



Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy

To the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel –
20th March 2019

Progress towards Meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard

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|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose: | To brief the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel on 20 th March 2019 |
| Content: | An update on progress towards meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard |
| Councillors are being asked to: | Consider the information provided and to forward views to the Cabinet Member via a letter from the Panel Convener |
| Lead Councillor: | Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy |
| Lead Officer & Report Author: | Mark Wade and Dave Bratley Tel: 01792 635215 E-mail: dave.bratley@swansea.gov.uk |
| Finance Officer: | Amanda Thomas |
| Legal Officer: | Lyndsay Thomas |
| Access to Services Officer: | Rhian Millar |

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council has a statutory obligation to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by the end of December 2020. In 2018, the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) undertook a review to determine whether the Council has effective arrangements in place to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2020.
- 1.2 Overall, the findings were positive and the WAO confirmed that the Council has a sound approach to meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by December 2020. The WAO came to this conclusion because:

- The Council's approach to WHQS is generally well-integrated into its strategic housing function, but some key plans need to be updated;
- The Council has comprehensive stock condition information about its homes that effectively shapes its investment programme to meet the WHQS;
- The Council has a programme in place to achieve the WHQS by December 2020, but delivery of the programme will be challenging and there is little room for any slippage;
- More timely reporting and monitoring of the Council's progress in meeting the WHQS is necessary to ensure it meets the standard by December 2020, and that tenants are aware of the progress being made;
- Most tenants WAO spoke to are satisfied with the quality of improvement works done to their homes by the Council, and with the housing service they receive;
- Most tenants WAO spoke to felt that the Council takes their views into consideration, but the Council could strengthen tenant engagement and make sure tenants are clear about why improvement works are needed.

The full WAO report is set out in appendix A.

- 1.3 In terms of suggested improvements WAO noted the Council needs more up to date plans, tenant engagement and focus on contracts and timescales. The attached action plan in appendix B highlights the Council's response to WAO's key recommendations. This focuses on methods for reporting progress, effective monitoring, procurement, updating key plans, information and engagement with tenants.
- 1.4 WHQS compliance is an integral part of the Local Housing Strategy, is a key component of the Housing and Public Health Service Plan and is governed by a WHQS Compliance Policy. The Council periodically engages a third party specialist to measure the condition of the housing stock; this provides an independent assessment on the levels of WHQS compliance and identifies future repair and investment needs required to meet the WHQS. A financial business plan is prepared annually to ensure sufficient investment is available to deliver the detailed programme of repairs and improvements.
- 1.5 Arrangements for monitoring WHQS include reporting compliance levels on an annual basis internally and to the Welsh Government. Progress on repairs and improvements, designed to bring homes up to the standard, are reported quarterly internally and to the Welsh Government.
- 1.6 Tenants are informed about the WHQS programmes and progress via the tenant magazine Open House, the Council's website, tenant groups and individually when major repairs are planned for their home.

2. WHQS Measurement

- 2.1 The WHQS sets out its requirements across six main themes including good state of repair; safe and secure; adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated, up to date kitchens and bathrooms; located in safe and attractive environments and suit the specific requirements of the household. Compliance is reached when all elements within these themes are considered to be in reasonable condition and performing as intended. The level of compliance is recorded via house condition surveys and updated once major repairs and improvements are completed.

2.2 Within the WHQS guidance document is the facility to record elements as ‘acceptable fail’. The document recognises that it may not be possible to bring all elements up to the standard and landlords are permitted to report these as one of the following acceptable fails categories: cost of remedy; timing of remedy; residents’ choice; and physical constraint. Elements that cannot be brought up to the WHQS continue to be repaired and maintained to ensure homes remain safe.

3. WHQS Compliance

3.1 The figures set out below show the level of overall WHQS compliance as well as compliance for individual WHQS elements and acceptable fails. The figures are based on work completed up to the end of January 2019 and will be expected to change further by the end of the financial year once all completed work is signed off.

