



GREENSQUARE GROUP SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

Details

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Related policies and procedures			

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Introduction

As a housing Group, GreenSquare and its residents and partners can make significant impact on the Sustainability of our new and existing housing stock. We have a wider responsibility to protect the scarce natural resources and comply with Government targets to improve sustainability i.e. Code for Sustainable Homes requirements for energy efficiency in new homes.

With an ongoing responsibility to our existing and future residents, our actions need to reflect the pressures faced by the wider environment. Long term, existing carbon based sources of energy will diminish, driving up costs for us and our residents and requiring investment in new renewable sources of energy.

As an organisation, with accountability to our regulators and residents, we should aim to deliver continued improvements in sustainability, such as reducing waste and improving energy efficiency.

For our direct operations, i.e. offices and maintenance services, we intend to measure the impact on sustainability and make improvements to reduce waste and costs.

Housing is responsible for 26% of all the CO₂ outputs in Britain, so any actions we can take to improve the energy efficiency of our existing housing stock would benefit residents through lower costs and reduce CO₂ emissions.

For our new homes, we aim to develop new homes, which are more energy efficient, desirable places to live. We will monitor the use of resources in the development process and minimise waste, wherever possible re-cycling materials.

We will agree and monitor performance indicators across our operations to better understand our impact and make changes to improve.

Vision, aims and objectives

1. GreenSquare Group believes that adopting sustainability principles and policies is linked to providing the best living environments for our current tenants and those of future generations. It will establish a Sustainability “Green Team”, with representation from across the Group.
 - 1.1 Adopting these principles will cover all aspects of the Group's work from land buying through to regeneration, our offices and operations, and all the services to residents in-between. Sustainability principles and objectives will form an integral part of the business plan and operational strategy for each area of the Group’s work.
2. GreenSquare Group will approach sustainable development as a socially responsible aim to optimise resource usage and minimise waste and emissions. One Planet Living principles (see Context section, page 8) will be used as a framework to analyse, set targets and monitor organisational and operational sustainability. We will maintain awareness of our impact and will affect negative outputs where it is safe, reliable, cost effective and in the interest of our residents to do so.
 - 2.1 We will seek to protect or enhance the environment where we build and where possible use materials, suppliers and resources local to our operations.
3. GreenSquare Group will design communities for social inclusion, efficient and appropriate use of resources and minimum waste. The lifecycle usage and emissions of our homes will be considered in design, respecting potential needs of future generations and consulting with our communities. We will make affordability for residents a consideration in all our sustainability decisions.
4. The Group will engage with staff, stakeholders, communities and suppliers to encourage awareness and understanding of the sustainability challenge. All of us should recognise the challenge as a shared aim to which we contribute and are accountable for. We will foster a culture that encourages staff to take account of sustainability issues in all their decision.
5. GreenSquare Group seeks to develop long term relationships with partners founded on shared values, trust and a passion for excellent service.
6. GreenSquare Group is committed to ensure that no-one suffers harm resulting from its day to day activities and recognises its duty as a landlord and employer to take all reasonable steps to protect their health and safety.

7. GreenSquare Group will comply with all relevant industry legislation as a minimum and actively seek opportunities to progress its 'sustainability' agenda through continuous improvement.
8. GreenSquare Group will monitor and report year on year objectives and targets set and will report on performance indicators, through its business plan and balanced scorecard.

Policy Principles and Scope

This strategy will apply to all members of the group, and all its activities, including commercial activities.

Sustainability touches on all areas of our operations and should be seen as intending to guide our decisions rather than dictate solutions. As a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) Group, much of what we already do is sustainable, guided by legislation, best practice and Value for Money.

The sustainability strategy is intended to guide the group and its subsidiaries on how it can improve its performance, not re-engineer how it delivers i.e. core services.

The setting of performance indicators is intended to coordinate activities and ensure a consistent approach across group subsidiaries.

Context

The concept of sustainability

The concept of sustainability has come about as a response to a number of factors affecting the lives of people today and into the future:

- Carbon outputs
- Energy consumption
- Traffic congestion
- Rising energy/transport costs
- The impact of energy/transport prices on i.e. food costs
- Global warming and the risks it poses i.e. flooding, land erosion
- Uncontrolled and unsustainable levels of waste

Sustainability can broadly be summarised as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.*

Current consumption of energy, the world's natural resources and creation of waste is beyond our 'fair share' of the earth's resources and cannot continue without serious consequences for future generations. Given the seriousness of the threat, action is being taken on a variety of levels.

