

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 10 April 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Changes to the Welsh Housing Quality Standards 2023
Purpose of Report:	To inform Members of the changes being introduced to the Welsh Housing Quality standards and the impact on the Council's housing stock and implications for the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.
Report Owner:	Miles Punter – Director of Environment and Housing
Responsible Officer:	Andrew Treweek - Operational Manager Building Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	No individual ward member consultation as the report outcomes affects all wards. Mike Ingram - Head of Housing and Building Services Officers consulted - Rachel Williams - Housing Accountant Nick Jones – Operational Manager – Public Housing Services
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for executive decision by Cabinet
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following several years of consultation with the sector and research, the Welsh Government launched the second edition of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard in October 2023 (WHQS '23). The requirements of the original standard remain in the latest version, but there are now additional requirements moving the housing stock towards carbon neutral, or as close as possible towards it together with other requirements.

Recommendation

1. That Committee considers the contents of the report, and the implications the changes to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard will have to the Council's Housing stock and supporting investment programmes.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To ensure that Elected Members have knowledge and understanding of the changes being introduced on the latest version of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards and the upcoming key achievement dates.

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2002, the Welsh Government produced the first documentation setting out its intentions for all social housing in Wales to reach a minimum standard. This document set out a number of aspirations for all social housing to ensure it was fit for twenty-first century living. In 2004 the Welsh Government undertook a revision of the 2002 standards following requests from a number of Councils seeking additional guidance and clarification.
- 1.2 Subsequently a revised Welsh Housing Quality Standard was issued and adopted in 2008, requiring all social housing to have been improved where necessary to reach the standard by 2020. The standard covered a range of key elements of the home associated with modern living standards and was split into the following key elements:
 - in a good state of repair – walls and roofs are structurally sound and the home is free from damp.
 - safe and secure – must meet requirements for safe food preparation, heating provision, security to windows and doors and be safe to move around the home.
 - adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated – provision of fuel-efficient heating and the building must be capable of retaining the heat.
 - contain up to date kitchens and bathrooms – kitchens and bathrooms should be modern and designed to ensure their safe use.
 - well managed (for rented housing) – tenants should receive a good service which meets their needs and the surrounding community.
 - located in attractive and safe environments – where practicable the local footpaths, roads and recreation areas should be well maintained.
 - as far as possible suit the specific requirements of the household (e.g. specific disabilities) – homes should be adapted to support independent living.
- 1.3 The Vale of Glamorgan Council achieved WHQS in 2018, and this was reported to Committee on 1st October 2018. The work associated to bring the housing stock

up to the first WHQS standard required an investment of over £85 million to fund the following works to our circa 4,000 homes.

1.4 The details shown below provides the number of properties receiving improvement.

Element	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Total
Kitchens	315	1474	1152	343	69	59	3,412
Bathrooms	266	1387	1023	306	93	86	3,161
Heating/ Boilers	268	207	292	115	52	42	976
Rewiring	317	1616	1181	352	76	77	3,619
Roofs	151	18	12	377	307	511	1,376
External Wall Ins'.	0	0	14	190	198	153	555
Pointing, Painting & Rendering	0	1	14	336	433	496	1280

1.5 Since achievement of the WHQS the Council has been in the Maintenance stage of the standard, whilst also continuing to invest in the housing stock in preparation for decarbonisation.

1.6 Since the launch of the first WHQS, a climate crisis has been declared and reducing carbon emissions is becoming ever more important in the way we live our lives. It is therefore clear the standards required a revision to provide rented homes which are kinder to the environment.

1.7 The key elements of the new standard are discussed below with a summary of the changes is provided at Appendix 1.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

2.1 The new standard maintains all the previous WHQS requirements and covers the following categories:

- Homes must be in a good state of repair,
- Homes must be safe and secure,
- Homes must be affordable to heat and have minimal environmental impact,
- Homes must have an up-to-date kitchen and utility area,
- Homes must have an up-to-date bathroom,

- Homes must be comfortable and promote wellbeing,
- Homes must have a suitable garden,
- Homes must have an attractive and practical outside space,

2.2 There are several elements which become applicable to properties being prepared for new tenants at the void stage and are immediately applicable to our void process from April 2024, whilst the decarbonisation of the housing stock is a phased target concluding in 2034.