3.2 There are 4,301 fully compliant properties with a further 9,227 properties that are almost compliant but contain one or more elements that are classed as acceptable fail.

3.3 Levels of compliance for individual elements are contained in the following table:

| WHQS Element | Properties Fully Compliant | Properties with an Acceptable Fail |
|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Roofing | 13,110 | 418 |
| Windows | 13,526 | 2 |
| Doors | 13,462 | 66 |
| Kitchens | 9,695 | 3,833 |
| Bathrooms | 7,520 | 6,008 |
| Heating Systems | 13,239 | 289 |
| Energy Rating | 9,855 | 3,673 |
| Electrical Systems | 13,399 | 129 |
| Smoke Alarms | 13,340 | 98 |
| Gardens | 5,608 | 7,920 |

4. Conclusion

4.1 The Council has in place strategic, financial and operational arrangements to deliver WHQS compliance by the deadline and the WAO audit in 2018 confirmed these are all generally well integrated.

4.2 The WAO found tenants are satisfied with the improvements works to their home.

4.3 Following the WAO recommendations, the Council has developed an action plan focusing on improving methods for reporting progress, effective monitoring, procurement, updating key plans, supplying information and engaging with tenants.

5.0 Equality and Engagement Implications

5.1 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.

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

5.2 Tenants and leaseholders have been engaged as part of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy.

5.3 An EIA screening has been undertaken and there are no equality implications as it reports on a recent audit and the current level of WHQS compliance. Specific equality issues are met at the point of delivery of WHQS improvement programmes.

6. Legal implications

6.1 WG have powers under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 if there is a failure to meet the statutory obligation referred to above.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report

Glossary of terms:

| | |
|------|--------------------------------|
| WHQS | Welsh Housing Quality Standard |
| WAO | Welsh Audit Office |

Background papers: None

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Findings from the Welsh Audit Office Report on Welsh Housing Quality Standard
- Appendix B: Welsh Audit Action Plan December 2018

Report of the Welsh Audit Office:



Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Welsh Housing Quality Standard Review including Council tenants' views – **City and County of Swansea Council**

Audit year: 2017-18

Date issued: November 2018

Document reference: 842A2018-19



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Katherine Simmons, Lisa McCarthy, Ron Price, Sara-Jane Byrne under the direction of Jane Holownia.

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Summary report

Summary

What we looked at

- 1 We reviewed the Council's arrangements to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by the Welsh Government's deadline of 2020. This included the quality of plans and programmes, housing stock condition information, monitoring and scrutiny arrangements, tenant satisfaction and the way in which WHQS was making a difference to tenants' lives.
- 2 The findings in this report are based on fieldwork that we undertook during the period April 2018 to August 2018, and a telephone survey of tenants and leaseholders. We spoke to 680 tenants and leaseholders as part of this telephone survey.

Why achieving WHQS is important

- 3 Achieving WHQS is a key element of the Welsh Government's vision for housing in Wales. This standard is intended to set in place a common target standard for all social housing in Wales, and the Welsh Government expects all social housing landlords in Wales to adopt the standard and devise programme for bringing their homes up to the standard as soon as possible but by 2020 at the latest. The Welsh Government considers homes fully compliant when they meet all the individual elements of the standard around the condition, age and safety of the internal and external parts of the dwelling and elements like safe electrics, smoke alarms and energy efficiency requirements are met.
- 4 As at the 31 March 2018 the Council owned 13,528 dwellings, of which 3,415 dwellings were fully compliant with the WHQS and 193 dwellings were not compliant. The Council identified that 9,920 dwellings were compliant subject to acceptable fail guidance. The Welsh Government considers homes fully compliant when they meet all individual elements of the standard. But, social landlords may record one or more element as an acceptable fail, where achieving the standard for an individual element is not possible. The Welsh Government defines what can be determined as an acceptable fail.

Examples of acceptable fails include the cost or timing of the work, residents' choice not to have the work done or where there are physical constraints to the work. Where a dwelling contains one or more acceptable fails, but all other elements are compliant, the Welsh Government deems the dwelling compliant subject to acceptable fails.