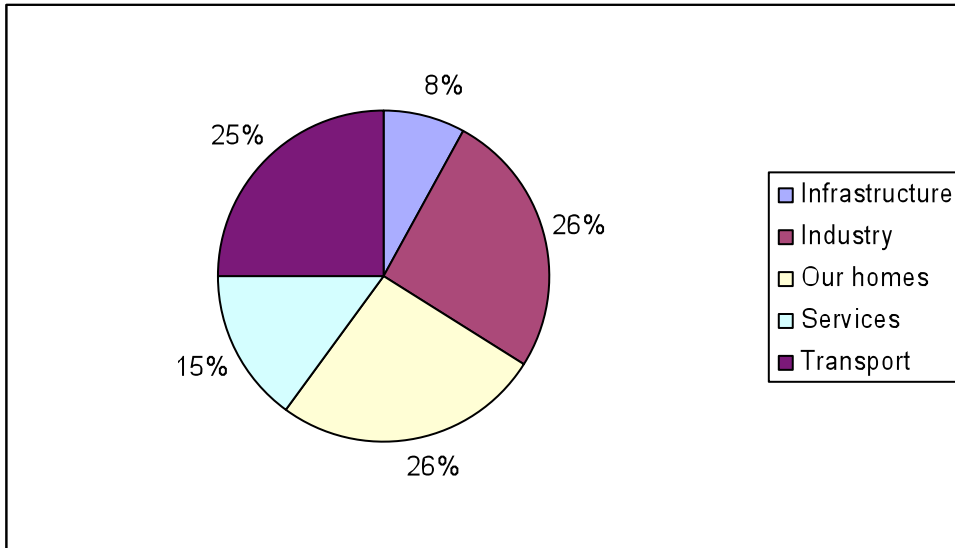
The threat of climate change

Globally, climate change is seen as a potentially greater threat than terrorism. Scientific consensus is that the primary cause of climate change comes from greenhouse gas emissions from modern industrialised lifestyles combined with deforestation.

To date, climate change has resulted in hotter, drier summers, milder winters and more extreme rainfall patterns and resulting flooding.

The best measure of our greenhouse gas emissions is agreed as tonnes of carbon dioxide (or equivalent). Actively measuring and reducing our 'carbon' output is one of the most straightforward ways of reducing climate change.

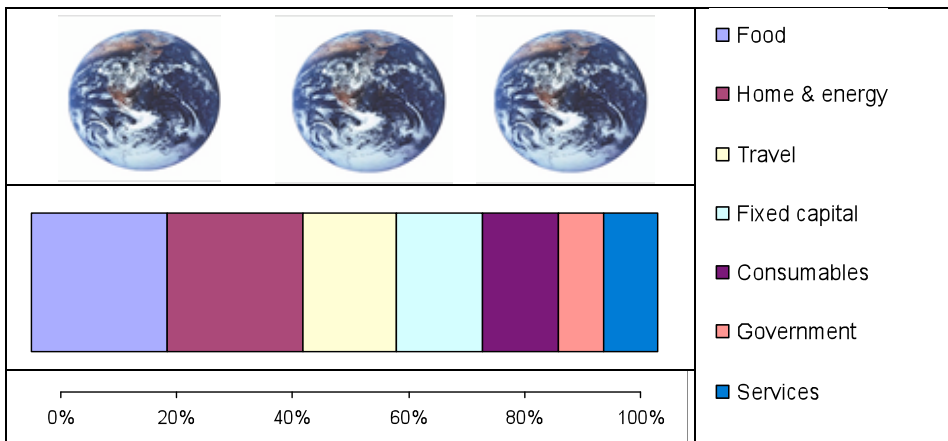
*World Commission on Environment and Development – The Bruntland Commission



UK Government Response

The UK Government has set a target to reduce carbon emissions by 60% by 2050 and put steps in place to deliver all new homes as 'zero carbon' by 2016.

We rely on the earth for the resources we need to sustain our lives and to absorb our waste. Living unsustainably beyond the regenerative carrying capacity of the earth is resulting in the degradation of our environment and diminished human wellbeing.



Studies by the Global Footprint Network and others have highlighted the extent of our over-consumption and pollution of our environment. Whilst globally we are living at a 1.2-planet level, if everyone lived as we do in the UK we would need 3 planets to support us. These figures suggest that the UK needs to reduce its consumption of fossil fuels and virgin materials by two-thirds to be environmentally sustainable. To achieve this reduction in consumption, we need to develop lifestyles that are consistent with 'one planet' ways of living.

