

Housing associations track sustainable suppliers

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HOUSING associations in the West Midlands have completed a search for new businesses capable of supplying new green and environmentally-sustainable services.

Creative Ceilings, from Wolverhampton, Greengineering from Kidderminster, Heat Genius, from Brierley Hill and iRed based in Birmingham and Oldbury are each planning to trial products or services with Stafford and Rural Homes (SARH) and South Staffordshire Housing Association (SSHA) after participating in the Built Environment Climate Change Innovations (BECCI) project's 'Hard to Heat' challenge.

BECCI, an ERDF funded project delivered by the University of Wolverhampton in partnership with Coventry University, is aimed at developing the supply chain for carbon reducing products to existing affordable housing stock.

The four companies were picked by a panel, including SARH and SSHA, which own and manage a combined 11,000 homes in Staffordshire, from a shortlist of 11 firms participating in Hard to Heat.

Karen Armitage, Chief Executive of SARH, said: "We are keen to progress our conversations with the companies involved in the challenge as we look at new ideas to improve our customers' homes. The challenge has certainly highlighted some of the new and innovative ways Midlands firms are

developing technology to make properties more eco-friendly and reduce fuel bills."

Ursula Bennion, Director of Business Development at Housing Plus, of which SSHA is a part of, added that the challenge had been a positive process which has introduced some new innovative products and services.

Creative Ceilings produces energy efficient radiant heating ceilings made from 100% recycled and non-toxic materials. The system can be installed quickly in almost all areas of residential and commercial property.

"BECCI has been the catalyst that has enabled us to access a potential market we haven't had the opportunity or resources to explore before," said Mick Grantham, a director of the firm.

Greengineering, run by husband and wife team Kenny Gallagher and Peni Brudenell-Pryke and their son Scott Gallagher, was selected by the judging panel for its innovative system to capture and re-use waste heat energy produced by household appliances including air conditioning units, solar panels and refrigerators.

iRed caught the eye of the judging panel for its radiant heater developed specifically to address fuel poverty by heating the mass of a building rather than the air, thereby significantly reducing energy bills.

The company, which is three years old, currently employs six people across its two sites and is in the process of moving to a larger site to accommodate a new production line.

Heat Genius is a brand new product launched in October allowing homeowners to control the heating of each room in their home separately via a smart phone.

The system also has sensors which learn when rooms are in use and automatically adjust the temperature accordingly.

"Our main aim throughout the challenge has been to highlight the depth of products or services available in the Midlands that if implemented by social housing providers would result in less energy consumption by the tenants of these properties," said Glenn Barrowman, BECCI project manager at the University of Wolverhampton.