How we approached the review

- 5 To inform our findings we reviewed a range of Council documents and interviewed a selection of senior officers, members and operational staff, and held focus groups with tenants both of traditional council housing and from sheltered housing schemes. Additionally, we carried out a telephone survey of tenants using an independent contractor. The telephone survey engaged 680 respondents divided between tenants and leaseholders and was carried out between 24 April and 9 May 2018. We have referenced the findings of the telephone survey, where relevant, in the body of this report and include an infographic page summarising our findings at [Appendix 1](#).
- 6 We also commissioned Tai Pawb, Diverse Cymru and Ethnic Minorities and Youth Engagement (EYST) Wales to undertake two focus groups: one with disabled Council tenants and one with BME council tenants. Despite considerable effort by all parties, including engaging with the Council's tenant participation team, the numbers of participants at the two focus groups was disappointing. Five tenants attended the BME focus group and one tenant attended the disabled tenants focus group. We have made a reference to a view of the BME focus group within the report but given the levels of participation it is difficult to draw any representative findings from these additional focus groups. We have provided a summary of the findings from the additional focus groups to Council officers.

Overall finding

- 7 Our review sought to answer the question: Does the Council have effective arrangements in place to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2020?
- 8 Overall, we found that: Tenants are satisfied with the improvement works and the Council has a sound approach to meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by December 2020, but it needs more up-to-date plans, tenant engagement and focus on contracts and timescales to achieve it. We came to this conclusion because:
- The Council's approach to WHQS is generally well-integrated into its strategic housing function, but some key plans need to be updated;
 - The Council has comprehensive stock condition information about its homes that effectively shapes its investment programme to meet the WHQS;
 - The Council has a programme in place to achieve the WHQS by December 2020, but delivery of the programme will be challenging and there is little room for any slippage;
 - More timely reporting and monitoring of the Council's progress in meeting the WHQS is necessary to ensure it meets the standard by December 2020, and that tenants are aware of the progress being made;
- Most tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the quality of improvement works done to their homes by the Council, and with the housing service they receive; and
- Most tenants we spoke to felt that the Council takes their views into consideration, but the Council could strengthen tenant engagement and make sure tenants are clear about why improvement works are needed.

Proposals for Improvement

Exhibit 1: proposals for Improvement

The table below sets out the proposals for improvement that we have identified following this review.

Proposals for improvement

- P1 The Council should provide more timely and transparent reporting of progress on WHQS to members and tenants.
- P2 The Council should ensure there is effective monitoring and scrutiny of its progress so that any issues can be resolved quickly.
- P3 The Council should procure any outstanding works as soon as possible and ensure there is robust monitoring of contracts so that works are completed on time and to the level of quality agreed.
- P4 The Council should improve on its current arrangements to publicise arrangements for disruption payments to tenants in a clear, understandable and transparent way, and make sure tenants are aware of what they can and cannot claim for.
- P5 The Council should strengthen how it engages with its tenants, including ensuring tenants are clear why and when works are being undertaken.
- P6 The Council should update key plans, such as the Repairs, Maintenance and Improvement policy and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset management plan.

Detailed report

Tenants are satisfied with the improvement works and the Council has a sound approach to meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by December 2020, but it needs more up-to-date plans, tenant engagement and focus on contracts and timescales to achieve it

The Council's approach to WHQS is generally well-integrated into its strategic housing function, but some key plans need to be updated

9 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- Robust, comprehensive and wide-ranging plans are in place to support the Council's ambition to meet the WHQS by December 2020. These include the Swansea Housing Strategy 2015-2020, Housing Revenue Business Plan 2017-18, WHQS compliance policy and the Council's capital housing investment programme. However, the Council needs to review and update some plans, such as the

- Repairs, Maintenance and Improvement policy and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset management policy.
- The Council is taking an elemental approach to bringing its homes up to the WHQS, having largely completed the essential external works to dwellings and now focusing on kitchen and bathroom programmes leading up to the December 2020 deadline.
 - The WHQS programme supports other Council housing priorities, such as energy efficiency, the safety of high rise blocks of flats including fire safety, and ensuring that homes are weather proof and resilient.