It is commonly believed that energy use in our buildings accounts for most of our negative environmental impacts, but ecological footprint analysis highlights the importance of food, travel and consumables (and the waste they generate). Therefore our lifestyles – how we travel, what we eat and the waste we create – also impact on the environment. The opportunity exists to design our homes, operate our businesses and provide facilities which enable people to choose to lead sustainable lifestyles.

To help promote this BioRegional Development Group and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have developed One Planet Living, a global initiative based on 10 principles of sustainability, which aims to promote the concept of living within a fair share of the earth’s resources. These principles can be used as a broad and holistic framework for visioning and developing strategies for sustainable communities.

Westlea Housing commissioned BioRegional Consulting to assist it in developing a Sustainability Vision and Strategy to improve its performance with respect to sustainability over time. The Strategy will address all aspects of the Group’s operations, not just the development of new homes. Adopting the ten One Planet Living principles can help meet the higher levels of the Code for Sustainable Homes, required for grant funded social housing and also address wider issues of a sustainable lifestyle, such as transport and food. These principles have been used here to develop a holistic sustainability strategy for all the Group’s operations.

Zero Carbon	Minimising CO ₂ emissions from heating, cooling and powering our buildings
Zero Waste	Minimising waste and flows of waste to landfill in a resource-efficient society
Sustainable Transport	Reducing the need to travel and providing sustainable alternatives to private car use
Local and Sustainable Materials	Optimisation of use of materials, in terms of their source and their performance
Local and Sustainable Food	Maximisation of opportunities for use of local food supplies
Sustainable Water	Minimisation of water consumption and addressing flood risk issues
Natural Habitats and Wildlife	Protection of the natural environment and the habitats it offers to flora and fauna
Culture and Heritage	Protection of the cultural heritage and the sense of local and regional identity
Equity and Fair Trade	Promoting equity and fair trade within the community
Health and Happiness	Promoting well-being and healthy lifestyles

Affordable Warmth for our Residents (see GreenSquare Group Affordable Warmth Strategy)

It is GreenSquare Group's vision to deliver excellent customer care and quality of life initiatives for our residents. Among many initiatives where sustainability is a key consideration is the area of affordable warmth.

Affordable warmth is a key measure of our sustainability and is defined as those residents for whom heating their homes to an adequate level costs more than 10% of the household's income. The issue therefore reflects residents' incomes, but also the energy efficiency of their homes.

The aim is to ensure all vulnerable groups can afford to heat their homes by 2010 and for all residents by 2018. We have detailed plans in place to address the efficiency of both heating and insulation in line with the Decent Homes Standard.

There is a general consensus that energy costs will rise in the future, as global demand increases. This is coupled with long term decline in availability of traditional energy sources i.e. oil and gas. Also, much of Britain's current nuclear energy capacity will be obsolete by 2023, requiring additional capacity to be built. Measures to reduce energy consumption for homes and businesses will be critical to keeping costs low and ensuring ongoing availability for vulnerable groups.

Building new sustainable homes to meet demand is key, however it is estimated that of all the homes in existence by 2050, 70% have already been built. This reflects the need for substantial investment in improving the sustainability of our existing homes (thermal insulation, heating efficiency and water usage). To this end we will use Eco Homes XB methodology.

Building New Homes (see G2 Development Strategy)

In conjunction with our targets for land use and development, much of how we deliver new homes is governed by the Code for Sustainable Homes.

This sets out the Government's response to the impact of homes on global warming and defines a future for 100% of new homes being zero carbon by 2016.

To achieve this will require a totally new approach to building homes with risks of significant additional costs per home which must be borne against the Government aim to deliver 3 million new homes by 2015.

The timeline to move towards zero carbon homes poses enormous challenge to both housing associations and commercial developers. The table below

indicates the measures be brought in to guide delivery of new, low energy homes.