2.3 The main elements becoming applicable at the void process are:

- 4e) Homes must have adequate space for local recycling requirements,
- 4h) Homes must have adequate facilities for washing, drying and airing clothes,
- 6b) At change of tenancy all habitable rooms (bedrooms and living rooms), staircases and landings located within the home should have suitable floor coverings,
- 6c) Exposure to noise should be minimised,
- 8a) External lockable storage for cycles and equipment must be made available,
- 8c) Biodiversity opportunities should be introduced by landlords who own or manage verges, parks, grounds and open green spaces by changing their management of these areas to make them more wildlife friendly.

2.4 It should be noted that requirement 8c will impact on external programmes such as fencing and neighbourhood schemes.

2.5 The impact of these new requirements will add around £2,000 per void let and will add an estimated seven days to the void lettings process. With an average of 250 voids per year and an average rent of £117.15/week this provides an additional cost of £500,000 to the void process and an additional £29,300 rental loss.

2.6 To reduce costs and avoid unnecessary landfill/waste generation, the team is currently investigating the potential to clean existing floor coverings wherever practicable.

2.7 The move towards carbon reduction is a significant programme of works and despite the Vale of Glamorgan having worked to ensure it is well placed to meet this challenge, there remains considerable investment needed to meet it.

2.8 The key dates and targets for carbon reduction are:

3d) Landlord's must carry out a Whole Stock Assessment and produce Target Energy Pathways for their homes (PAS 2035)	31 March 2027
3b) In the interim, all homes must meet a minimum of SAP 75 – EPC 'C'	31 March 2030

3c) Carbon emissions from homes must be minimised (minimum of EIR 92)	Set by the Targeted Energy Pathways
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- 2.9** The estimated average cost per property in meeting the decarbonisation targets is in the region of £50,000 to £60,000 per home and will include a range of technologies and improvements needed to meet the challenge as identified in the PAS2035 Surveys (Publicly Available Specification 20235 is the British Standard for retrofitting dwellings). PAS 2035 surveys are a whole house survey, defining the practical measures to improve the energy efficiency of the home. Unlike the previous Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) statements, the measures proposed on the certificate provide a route map to reduce carbon emissions, with each measure building on the previous one rather than stand alone as is the case under the EPC scheme. Each measure proposed through the PAS 2035 survey must be carried out in a specific order to enable the best path through the energy improvements and to ensure running costs are maximised.
- 2.10** The first major target is to have surveyed all homes by 31 March 2027, this will provide details of all the necessary works to achieve the Council’s carbon reduction programme. Only at this stage will the full scale of the project be understood and at this stage the full costs of the project can be evaluated.
- 2.11** The second stage in the carbon reduction programme is to achieve Standard Assessment Procedure 75 (SAP 75) by 31 March 2030. SAP is the single government approved system for determining a home’s energy rating. Currently, the Council’s average SAP rating is 73, and the fabric first approach is scheduled to achieve this part of the standard by the target date.
- 2.12** The overall cost of investment for carbon reduction will be in the region of £150m to £200m. these investment figures will need to be fully factored into the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, which has recently been approved by Council for this next year. To ensure sufficient funding is available to meet the decarbonisation challenge, it has been necessary to increase rents by the maximum permissible, and when working through the cost plan leading towards 2034, it is evident more financial resource will be needed to meet the standard by the target date.
- 2.13** The Building Services and Housing teams are currently working through the policies and processes associated with WHQS ’23 and once completed these will be published in a revision of the WHQS compliance policy. The previous compliance policy was presented and approved by Cabinet on 23 March 2020.
- 2.14** The current aspirational date for achievement of the standard has been set initially at March 2034, but this could change depending upon the targeted energy pathways and the level of investment required and available.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1 Looking to the long term** – the new WHQS requirements are mandatory standards being set by Welsh Government to ensure good quality housing which supports healthy living for now and future generations. Introducing carbon reduction measures will help reduce dependency of carbon fuels and protect the environment.
- 3.2 Taking an integrated approach** – The introduction of the latest Welsh Housing Quality Standards has been a collaboration between; Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords. Tenant’s will be consulted on the revised procedures and policies which result from reviews being undertaken following the introduction of WHQS ’23.
- 3.3 Involving the population in decisions** – The Tenants Quality Design Forum (QDF) members have been kept abreast of the developments of the new standards and the wider tenant group network will be consulted on the revised Compliance Policy.
- 3.4 Working in a collaborative way** - N/A.
- 3.5 Understanding the root causes of issues and preventing them** – N/A.
- 3.6 This proposal will meet:**