The Council has comprehensive stock condition information about its homes that effectively shapes its investment programme to meet the WHQS

10 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- Stock condition surveys have been carried out by external consultants every five years.
- Stock condition surveys have covered the key elements of WHQS compliance.

Stock condition surveys are supported by regular in-house surveys which have also covered Energy Performance Certification (EPCs) and asbestos type and location surveys.

- The Council uses the stock condition information to inform its Capital Housing Investment Programme.

The Council has a programme in place to achieve the WHQS by December 2020, but delivery of the programme will be challenging and there is little room for any slippage

11 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- The Council has a capital programme in place which sets out the work needed to be completed in each property to meet the December 2020 deadline. The majority of this work has now been procured except for some garden fencing and external property work. However, the Council now only has 26 months to complete all the necessary works, including commissioning any outstanding works. The Council cannot risk there being any delays in completing the programme. It needs to ensure there is robust procurement and contract management in place to do this.

- Financial assumptions and budgets are contained in the HRA business plan.
- Kitchens, bathrooms and ancillary work will be undertaken in 6,330 dwellings between 2018 and December 2020. The WHQS is scheduled and planned to be achieved by December 2020.
- All void empty properties are bought up to the WHQS prior to re-letting unless they are soon to be completed within the primary WHQS capital programme. However, the Council recognises this has impacted upon the length of time taken to re-let void properties, and it needs to consider how it can improve this.
- An effective gas servicing regime to meet statutory landlord responsibilities is in place.
- Additional fire safety measures have been, or are programmed to be, installed in high rise blocks. This includes sprinkler systems, additional fire doors and awareness raising in conjunction with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service.
- A back-fill programme plan is in place for those properties where tenants have initially refused WHQS work, or where access is difficult or not convenient.
- The Council has worked effectively with its leaseholders to ensure that work is not held up. The Council has provided loans and financial support to those leaseholders unable to pay for work to communal areas of buildings.

More timely reporting and monitoring of the Council's progress in meeting the WHQS is necessary to ensure it meets the standard by December 2020, and that tenants are aware of the progress being made

12 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- The Council has reported and updated public information on progress against the WHQS in a limited way. For example, there has been a lack of information reported on the numbers and reasons for acceptable fails, and what category they fall into under WHQS guidance. The WHQS performance figures released by Welsh Government show that as of March 2018, the Council has 9,920 homes subject to acceptable fails. This equates to 73% of the Council's housing stock. It is, therefore, important that the Council reports the reasons for these acceptable fails. This will enable the Council to determine what future actions it can take to make those homes currently

classed as acceptable fails into homes fully compliant with the WHQS. For example, those homes which are currently deemed as acceptable fails due to current tenant choice.

- Our telephone survey of a sample of Council tenants found that there was limited awareness of the WHQS programme among tenants. 24% of respondents confirmed that they had been contacted by the Council about WHQS and 66% said they had not been contacted. For those who have had improvement works, there seems to have been a lack of communication about the reasons for the planned works. Around half of respondents (48%) recall that the Council explained why the improvement works were needed but 43% had not been told.
- The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a WHQS Scrutiny Working Group, and undertook a review of WHQS in March 2016. However, there has been little scrutiny of this major Council programme since that time. There has been limited reporting on the WHQS to the Council's performance panels. Given that the Council must achieve the WHQS by December 2020, it is important that there is robust monitoring and challenge of progress, but we found limited evidence that this was happening.

Most tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the quality of improvement works done to their homes by the Council, and with the housing service they receive

- 76% of respondents to our telephone survey confirmed that the WHQS improvement works were completed on time.
- 76% of respondents confirmed that they were satisfied with the quality of improvements, and 14% were dissatisfied.

