

Local MP visits forward thinking supported homeless hostel

Mark Lancaster visited Fishermead Hostel, one of Orbit Independent Living's supported homeless schemes to see how the scheme helps homeless adults to work toward independent living and to learn about a project to fit photovoltaic (PV) cells to the property's roof.

With 20 single occupancy rooms, the scheme provides supported temporary accommodation for homeless adults with support needs, for example relating to drug or alcohol misuse or mental health issues. The hostel provides an on-site manager and staff, with out of hours emergency call system and 24 hour internal and external CCTV. In addition to private fully furnished rooms, residents are able to make use of the property's communal kitchens, lounge, bath/shower rooms, laundry facilities, games room and key work room.

An assigned key worker works with each customer on a one-to-one basis to set and work towards their individual development plan, coordinating any support from partner agencies to facilitate holistic support and smooth transition to independent living. Also offered are a range of social activities to encourage social integration and promote self confidence and motivation.

Mark met with both staff and customers. Scheme staff provided him with an escorted tour of the scheme and he spoke to customers about their experiences and hopes for the future.

He also learnt about Orbit Independent Living's plans to spend Â£17,000 on fitting photovoltaic (PV) cells to the scheme's roof to supply electricity. The PV cells are expected to produce enough electricity to make 51,500 cups of tea a year. Energy cost savings made will be passed on to the customers, who will reap the benefit of reduced bills.

Vicky Harwood, Orbit Heart of England's Director of Independent Living, said: "Fishermead Hostel is one of the first of our supported schemes or homeless hostels to be retro-fitted with photovoltaic (PV) cells. We are committed to helping our customers maintain financial independence by minimising the impact of rising energy costs. By looking to low carbon technology to provide the future energy needs of the building, we are working to offer our vulnerable customers a holistic package of support that also delivers value for money."

Mark said: "I have been impressed by the range of facilities offered at this supported homeless shelter and the positive approach of both staff and residents to meeting development goals. The project by Orbit Heart of England to provide a sustainable energy source demonstrates an inspiring and forward thinking approach to safeguarding their customers' financial inclusion. I have been delighted to hear how the scheme's customers have been kept involved in the project and wish them all every success in meeting their goals to live independently."