



HOUSING TASK GROUP (WHQS) – 12TH SEPTEMBER 2012

SUBJECT: THE WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD (WHQS)

REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To outline the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), the Council's commitments, and the programme structure.

2. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 2.1 The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) is intended to ensure that all local authority and housing association homes are improved and maintained to achieve specified standards.
- 2.2 Relevant policy documents are the National Housing Strategy "Sustainable Homes" WAG; the Council's Community Strategy; Corporate Improvement Plan; Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Plan; Regeneration Strategy; and Children and Young People's Plan.
- 2.3 The Council's Local Housing Strategy "People, Property, and Places" has the following aim:
- "To provide good quality, well managed houses in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations"

3. THE REPORT

- 3.1 In 2001 the National Assembly approved the National Housing Strategy for Wales "Better Homes for People in Wales". This sets out a long-term vision that all households should live in good quality homes that are:
- In a good state of repair
 - Safe and secure
 - Adequately heated, fuel efficient, and well insulated
 - Contain up to date kitchens and bathrooms
 - Located in attractive and safe environments
 - Suit the specific requirements of the household
- 3.2 Each element of the standard has been categorised as either Primary or Secondary. A Primary element is one that impacts on the safety of residents, and a Secondary element is more focussed around the comfort of residents. Each element is assessed against a checklist of questions, 41 in total. Elements should be assessed as Pass, Fail, or Not Applicable. It will not be appropriate for every dwelling to be assessed on all elements within the Standard. In some

cases an Acceptable Fail category will be used. An Acceptable Fail is only possible on individual elements and not the dwelling as a whole. An Acceptable Fail may only be used in one or a combination of the following situations:

- Cost of remedy
- Timing of remedy
- Residents' choice
- Physical constraint

- 3.3 Any outstanding work required to convert an Acceptable Fail to a Pass would normally be undertaken prior to re letting of the property.
- 3.4 The original target set by Welsh Government was for all social landlords to meet the WHQS by 2012. Social landlords were expected to carry out an assessment of the stock and develop an improvement programme to meet the WHQS.
- 3.5 As a consequence of the Council being unable to meet the WHQS by 2012 tenants were balloted in 2012 on whether they wished their homes to be transferred to a new social landlord. The transfer proposal was based on the new RSL achieving the WHQS by 2017/18. Due to changing financial circumstances the Council was able to demonstrate that it would have a viable business plan to achieve the WHQS by 2019/20. Additional information (the addendum) was provided to tenants prior to the ballot to explain this position. In the event tenants voted almost 2 to 1 to remain with the Council as their landlord.
- 3.6 The Council committed to achieve the WHQS by 2019/20 and to match all the specifically costed service improvements that would have been undertaken by the RSL. The retention of the housing stock should now become the catalyst for change and the opportunity to drive forward the modernisation of the housing service and integrated working. At the heart of this should be a demonstration that the promises made to tenants in the addendum will all be taken forward. A programme structure has therefore been developed based around work streams that align with key proposals in the addendum. The programme structure is attached at Appendix 1. There are six main work streams that pick up key themes from the addendum:
- Investment Programme
 - Sheltered Housing Support Service
 - Localised Housing Management
 - Tenant Engagement
 - Tackling Anti Social Behaviour
 - HRA Asset Rationalisation (a supporting activity)
- 3.7 Each work stream has a designated lead officer and the WHQS programme will be overseen by a Project Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive. The Housing Task Group and Cabinet Sub-Committee represent the governance arrangements.
- 3.8 The WHQS is a corporate strategic initiative and programme delivery will be led separately from the day- to-day management of the housing service. A WHQS Delivery Team is proposed with key personnel from the housing service transferred/seconded to the team. The team will incorporate other secondees who will deal with wider issues such as communications, community benefits, and regeneration.
- 3.9 There needs to be a fundamental change in the relationship between the Council and its tenants. This should be an underlying theme. The WHQS investment will bring about substantial physical improvements to both houses and environment, but alongside it has to be recognised that some of the Council's estates have high levels of deprivation, poverty, unemployment, and social

exclusion. The delivery of the programme is an opportunity to link housing and regeneration outcomes. A transformational programme is needed that has a significant impact on people's lives and life chances. The WHQS investment should be a catalyst to achieve wider objectives including new jobs and training opportunities for local people. Part of the challenge will be to align the WHQS programme with other initiatives, local services, and partner activity. This will include for example Job Centre Plus and work related programmes, health and well being support, community policing, skills and training, Communities First, and tackling poverty.

- 3.10 The magnitude of the investment programme, delivering on the undertakings made to tenants, and addressing the wider regeneration issues should be viewed as the strategic responsibilities of the Housing Task Group.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The report is for information purposes, so the Council's EqIA process does not need to be applied.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report has no direct financial implications. Please refer to the agenda item on the WHQS Investment Strategy for further information relating to the business plan and investment requirements.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report has no direct personnel implications. The WHQS Programme Structure has required senior management changes, which have already been implemented. Consultations are currently being undertaken in respect of the proposed WHQS Delivery Team.

7. CONSULTATIONS

- 7.1 Comments received from consultees have been incorporated within the report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The report is for information.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To advise the Housing Task Group on the WHQS and the arrangements the Council has made for taking the WHQS Programme forward to meet the commitments given to tenants.

10. STATUTORY POWER

- 10.1 Housing Acts and Local Government Acts. This is a Cabinet Sub-Committee function.

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Consultees: Councillor Gerald Jones, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing.

Nigel Barnett, Deputy Chief Executive.

Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer.
Nicole Scammell, Head of Corporate Finance.
Dan Perkins, Head of Legal Services.
Gareth Hardacre, Head of Management & People Development.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 WHQS Programme Structure