- A significant majority of tenants are satisfied with the condition of the kitchens, bathrooms and outside of their homes. 73% are satisfied with their kitchen, 74% satisfied with their bathroom, and 69% satisfied with the outside of their home.
- 83% of respondents are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.
- 80% of respondents are satisfied with the housing service they receive from the Council, highlighting a good base to work from to make any further future improvements. Around one in ten are unsure (11%) or dissatisfied (9%) with the service received from the Council.
- The Council has done significant work to improve health, safety and security of those people living in high rise blocks of flats.
- District Housing Managers draw up lists of bids for environmental improvements on estates in conjunction with tenants, for example, to identify areas that require additional play facilities. The Council has provided financial support to pay for these programmes of improvement on a regular basis.
- About one in three tenants we spoke to as part of our telephone survey reported concerns with heating systems and damp in their homes. Of the 680 respondents, 30% find it difficult to heat their home during winter. 45% of respondents were concerned about the lack of, or poor, draught proofing. 34% of respondents reported damp, with the most visible signs being mould and wet patches.

Most tenants we spoke to felt that the Council takes their views into consideration, but the Council could strengthen tenant engagement and make sure tenants are clear about why improvement works are needed

13 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- The Council has a range of ways in which it engages with its tenants:
 - The use of Tenant Liaison Officers to give an interface between the Council, contractors and the individual tenant generally works well.

- Follow up visits by the Council’s technical staff are made to tenants at the completion of improvement works, but further checking of any snagging items or defects is required to ensure that all work is completed to tenants’ satisfaction. Concerns about this aspect of improvement works has been identified in the Council’s tenants’ satisfaction survey results and was expressed by Tenants at our focus groups.
 - the Council’s ‘Open House’ magazine provides a range of information about tenant related issues and helpful hints and guidance.
 - The Council has undertaken Tenant Satisfaction surveys on a regular basis which gives the Council sufficient information about the areas where tenants believe that improvement to services should occur.
 - The Council did a tenant satisfaction survey in 2017. 2,618 tenants responded to this survey. The survey found that 80% of tenants who responded were satisfied with the condition of their home, while 20% were dissatisfied. Of the 2,618 respondents, 40% had not seen an improvement to their house or estate. Of those tenants who had received improvements to the inside of their homes, approximately 22% were not satisfied with the end result. The Council should consider how it can address tenants’ concerns, particularly as the bulk of the WHQS work (kitchens and bathrooms) is now being done within tenants’ homes.
 - The Council has not systematically analysed the reasons and factors contributing to the concerns of its’ tenants, expressed through the Council’s own tenant satisfaction survey, about the quality and timeliness of work carried out by contractors.
- Whilst the Council has a Tenant Participation Strategy covering the period 2015-18, it is limited in scope and information, including how resources will be used to support priorities. The Council has indicated that a new strategy will be produced during 2018, and this will be an opportunity to extend the ways on which it consults, engages and involves tenants.
- Our telephone survey found that:
 - 61% of respondents said that the Council included them in the design or specification of any improvement works, but 35% said they were not.
 - 85% of tenants we spoke to as part of our telephone survey said that they can quickly and easily contact the Council at a time that is convenient to them.
 - 62% of tenants we spoke to are satisfied the Council takes their views into consideration, and listens and acts upon them, although 21% are unsure. The remainder are dissatisfied (17%) suggesting there is work to do on engagement.

- The findings from our focus groups with a small number of BME tenants also suggested that the Council needs to consider how it can improve its engagement with tenants whose first language is not English or Welsh.
- Disruption payments are made to many tenants who are receiving work to their homes. In 2017-18 payments totalling £443,250 were made to 2,571 households. However, it was evident from our focus groups with tenants that there was some confusion about these disruption payments.

- The arrangements and approval for disruption payments should be revisited by the Council, and information provided to tenants should be made clearer on the subject. It was evident from our focus groups with tenants that there was some confusion about these disruption payments.