Housing association/ Government funded	2002	2006	2007	2009	2010	2013	2016
Part LIA Regs Carbon Reduction	Base point	(23%) reduction			(25%) reduction	(60%) reduction	Zero carbon
Code for Sustainable Homes			Level 3		Level 4		Level 6
Environment al impact of materials			BRE 'D' rating				
Surface water run-off			'ceiling' for run-off levels				
Site waste management			Minimise waste				
Energy Performance certificate			June 2007 (HIPs)				
Local Authority Renewables Policy		10% for planning approval					

Delivering these commitments will require significant technological progress and new design thinking, the following measures need to be 'built-in':

- Improved energy efficiency (glazing, insulation, design)
- Improved water efficiency (rain water harvesting, lower water use appliances, grey water recycling)
- Site and household waste management
- Use of sustainable materials
- Re-use of materials
- Use of renewable energy solutions (solar, wind, bio-mass).

All of these represent a financial and logistical challenge, which if we balance accordingly will help contribute to our vision of delivering sustainable homes and communities.

The strategy

Our assets

GreenSquare Group is responsible for maintaining over 9,000 homes, the ways we go about doing this will have a major impact on our sustainability.

Land usage

Within our areas of operation, we will endeavour to use land efficiently to ensure we deliver sustainable communities in which people want to live.

Through our land buying and regeneration strategies, we will aim to increase the population of 'brown field' land as a proportion of total land developed (reflecting the rural nature of our areas of operation).

We will deliver new homes with good quality amenity space and infrastructure.

Development (See GreenSquare Group Development Strategy)

Under the Development Strategy, GreenSquare Group aims to build up to 400 new homes each year across our 3 counties of operation. In addition through its commercial subsidiary, Oakus, could develop up to 100 units of housing built for sale. From April 2008, all our homes will be built to code for sustainable homes level 3 as a minimum. We will aim to deliver a number of projects, where possible up to code level 6 by 2012/13.

All units will be built under a variety of procurement methods, each giving a different level of control over issues of sustainability:

1. Section 106 Planning Agreement
We will ensure our Partners have a copy of our sustainability strategy and will work with them to deliver the best possible outcome.
2. A build contract with an external commercial developer
We will ensure the performance standards from our sustainability strategy are built into tender documents and pre-qualification questionnaires. Compliance will be key criteria for selection of contractors.
3. In-house construction management (ref. GreenSquare Group construction procedures)
Where homes are being built under this approach, it is anticipated that we will have far greater control over resource usage and build approach. We will monitor energy and water consumed. We will work with contractors to minimise waste and vehicle movements.

Transport

Our Residents

To deliver sustainable communities we need to consider how our residents can access employment, education and the resources they need and the transport requirements they demand.

Through our consultation with residents and communities and in conjunction with local planning authorities, we will ensure that all new and redeveloped homes have good access to public transport.

We will also design-in access to local facilities and employment via walking/cycling routes to reduce the need for transport.

We recognise that much of our stock is rural and that our residents cannot rely on the public transport provision that exists in large urban areas.

Through our Parking Strategy we will work with our residents and communities to provide appropriate solutions to their parking needs.

Through our community involvement work we will encourage car sharing and the facilities it requires.

We will have considered how we could work with our residents to explore facilities for renewable or alternative fuels. We will engage with residents to develop ideas to help reduce energy consumption i.e. home energy monitors and the Home Energy Assessor roles

Our Partners

We are aware that our choice of partners and how we work with them, can impact our environmental footprint from transport.

We will evaluate potential partners own transport strategies as part of the selection process.

We will work with partners to minimise journeys whilst not compromising service, through collaborative planning and new technology i.e. video conferencing

Our Staff

All our staff will be aware of the impact that transport has on the environment and the need to reduce journeys and make transport choices that minimise environmental impact.

We will incentivise our staff to car share (the business mileage policy) and use public transport whenever possible.

We will measure the total mileage our staff drive on business and deliver year on year efficiencies.

We will equip staff with technology solutions that enable effective communication as alternatives to face to face meetings.

We will develop these solutions during 2009/10 and work with staff to minimise travel, yet still ensure GreenSquare Group are seen as a partner of choice that deliver excellent service to residents.

Our Operations

We will measure the mileage driven by our Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) and the environmental impact of its transport. Through developments in new technology we will aim to reduce journeys (mobile working) and the impact on the environment. We will pioneer using alternatives to fossil fuel based transport and following extensive trials will roll solutions out across our fleet.

Re-use and recyclability

Asset Management

GreenSquare Group will consider all options to either re-use or recycle materials wherever possible from our operations.

Each year we dispose of waste from our homes and developments, each year we will aim to reduce this through increased re-cycling of timber, building materials, interior fittings, metals.