Objective 1: TO WORK WITH AND FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

Corporate Plan Commitment: 2. Work innovatively, using technology, resources and our assets to transform our services so they are sustainable for the future.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** The introduction of WHQS ’23 has significant implications for carbon reduction and mandates landlords to work towards carbon reductions and energy efficiency measures within all their housing stock.
- 4.2** The standard also seeks to reduce consumption of other natural resources through the introduction of water saving measures.
- 4.3** There are requirements within WHQS ’23 to consider the impact on nature as a result of the work programmes being delivered in meeting the standard.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** Full financial details will be further considered as part of the annual Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. This plan will be adjusted as necessary to reflect the emerging costs associated with delivery of WHQS ’23

Employment

5.2 There are no other resource issues to report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.3 Failure to follow and meet the requirements set out within WHQS '23 could lead to individual legal challenge from tenants in relation to their housing standards. Failure to comply with the standard could lead to challenges and interventions being made by Welsh Government.

5.4 In terms of equalities, this is a Welsh Government standard, equality issues will be considered within the procedures and policies being developed in response to this new standard.

6. Background Papers

None.

ELEMENT	COMPLIANCE DATE
1. Homes must be in a good state of repair	
1a) Homes must be structurally stable and free from disrepair	Continuation
1b) Homes must be free from damp	Continuation
2. Homes must be safe and secure.	
2a) External doors and windows must provide a reasonable level of physical security	Continuation
2b) Staircases & balustrades must be safe	Continuation
2c) Homes must have an adequate fire detection and alarm system installed and maintained to the appropriate British Standard	Continuation
2d) Homes must have appropriate means of escape in case of fire from the building to a place of safety outside the building, in accordance with building regulation requirements	Continuation
2e) Gas, oil-fired or solid fuel burning combustion appliances and installations must be annually certified as safe by an appropriately qualified person	Continuation
2f) A carbon monoxide detector must be fitted in each room containing a fixed gas appliance, an oil-fired combustion appliance, a solid fuel burning combustion appliance or an associated flue	Continuation
2g) Homes must have an electrical safety inspection undertaken by a qualified person at intervals of 5 years or less	Continuation
2h) All electrical equipment supplied by landlords in homes must be safe, comply with the current safety requirements for domestic electrical products and be tested annually	Continuation
2i) Common parts of flats and other multi-occupied residential buildings must have adequate means of warning and escape from fire in accordance with building regulations requirements	Continuation
2j) All buildings containing more than one dwelling (regardless of whether they also contain common parts) must have a current and up-to-date fire risk assessment	Continuation
3. Homes must be affordable to heat and have minimal environmental impact	
3a) Heating systems must be reasonably economical to run and capable of heating the whole of the home to a comfortable level in normal weather conditions (minimum of SAP 92 – EPC A)	Set by the Targeted Energy Pathways

