

Steve Howlett



Name:
Steve Howlett

Position/occupation:
Chief Executive,
Peabody Trust.

Residence:
Lewisham.

“An estimated 900,000 people across London lack literacy skills and 2.3 million lack numeracy skills. Without addressing this, breaking the cycle of social exclusion is not possible.”

Steve is the Chief Executive of Peabody Trust, one of London’s oldest and largest housing associations. Established in 1862 by American philanthropist George Peabody, the Trust owns or manages more than 18,000 properties, housing about 50,000 people. The Trust also provides a number of support services in the community and is a community regeneration agency and charity.

Sustainability experience

Since Steve joined the Peabody Trust in 2004 he has championed and pushed the sustainability boundaries of the organisation. Driven by a personal commitment to strive for cohesive and stable communities, under Steve’s leadership, the Peabody Trust has stepped up to the challenge by focussing on community regeneration, anti-poverty activities and capacity building. Steve recognises that the Peabody Trust has a great opportunity to reach people who have missed out on learning skills the first time around and the Trust offers its residents the chance to learn the basic skills that are needed to get a job in London. “An estimated 900,000 people across London lack literacy skills; and 2.3 million, or 48% of the population, lack numeracy skills. Without addressing this, breaking the cycle of social exclusion is not possible.”

Steve is a Basic Skills Champion on the BITC Skills for Life Programme and this personal commitment is again reflected in Peabody practices. The Trust has neighbourhood learning centres and mobile training suites to help reach those who want to improve their skills, offering IT training, job seeker skills and basic literacy and numeracy. “Attractive learning is key,” says Steve, “At Peabody we offer young people IT and football coaching lessons together. Football is the draw but this combination of skills makes young people employable and many go on to become local football coaches in their borough.”

Steve believes long-term employment is vital to the overall sustainability of the city and provision of sewing and business classes to Asian women on one Peabody estate means that new household incomes can become a reality, while at the same time promoting community interaction.

To be sustainable Steve recognises that the Trust also has to have its own house in order and has therefore championed internal sustainable practices by establishing the Peabody Green Task Force, which has seen the organisation measuring and reducing its corporate carbon footprint, as part of its business plan. “This has included adopting simple policies such as bin-less offices, not using plastic cups, and using recycled materials.”

Sustainability challenges

“Without changes to our lifestyle and with the impact of climate change, by 2050 we could have a very different landscape and climate in London, hotter temperatures causing particular problems. I anticipate that London will continue to grow in prosperity but I think working towards more cohesive communities is crucial if we are to avoid large-scale social and religious divisions in the city. We need a strong but subtle approach to tackling inequalities and that includes engaging young people more and those currently disengaged in civic life.”

Embracing the need for change, Peabody is leading the way in learning about what constitutes a sustainable community, and has commissioned a new project, ‘21st century Peabody’. Through the project the Trust will work with residents on four estates to better understand what makes an ‘exemplary community’ and one that improves people’s ‘life chances’.

Steve thinks that one of the biggest sustainability challenges in London is reducing energy consumption and the carbon footprint of the existing building stock. “Improving the transport infrastructure and access to public transport must also remain a priority and

meeting housing shortages whilst providing attractive homes where people want to live, with open and usable public spaces, will continue to be a major part of Peabody's work. Experiences of London vary considerably. In a city of diversity and inequality one way to address this is to involve people in local decision-making and to this end Peabody Trust has set up Youth Councils on some estates."

There may be challenges but there are also opportunities in London. "The 2012 Games gives us new energy for change, it's not just about sport but legacy and I see there's potential for the Games to really carry the city forward. Through the Games, London can demonstrate that a diverse city can live together in harmony".

London Leaders

"By taking part in London Leaders I want to spread the sustainability message. I want to help others by providing examples and lessons of what works well and what doesn't and encourage others to make changes. Ultimately working in partnership is key to large-scale change."