Development

Through our development of new homes and regeneration of existing buildings we will:

- Prior to demolition, survey each building and re-claim all possible materials for re-use or re-cycling.
- Where possible, where buildings have been demolished, we will re-use all materials possible in new construction on the same site.
- For future developments, we will aim to specify materials which are suitable for re-cycling and assess how easily buildings can be dismantled. We will also consider the use of new, less energy intensive building materials
- We will consider distance materials have to be transported to site and wherever possible source locally to the site.

Our Operations

As GreenSquare Group we are aware that we can make many choices that could reduce waste and increase the proportion of waste that we recycle.

We will proactively recycle an increasing number of items we consume (currently mobile phones, paper, toner cartridges).

In our purchasing decisions we will consider recyclability and the volume of waste (i.e. packaging) resulting from our choices.

Through our operations we will recycle as much of the waste that we generate through our actions or remove from our homes and developments.

Our Residents

In parallel with our commitment to improve the sustainability of our residents' homes and our business operations, we are committed to helping our residents make informed choices.

We will communicate regularly with our residents through correspondence and events.

We will help our residents understand the need to reduce waste going to landfill through helping them reduce the amount of waste they create and taking steps to improve the adoption of recycling practices.

Our Offices

Facilities have been put into place to enable staff to put all food waste into an on-site composter to reduce waste going into landfill.

We will continue to recycle and re-use as much as we can. Currently we recycle paper, computers, mobile phones, toner cartridges.

In 2008/09 we will increase recycling to cover new items (cans, cardboard and plastic).

Energy and Resource Usage

Our Residents

We will work with our residents to improve their understanding of the importance of saving energy (both financial and environmental) and ways to go about it.

We will continue to fit low energy light bulbs to all our void properties.

We will communicate regularly with residents on how to go about reducing energy consumption in the home. We will review possible sources of funding to enable programmes for explore ways of reducing energy consumption with Residents i.e. Government funded bodies such as Act on CO₂, Energy Savings Trust and European Union funded schemes.

We will work with residents to improve understanding of the need to save water and work with local partners to provide solutions for the home.

Through our Affordable Warmth work we will ensure all our residents' homes are insulated to the Decent Homes Standard and have efficient heating systems.

Office Accommodation

GreenSquare Group will continue to improve the sustainability of its office accommodation.

Energy and water usage will be monitored annually and targets will be set for year on year improvement. We will work with staff to reduce energy and water consumption through raising awareness and providing low energy solutions.

Recycling will remain a key challenge and each year we will aim to increase our waste recycling across:

- Paper –We will aim to reduce the volume bought and increase volume recycled every year. All our printers are set to print double sided.
- Office recycling– we will continue to recycle wherever possible, to date this covers toner cartridges, mobile phones, cans.
We will aim to increase the range of materials we re-cycle each year.

- Employee transport – we will embrace new technology and continually seek ways to reduce the need to travel and minimise the environmental impact of staff journeys.
We will use electronic communication (teleconferencing etc) wherever practical to minimise travel.
We will encourage staff to lift share and optimise route planning to reduce overall travel.
We will adopt flexible working practices to enable staff to be flexible in working from home or other group office locations where practical.

'Greening' the organisation

We are actively publicising our 'green' agenda to staff and held a Sustainability Workshop at the annual GreenSquare conference in October which was open to all staff.

We will establish a 'Sustainability' Green Team in order to reflect the issues of sustainability across all areas of our operation and continue GreenSquare Group's progress on the journey to sustainability.

The sub group will be chaired by the Head of Oakus and encompass representation from:

- Asset Management
- Development
- Neighbourhood Involvement
- Finance
- Neighbourhood Services

We will monitor our sustainability indicators twice a year and review them at the Executive level. We will publish our performance against these measures annually in our Business Plan and Balanced Scorecard.

Local and sustainable food

We use local suppliers for all food ordered for lunches etc and are supporting creation of allotment areas on new development schemes.

Performance and Standards

The table attached at Appendix 1 contains the performance indicators that we will monitor and report against.

We will report against these half yearly (Balanced Scorecard) and annually within the Business Plan.

Many of the factors that contribute to improving sustainability are already measured elsewhere within the current balanced scorecard i.e. investment in Affordable warmth.

Likewise, there are many reporting structures that contribute to sustainability already in place i.e Value for Money.

Our Residents

Our residents' interests lie at the heart of our Sustainability Strategy. By moving towards sustainability, we focus on improving the homes and communities we support and also deliver benefits that will impact future generations of our residents.