Appendix 1

Infographic summarising the key findings from our telephone survey

Exhibit 1: infographic summarising the key findings from our telephone survey with a sample of the Council's housing tenants



Most tenants we spoke to find their homes warm enough in winter but some told us they had problems with damp



HEATING

70% of tenants do not find it difficult to heat their homes in the winter



DAMP

34% of tenants we spoke to said they have damp in some parts of their homes. In most cases, tenants identified the damp through visible mould and had reported the problem to the Council

Tenants we spoke to don't always get the information that they need about WHQS



INFORMATION

24% of tenants told us that the Council has told them about WHQS



EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR THE WORKS

48% of tenants who have had works told us that the Council explained why the improvement works were needed



NEXT TWO YEARS

38% of tenants we spoke know if the Council will be making any improvements to their homes in the next 2 years, 39% told us they didn't know and 23% didn't know/couldn't remember



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

The telephone interviews for **City and County of Swansea Council** ran from **24th April** until **9th May** 2018.

The Auditor General requested a sample of around 5% of all of the Council's tenants and leaseholders. The sample of **680** respondents was divided between tenants and leaseholders based on the WHQS compliance status of the **9,072** (general needs and sheltered housing) and **501** leaseholder properties that the Council provided. Properties can be fully compliant, non-compliant or acceptable fails. The sample also reflects the WHQS status of properties across the area based on the data provided by the Council. **639** tenants and **41** leaseholders responded to the survey.

Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
24 Heol y Gadeirlan
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: post@archwilio.cymru

Gwefan: www.archwilio.cymru

Appendix B

Action plan in response to WAO report on Welsh Housing Quality Standard Review including Council Tenants' views.

The following information details key actions which the Housing service will put in place to deliver improvements as a result of the feedback received from the Wales Audit Office.

| Proposals for improvement identified by WAO | Actions | Officer responsible/By when |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1 The Council should provide more timely and transparent reporting of progress on WHQS to Members and tenants. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update existing stock condition data with the results from the latest survey to provide an up to date record of condition and WHQS compliance in April 2019. Provide a summary of the current position to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Cabinet Member➤ Housing Futures Programme Board➤ Housing Futures Member/Officer steering group➤ Ward members➤ Website/Open House➤ Tenant Groups• Ensure acceptable fail reasons are communicated clearly as to what they are and how they will be treated in future in Feb/March 2019: Specific explanation as to what they are, how they are applied, current levels and plans for the future set out to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Housing Futures Programme Board➤ Housing Futures Member/Officer steering group➤ Include a section in the HRA capital programme report to Council➤ Website/Open House➤ Tenant Groups | Dave Bratley April 2019 Dave Bratley Feb/March 2019 |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A progress update is on the website detailing information on the various components of WHQS. It was included in the July 2018 edition of Open House and further information is included in the early 2019 edition. • Following submission of stats to Welsh Government Aug/Sept each year, compliance/Acceptable Fails annual data will be circulated to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Cabinet Member and Ward members ➤ Housing Futures Programme Board ➤ Housing Futures Member/Officer steering group ➤ Updates in Open House magazine and website ➤ Reported to Tenant groups • Undertake review of Compliance policy by July 2019 for consideration by Cabinet/Council | <p>Dave Bratley Sept 2019</p> <p>Peter Williams July 2019</p> |
| <p>P2 The Council should ensure there is effective monitoring and scrutiny of its progress so that any issues can be resolved quickly.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An annual position statement about progress in delivering WHQS by the 2020 target is scheduled on the Scrutiny Work Programme 2019/20 and will be reported to the Service Improvement & Finance Panel. • Reporting on WHQS progress and levels of compliance are formally embedded in existing governance arrangements. These include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Quarterly reports to Welsh Government on programme progress are reported to the Joint Housing Programme Forum, Housing Futures Programme Board and Housing Futures Member/Officer steering group | <p>Mark Wade March 2019</p> |
| <p>P3 The Council should procure any outstanding works as soon as possible and ensure there is robust monitoring of contracts so that works are completed on time and to the level of quality agreed.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a detailed procurement programme in place for the work that is required to enable us to complete all elements of the WHQS by 31st December 2020. • A large amount of the work is carried out by our own internal work force giving us greater control, visibility and certainty on progress and completion timescales. • Every external contract is monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that agreed timescales are met and appropriate action taken if contracts fall behind for any reason, daily checks are carried out by the Clerk of the Works in relation to progress and quality of work and their findings are reported back to the contract QS who will challenge the contractors if there are any discrepancies. | <p>Nigel Williams Actions are ongoing</p> |