ELEMENT	COMPLIANCE DATE
3b) In the interim, all homes must meet a minimum of SAP 75 – EPC C	31 March 2030
3c) Carbon emissions from homes must be minimised (minimum of EIR 92)	Set by the Targeted Energy Pathways
3d) Landlord’s must carry out a Whole Stock Assessment and produce Target Energy Pathways for their homes	31 March 2027
3e) Homes, and in particular kitchens and bathrooms, must have an adequate amount of ventilation	Continuation
3f) Landlords must <u>make arrangements</u> for a smart meter to be installed in each home	1 April 2024 onwards
3g) Measures to improve water efficiency and alleviating water poverty must be installed when replacing fittings and fixed appliances	1 April 2024 onwards
3h) Water butts to be installed	1 April 2024 onwards
4. Homes must have an up-to-date kitchen and utility area	
4a) Kitchens must be less than 16 years old, unless they are in good condition	Continuation
4b) Kitchens must have adequate space for kitchen appliances	Continuation
4c) Kitchens must be well organised and contain sufficient work surfaces	Continuation
4d) Homes must have sufficient general storage	Continuation
4e) Homes must have adequate space for local recycling requirements	1 April 2024 onwards
<p><i>In addition to provision of space for general waste storage there must be sufficient provision for the collection of key recyclables and storage of food waste in homes. The provision of this may be a combination of internal and external storage.</i></p>	
4f) Kitchens must have sufficient conveniently located power sockets	Continuation
4g) Kitchens and utility areas must have suitable flooring	Continuation
4h) Homes must have adequate facilities for washing, <u>drying</u> and airing clothes	1 April 2024 onwards
<p><i>This includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o <i>space, power and plumbing for a washing <u>machine</u>;</i> o <i>provision for an external drying line; and</i> o <i>a heated airing cupboard with at least 1m2 of internal slatted shelving provided.</i> 	

ELEMENT	COMPLIANCE DATE
<p><i>These may be provided in communal laundry facilities e.g. in some sheltered housing schemes and multi-storey flats.</i></p> <p><i>If it is not possible to provide an external drying line, and there are no communal drying facilities, landlords must provide an energy efficient tumble dryer (e.g. heat pump dryer with drainage connection for condensate) or an energy efficient washer dryer together with a power supply. Space for this appliance will normally be in the kitchen but may be in a utility area.</i></p>	
5. Homes must have an up-to-date bathroom	
5a) Bathrooms and WC facilities must be less than 26 years old, unless in good condition	Continuation
5b) Bathrooms and WC facilities should have suitable flooring	Continuation
5c) Bathrooms must have a shower and a bath (or shower and sufficient space for the provision of a bath)	Continuation
6. Homes must be comfortable and promote wellbeing	
6a) Homes should have sufficient space for everyday living	Continuation
6b) At change of tenancy all habitable rooms (bedrooms and living rooms), staircases and landings located within the home should have suitable floor coverings	1 April 2024 onwards
<p><i>Floor coverings must be present at change of tenancy. However, floor coverings do not need to be replaced if they are suitable, appropriate and in good condition. When deciding on whether floor coverings are suitable and appropriate, consideration should be given to the specific needs of the tenant, and the durability and maintenance requirements. Choice should be offered where possible. The exact detail of the flooring (e.g. loose lay or glued down) is for the landlord to determine.</i></p> <p><i>The landlord can 'gift' the flooring to the tenant to remove ongoing maintenance obligations.</i></p>	
6c) Exposure to noise should be minimised	1 April 2024 onwards
<p><i>This element covers threats to physical and mental health resulting from exposure to noise inside the home caused by lack of sufficient sound insulation or within its curtilage. It does not cover unreasonable noisy behaviour of neighbours (domestic or commercial).</i></p> <p><i>Any home where a hazard rating score (expressed as a band) is assessed to be worse than the national average for that <u>particular type</u> and age of dwelling (as detailed in the HHSRS Operating Guidance, Hazard 14 - Noise 'average HHSRS scores' table) will fail this element.</i></p> <p><i>The design and construction of homes should protect the occupants from ordinary domestic noise from one home entering another, and from traffic or other ambient external noise.</i></p>	