Our Sustainability Strategy will only deliver improvements if we engage with our residents and communities. In return, we will work to inform our residents on how they can make individual decisions that impact their environmental footprint and wherever possible we will facilitate solutions on their behalf.

Above all, this strategy is about improving our sustainability which should deliver long term benefits to residents.

We have consulted with residents across the Group, using the OCHA Panel and Westlea's Market Research Team.

Two surveys have been carried out, initially to understand residents' attitudes towards sustainability, and secondly to identify residents' attitudes towards adapting homes to reduce water and energy consumption.

The findings of the surveys are outlined below.

- 93% of residents agree that environmental issues are important; only 1.7% disagree
- 85% of residents have made changes to their lives as a result of environmental issues
 - Most people have started to recycle more and put less waste to landfill
 - Slightly fewer have taken steps to reduce home energy consumption and reduce car journeys
- 62% of OCHA residents think their landlord cares about the environment
- 56% of OCHA residents think that their landlord should do more to protect the environment; 44% do not! Feeling that there are other organisations who should be more active in this area
- 76% of OCHA residents think that their landlord should do more to make their existing homes more environmentally friendly
- From the ideas proposed by residents, below were the most common responses:
 - Supply water butts

- Help with cost of solar panels
- Improve recycling facilities
- Supply energy monitoring meters – provide information on reducing energy use

▪ The results of the second survey are outlined below:

	OCHA	WESTLEA
Do you believe that turning appliances off rather than leaving on standby saves energy?	95%	100%
Would you be interested in trialling and energy monitor?	79%	50%
Do you feel you have sufficient control of your home heating system?	Yes 70% No 5%	Yes 70% No 30%
What materials are you currently able to recycle?		
- Glass	88%	80%
- Cans	93%	90%
- Cardboard	95%	60%
- Paper	91%	90%
- Food	67%	50%
- Plastics	88%	50%
Do you have space for a compost bin?	40%	44%
If so, would you like to have one?	48%	
Does your home have a water metre?	77%	30%
Would you like to use less water through low flush toilet/low flow shower head?	Yes 46% No 33%	Yes 10% No 90%
How important is it to have a bath as well as a shower?	70%	30%
Transport		
Are you able to use public transport to reduce journeys you make by car?	70%	78%
How important is it that new homes are built with public transport links?	Agree 91%	Agree 90%
Would you be interested in joining a focus group to consider i.e. the environmental design of new homes?	Yes 14%	Yes 11%

Equality and Diversity

All of our actions resulting from adoption of the Sustainability Strategy will be subject to the GreenSquare Group Equality and Diversity Strategy.

We will ensure that all parties that we work with meet the standards that our Equality and Diversity Strategy requires.

The sustainability journey will require us to work with and bear in mind the needs of a wider community than we currently consult. To this end, we will appoint a member of the Sustainability sub-group to be specifically responsible for ensuring our actions are equally accessible to all.

The Group will also ensure that the strategy does not cause any reductions in the quality of services to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

Money and Resources

Through the adoption of our strategy, the sustainability implications of many of our purchase decisions will be considered. Where, for financial reasons we are compelled to balance sustainability versus cost, we will track the reasons for the decision and the implications thereof.

It is anticipated that an external perspective will be required annually to verify our performance against our sustainability performance indicators. A budget request for £6,000 will be submitted for approval to join the Social Housing Index for the Future (SHIFT) which is a sector body, supported by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Tenant Services Authority (TSA) to help guide organisations in improving their sustainability.

We will attempt to track the non cashable savings that arise from our taking more sustainable decisions (value of items recycled) in addition to the savings from reduced land-fill tax/reduction in travel.

It is anticipated that the costs of the Sustainability sub-group will be covered from existing budgets.

Responsibilities

Leadership of the Groups “Green Teams” will be by the Head of Oakus.

Individual GreenSquare Group departments will nominate representatives to this group

Reporting of sustainability KPIs will be undertaken by Finance, Facilities Management and by the Development Quality Manager.

Any specific proposals to amend practices will be subject to approval by the relevant Management Team/Executive.

Actions

Establishment of “Green Teams” within the Group will be agreed by the Head of Oakus.

The measurement of performance against targets will be approved by the Executive during the year and will be included in the Balanced Scorecard and Business Plan.

The Head of Oakus will be responsible for submitting required budget bids for approval.