



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy

Council – 26 September 2019

# Updated Welsh Housing Quality Standard Compliance Policy

<b>Purpose:</b>	To update the existing Welsh Housing Quality Standard Compliance Policy, which was initially approved by Council in 2016.
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Local Housing Strategy 2015 - 2020
<b>Consultation:</b>	Access to Services, Finance, Legal and Welsh Government
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It is recommended that:  1) The report is endorsed by Council.
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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is a Welsh Government requirement that all Authorities that have retained their housing stock have an up to date Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Compliance Policy, which highlights how the Authority will meet the WHQS by 2020.
- 1.2 The Authority's first WHQS Compliance Policy was produced and subsequently approved by Council in 2016. The policy has been reviewed annually since it was introduced.
- 1.3 Since its initial production, some elements of the policy have become outdated. In addition, during the Authority's regular meetings with the Welsh Government, Council officers have been asked by Welsh

Government officials to expand on certain parts of the policy to provide more clarity.

- 1.4 Meeting the WHQS will be aligned to the five ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

## 2. Changes to the Policy

- 2.1 The main changes and additions that have been included in the updated policy are as follows:-

**Verification and Monitoring** – At the request of the Welsh Government, the new policy lists how the Authority independently verifies that it is achieving WHQS compliance. This is via a contractor that undertakes a stock condition survey every 5 years. The policy now lists the additional ways in which progress towards meeting the standard is monitored since the initial policy was produced. This includes quarterly data returns to the Welsh Government.

**Clarity regarding the deadline for meeting the standard** - There has been some confusion amongst Authorities whether the deadline for WHQS achievement is at the end of the financial year 2020/21 or 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. The WG have recently confirmed that the deadline is 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 and have requested that the updated compliance policy reflects this fact.

**Financial Changes** – There is a section in the updated policy regarding how the Authority funds WHQS works. Since the production of the first compliance policy the Welsh Government have abolished the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System which removes the borrowing cap which applied to Housing Revenue Accounts. This has enabled the Authority to borrow more resources to fund achievement of the standard.

**Definitions of Acceptable Fails** – The WG requested that the Authority lists in detail the circumstances in which it will not achieve WHQS by 2020 for certain properties and will record them as being ‘acceptable fails’. There are a range of circumstances where the Authority will record properties as being acceptable fails such as where tenants refuse the improvements that the Authority are planning to deliver or where it is not financially viable for the Authority to deliver an aspect of WHQS work.

**Communicating Progress** – The new policy expands on how progress towards achieving WHQS compliance is communicated to stakeholders. This includes reporting progress to Ward Members on an annual basis, an annual update in the tenants’ magazine ‘Open House’ and also including updates on the Housing Service’s Facebook page.

**Measuring the Energy Efficiency of Properties** - There is now an updated section of the policy that clarifies how the Authority measures and

records the energy efficiency levels of its properties and meets the energy efficiency requirements listed in the WHQS.

***Tenant Involvement and satisfaction*** - There is a section in the policy listing how tenants who are to receive WHQS works to their properties are consulted and how their satisfaction with the works are measured and reported.

- 2.2 The updated policy can be found at Appendix A of this report.
- 2.3 The Welsh Government have been consulted regarding the proposed changes to the policy and have confirmed that they meet their requirements.

### **3. Equality and Engagement Implications**

- 3.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

- 3.2 An EIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full EIA report was not required as a full assessment was undertaken when the Policy was initially adopted in 2016 and the changes and additions highlighted within this report are relatively minor in nature and do not present any equalities issues.

### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications.

### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 makes the Welsh Housing Quality Standard a statutory requirement for local authorities. The statutory date for local authorities to be WHQS compliant is December 2020. The receipt of the Council's Major Repair Allowance (MRA) is conditional upon meeting WHQS within timescales agreed with the Welsh Government.
- 5.2 A letter from Welsh Government dated 15/03/2015 set out a requirement for local authorities to have compliance policy by April 2016. The compliance policy was to verify the authorities' interpretation and

achievement of the standard. The letter also provided guidance to local authorities as to the contents of a compliance policy.

5.3 A compliance policy has to be reviewed annually from April 2016.

**Background Papers:** None

**Appendices:**

Appendix A	Welsh Housing Quality Standard Compliance Policy 2019 Update
Appendix B	Equalities Impact Assessment Screening Form