ELEMENT	COMPLIANCE DATE
<p><i>The attenuation measures will be for landlords to decide but they will need to be sufficient to mitigate the hazard to the average level for the stock and will be a direct response to their assessment of the cause of the hazard.</i></p> <p><i>Measures that landlords should consider using include the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>double/secondary glazing and lobbies to external doors where there are high outside noise levels (e.g. traffic)</i> • <i>possible triple glazing near airports/sources of very high noise levels</i> • <i>internal insulation of upper floors, ceilings, and/or roof spaces</i> • <i>external insulation</i> • <i>Repairing any windows and/or external or internal doors to prevent noise penetration</i> • <i>Siting of plumbing from WCs/cisterns away from separating walls</i> • <i>Do not site bathrooms/WCs in flats above living rooms/bedrooms</i> • <i>better construction/conversions of partitions and party walls especially in flats/maisonettes</i> • <i>the use of self-closers on doors providing cushioning on kitchen units</i> <p><i>Professional Judgement used to assess this element should be undertaken by a suitably qualified HHSRS surveyor. Measurement of noise levels using properly calibrated noise meters can be helpful to confirm the subjective assessment.</i></p>	
6d) As far as possible, homes should suit the specific requirements of the household	Continuation
6e) Disabled and older people's housing requirements must be planned for and met in accordance with the duty for reasonable adjustments	Continuation
6f) Homes should be clearly identifiable and have definable boundaries	Continuation
7. Homes must have a suitable garden	
7a) There should be an external level space no smaller than 10m ² directly accessible from the home	Continuation
7b) There should be paved access from the home to any garden gate	Continuation
7c) There should be paved access from the home to the drying line if one is present	Continuation
7d) Outdoor space must be easy to maintain, and safe	Continuation
8. Homes must have an attractive and practical outside space	
8a) External lockable storage for cycles and equipment must be made available	1 April 2024 onwards

ELEMENT	COMPLIANCE DATE
<p><i>Tenants must have access to a robust and lockable external store, which must include sufficient space for secure storage for items such as garden equipment, and bicycles, pushchairs and mobility aids which can encourage sustainable travel.</i></p> <p><i>Provision for individual external storage need not be made if there is readily available and affordable secure communal provision. There are a number of lockable communal bicycle storage solutions now in the UK often provided in what was previously car parking spaces.</i></p> <p><i>Where new provision is made, its design and location should be planned in consultation with tenants to ensure it reflects tenants' needs. This is recommended even where tenancies are typically short.</i></p> <p><i>The Active Travel Act guidance provides detailed advice on design and location of cycle storage, primarily in section 14.8.</i></p>	
<p>8b) There should be adequate, practical, maintainable and safe community space(s)</p>	Continuation
<p>8c) Biodiversity opportunities should be introduced by landlords who own or manage verges, parks, grounds and open green spaces by changing their management of these areas to make them more wildlife friendly</p>	1 April 2024 onwards
<p>Biodiversity is important to help tackle nature and climate emergencies. Areas of biodiversity (flora and/or fauna) can also provide opportunities for residents, community groups, volunteers and schools to become involved, which can contribute to their health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Landlords should, where appropriate, adopt a range of measures to achieve this element, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, and manage sensitively, areas that already provide a very good habitats for pollinators, for example: flowering hedgerows, patches of wildflowers on waste ground, areas of bramble or ivy and flowering meadows • plant pollinator friendly plants • encourage wildflowers and pollinator friendly plants by reducing mowing and collecting grass clippings. • plant and/or restore hedgerows where possible and manage them in rotation to benefit wildlife. • locally source trees, plants and flowers from native stock • take action to remove or manage invasive non-native species where possible. • reduce dependence on chemical pesticides, only use them if absolutely necessary. • ensure that exterior lighting is not detrimental to biodiversity. • create hedgehog highways where fences are erected or renewed by cutting a 13cm² hole in them • Use peat free compost • Install bat and bird boxes • Seek advice from a professional ecologist before developing plans for large areas of the estate 	