| | | |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All contracts are monitored through a Programme Tracker, any that have a significant change from one month to the next are escalated to the Head of Service, an explanation for the change has to be provided along with a plan on how the contract will be brought back on track. • Quarterly monitoring reported to Welsh Government and Joint Housing Programme Forum | |
| P4 The Council should improve on its current arrangements to publicise arrangements for disruption payments to tenants in a clear, understandable and transparent way, and make sure tenants are aware of what they can and cannot claim for. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about Disturbance Allowance is discussed with the tenant at the 10 week visit pre-construction phase and sums to be paid confirmed in the Major Works Agreements and Kitchen & Bathroom brochure. • The narrative in the above documents will be reviewed and made clearer, where possible. • An additional letter will be attached to tenant BACS forms to confirm the payment process and how much the tenant is entitled. • Disturbance Allowance information has been added to Housing Services website • A consultation event will be undertaken with Tenant groups in January 2019 to consider how this could be further improved. | Dave Meyrick January 2019 and ongoing |
| P5 The Council should strengthen how it engages with its tenants, including ensuring tenants are clear why and when works are being undertaken | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All tenants are informed by letter, usually a minimum of 12 weeks before commencement of work is undertaken at their homes. Letters have been reviewed to ensure a wider explanation is given about why the work is required • In subsequent home visits, tenants are informed of the work to be carried out and this information is confirmed in Major Works Agreement documents and brochures. This engagement will continue in its current format. • The Kitchen and bathroom schedules are on the Council website however these may not be widely accessed. Signposting tenants to this information has been included in the Open House magazine, the Council's face book page and information in the District Housing offices. • The introduction of a Housing Facebook page will also help improve how the information about the works is communicated. • New tenants are advised at sign up on works scheduled to be completed • Proposed works are also discussed at tenant groups. | Dave Meyrick Actions are ongoing |
| P6 The Council should update key plans, such as the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRA Asset management plan to be completed by April 2019 • Repairs ,Maintenance and Improvements Policy to be completed by July 2019 | Peter Williams April/July 2019 |

| Repairs, Maintenance and Improvement policy and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset management plan | | |
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| Additional Issues raised by the WAO | Actions | Officer responsible/By when |
| All void empty properties are brought up to the WHQS prior to re-letting unless they are soon to be completed within the primary WHQS capital programme. However, the Council recognises this has impacted upon the length of time taken to re-let void properties, and it needs to consider how it can improve this. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Housing Commissioning review commenced in September 2018 and changes/improvements to the Voids and letting process will be considered and implemented in 2019/2020. | Jane Harris By end of 2020 |
| Of the 680 tenants that the WAO spoke to about 1 in 3 tenants reported concerns with heating systems and damp in their home. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All tenants are encouraged to report any concerns they have with their home to the repairs contact centre. Articles on condensation issues are regularly included in the Open House magazine to raise awareness regarding the accuracy of identifying damp problems as very often it could be condensation caused by lack of ventilation /lifestyle etc. An article has been included in the latest issue. • The Council continues to take a proactive approach to improving its homes and energy rating. The housing stock has already reached a key standard of energy efficiency (average SAP is now 65) and the current kitchen and bathroom programme includes mechanical ventilation which removes airborne moisture and reduces condensation. | Lynda Grove Ongoing action Dave Bratley ongoing works scheduled in Capital programme |

