



To: *Please ask for:* Overview & Scrutiny

Councillor Andrea Lewis
Cabinet Member for Service Transformation

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BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation. The letter concerns the meeting held on 8 November 2022 and the Welsh Housing Quality Standards Annual Update.

Dear Councillor Lewis,

On the 8 November, the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Welsh Housing Quality Standards Annual Update. The Panel are grateful to you, Dave Meyrick, Programme Planning and Delivery Manager, Carol Morgan, Head of Housing and Public Health and Dave Bratley, Housing Asset Manager for attending to discuss and answer questions.

We were interested to hear details of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) and that the standards aim to make sure houses are in a good state of repair, safe and secure, adequately heated, fuel efficient, well insulated, contain up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms, are well managed, located in attractive and safe environments and try to meet the specific needs of individuals, particularly people with disabilities, providing adaptations.

We recognise that not all properties can meet this standard and this is known as an acceptable fail. You informed us that 70% of our homes are now fully compliant, which is up 13% from the previous year and you explained that the 30% of acceptable fails broke down into 15% being due to residents declining the opportunity to have a Council kitchen or bathroom installed and the other 15% being due to program planning.

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You highlighted to us the economic impact that the WHQS work has had in the locality, as well as apprenticeship and employment opportunities created as a part of the program. You also demonstrated resident satisfaction with the work and improvement to quality of life.

We were pleased to acknowledge the progress made on WHQS and the work of Officers involved. You also alerted us to additions to WHQS due for implementation on 1 April 2022. The next standards will include decarbonisation, fire safety and property safety measures amongst others. This has the potential for a major financial challenge as delivering the new standards could cost in the region on £875m. £423m is currently set aside to meet the current standard but falls short of what will be required for new standards.

We ask what the timescales in achieving the new WHQS were and we were informed the consultation document indicates 10 years, however due to Councils highlighting the difficulty financing the program, there may be a revision of this target.

We also asked about sprinkler systems as we are aware they can be expensive and wondered whether they formed part of the new standards. You informed us that they have already been installed in high rise properties and sheltered housing complexes but installing these into ordinary domestic dwellings isn't a requirement. You have also trained an in house specialist team and used that team to install the fire sprinkler systems. The bigger pressures on the new standards will be more around decarbonisation and an increase in inspections.

We clarified that the current spend on WHQS so far (£546m) has been a mix of revenue rental contributions (£381m) and Welsh Government funding (£165m). This money has not come from council tax which is important to note as this is a common misinterpretation.

Your Response

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

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