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| <p>Follow up visits by the Council's technical staff are made to tenants at the completion of the improvement works, but further checking of any snagging items or defects is required to ensure that all work is completed to tenants satisfaction. Concerns about this aspect of improvement works has been identified in the Council's tenants' satisfaction survey results and was expressed by Tenants at our focus group.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clerk of Work will return to property after the snagging list issued is confirmed complete by the contractor. • Completion Certificates will be withheld until CoW is satisfied work is completed to the required standard. • Work quality complaints made by tenants on the Housing Services questionnaire will continue to be referred to technical officers and contractors for further investigation. • A further procedure be jointly developed with Building Services by June 2019 to ensure feedback is provided about each complaint, to confirm action required and determine if complaints justified. | <p>Andrew Jackett/Dave Meyrick June 2019</p> |
| <p>The Council did a tenant satisfaction survey in 2017. 2,618 tenants responded to this survey. The survey found that 80% of tenants who responded were satisfied with the condition of their home, while 20% were dissatisfied. Of the 2,618 respondents, 40% had not seen an improvement to their house or estate. Of those tenants who had received improvements to the inside of their homes, approximately 22% were not satisfied with the end result. The Council</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further analysis of tenant dissatisfaction will be carried across individual contractors to identify trends in perceived service weakness. • Undertake a review of how contractors are deploying tenant liaison staff, to ensure they are meeting contractual obligations. • Initial findings suggest main tenant dissatisfaction is due to lack of liaison by contractor's staff while work is and progress and failing to complete work within timescales set out. • Carry out a review of completion times to determine if there are discrepancies between number of working days recorded in the contractor's site diary and working days recorded on completion certificate. | <p>Andrew Jackett/Dave Meyrick June 2019</p> |

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| <p>should consider how it can address tenants' concerns, particularly as the bulk of the WHQS work (kitchens and bathrooms) is now being done within tenants' homes. The Council has not systematically analysed the reasons and factors contributing to the concerns of its' tenants, expressed through the Council's own tenant satisfaction survey, about the quality and timeliness of work carried out by contractors.</p> | | |
| <p>Whilst the Council has a Tenant Participation Strategy covering the period 2015-18, it is limited in scope and information, including how resources will be used to support priorities. The Council has indicated that a new strategy will be produced during 2018, and this will be an opportunity to extend the ways on which it consults, engages and involves.</p> <p>The findings from our focus groups with a small number of BME tenants also</p> | <p>The Welsh Government introduced the requirement to implement Tenant Participation strategies and action plans in 2007 over 3 year cycles. Whilst this is no longer a national requirement, the Council has continued to implement a strategy and action plan as best practice since then. The main purpose of the strategy is to actively encourage tenant involvement to help the continuous improvement of housing services. The current strategy is the Council's 4th since 2008 and these have all been developed with a Tenant Steering group, other existing groups and as a result of tenant surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2019-2021 strategy is currently being drafted, following its development with existing tenant groups, feedback from a comprehensive questionnaire to all tenants and face to face surveys in District Housing Offices. Findings from the surveys highlight that 81% do not want to get involved in issues that affect their home and area. • However the new strategy will continue to look at ways that encourage more tenants and increase the numbers under represented to get involved via closer working with Local Area Co-ordinators, the introduction of a Housing Facebook | <p>Lynda Grove Action is ongoing</p> |

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| <p>suggested that the Council needs to consider how it can improve its engagement with tenants whose first language is not English or Welsh.</p> | <p>page to promote what's happening in the local area, a survey will be undertaken with the Council's Disability Liaison Group and Regional BME network etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All tenants get individual visits prior to works commencing and Improvement officers make all the necessary arrangements to ensure communication is offered in alternative formats/liase with family members and utilise the telephone translation line.• Officers across Housing services offer all service users/tenants information in the language of their choice from the time they access a service/sign up for a property. However we will continue to improve all methods of communication via working with BME tenants who are on existing groups and also promote the telephone translation service etc. | |
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