



CABINET - 30TH JANUARY 2019

SUBJECT: WALES AUDIT OFFICE WHQS REVIEW

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members on the outcome of the follow up review by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) delivery programme following the previous report which was submitted to Cabinet on the 1st November, 2017.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 During March and April 2017, as part of the WAO performance audit plan, the WAO undertook a review of the Council's arrangements to deliver the WHQS by 2020.
- 2.2 At the time of the review, the WAO concluded that the ***“majority of tenants’ homes remain below the WHQS standard due to longstanding inefficient and ineffective programme management and the Council is unlikely to achieve the standard by 2020”***.
- 2.3 The WAO have now completed their follow up review which was undertaken between April and October 2018 and have now concluded that ***“the Council has responded positively to our June 2017 WHQS report and statutory recommendations by making significant improvements and as a result we now conclude that it is likely to meet the WHQS by December 2020”***.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The underlying principles of the WHQS programme, which includes the provision of good quality affordable housing, energy efficient homes and carbon reduction, sustainable communities, health and wellbeing, targeted recruitment and training, clearly links to 5 of the 7 well-being goals in ***The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015***.
- 3.2 ***Improving Lives and Communities: Homes in Wales (Welsh Government, 2010)***, which sets out the national context for improving homes and communities, including the energy efficiency of existing homes;
- 3.3 ***The Caerphilly We Want (CCBC, 2018-2023) - Well-Being Plan Objective 4: Positive Places - Enabling our communities to be resilient and sustainable.***
- 3.4 ***Corporate Plan (CCBC, 2018-2023): Well-being Objective 3: “Address the availability, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and provide advice, assistance or support to help improve people’s well-being.”***

3.5 ***The Welsh Housing Quality Standard: Revised Guidance for Social Landlords on Interpretation and Achievement of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (Welsh Government, 2008).***

3.6 ***Caerphilly Homes Service Plan (2018-2023): Priority 1A: All Council housing is improved to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2020.***

4. THE REPORT

4.1 As part of the 2016/17 performance audit plan, the WAO, during March and April 2017, undertook a review of the Council's arrangements to deliver the WHQS by 2020. WAO sought to answer the question "***does the Council have effective arrangements in place to enable it to meet the WHQS by 2020?***"

4.2 The WAO Review resulted in a number of recommendations which were set out in the Cabinet report of the 1st November 2017, together with comments from officers in response.

4.3 Progress made in addressing the recommendations were reviewed by a Cross Party Working Group which contained representatives from the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee and tenant representatives.

4.4 A report on the outcome of this review was presented to the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee on the 27th February 2018 and it was agreed that the recommendations had been progressed by the required timelines.

4.5 Following this review, the WAO arranged to undertake a further review during 2018 to determine whether the Council can demonstrate that it is meeting the commitments made to Cabinet on the 1st November 2017 in an effective, economic and efficient way.

4.6 This follow up review has been undertaken in two parts:-

- **A Service User Perspective Review** – which focussed on the views from 489 tenants and 25 leaseholders in relation to the delivery of the WHQS programme.
- **A Follow Up Review** – to determine whether the Council is meeting its commitments and making satisfactory progress to meet the WHQS by the WG deadline of December 2020.

4.7 The final version of the Service User Perspective Review report was received on the 20th December 2018 and the Follow Up Review received on the 3rd January, 2019.

Service User Perspective Conclusion

4.8 ***“Tenants and leaseholders have positive views about many aspects of the Council's WHQS programme including the quality, but are less satisfied with external works, the timeliness of work and the extent to which the Council involves them and provides information on the works”.***

4.9 The WAO arrived at this conclusion based on feedback from their survey of approximately 500 tenants/leaseholders who advised that:-

4.10 ***“The Council provides tenants and leaseholders with information about the WHQS programme, but could better explain why the works are needed”.***

Response

4.11 Every property is visited and surveyed individually and tenants engaged as they have an element of choice in the delivery of the work. In addition, letters are also sent to each household to advise of the anticipated start date of the work/contract.

- 4.12 Contact details of our Tenant Liaison Officers are also provided, who will support the tenants throughout the process.
- 4.13 Information on the WHQS programme has also been made available on the Council's website, through the use of newsletters, consultation events, social media, working groups, press releases and marketing events.
- 4.14 For leaseholders we follow a detailed legislative process which sets out the requirement to issue leaseholders with a "Notice of Intention", to provide an indicative scope of works and thereafter a "Section 20 Notice" which provides information of the outcome of our tender exercise including anticipated costs for each leaseholder. Leaseholders are also offered the opportunity to meet with relevant officers if required.
- 4.15 Any work undertaken is identified based on the requirement to bring it up to the WHQ Standard or due to its condition which may result in an element being repaired or replaced. It is accepted that the reason why work is required to each element is not explained to our tenants, although they are advised that it is part of our remit to meet WHQS.

4.16 ***"The Council could do more to ensure that the works are consistently completed on time across all areas"***.

Response

- 4.17 The survey identifies that 71% of tenants/leaseholders reported that the works were completed to the original timescales. The timescale for completing works, however, can be affected by many factors which make it extremely difficult to consistently complete the work on time, e.g. weather, unforeseen work (asbestos, structural, dry rot), access, tenant circumstances (medical conditions), contractor performance, utility company involvement.
- 4.18 ***"Those who have not had improvement works are satisfied with the quality of internal work, but are less satisfied with external works"***.

Response

- 4.19 It is pleasing to note that overall 81% of residents who have had WHQS works completed were satisfied. It is disappointing that only 59% of residents reported that they were satisfied with the outside of their home, with a further 17% reporting that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- 4.20 Unlike internal components, there is no stated timeline for replacing external elements of the home, therefore each property is surveyed and elements changed based on their condition. Tenants' expectations, however, may be that all properties would receive new roofs, new windows, doors, tender and paths, etc. which is not what was "promised" within our Offer Document. Work is ongoing to change the way in which customer satisfaction surveys are carried out so that responses can be analysed in more detail.

4.21 ***"Tenants and leaseholders are involved with the works, but the Council inconsistently applies tenant choice about electrical wiring"***.

Response

- 4.22 Caerphilly Homes has a policy to provide tenants with a choice about whether electrical cables are required to be chased into the wall or hidden with trunking.
- 4.23 Some tenants, however, advised that this choice was not consistently provided and as a consequence our survey forms have been amended to ensure this option is provided and the tenants are required to sign the form to confirm their choice.

4.24 ***“85% of tenants and leaseholders can quickly and easily contact the Council”.***

Response

4.25 This is a pleasing result and is considered to be the result of significant work that has been undertaken to promote our contact information through various sources, the introduction of appointments and texting facilities.

4.26 Overall, the Service User Perspective report confirms that the majority of tenants and leaseholders surveyed are satisfied with delivery of the WHQS programme. It is accepted that there is less satisfaction with external works, but these are not as clearly prescribed within the WHQS guidance document as internal works and therefore compliance and satisfaction levels are more difficult to gauge. It is also the case that leaseholders are required to contribute towards the cost of external works which may also impact on satisfaction responses. It is accepted, however, that improvements can be made and work will be progressed in this regard.

WAO Service User Perspective Review – Proposals for Improvement

4.27 To ensure that the WHQS programme meets the needs of all tenants and leaseholders, the Council should:-

“Strengthen its communication approaches with all tenants and leaseholders, taking account of the experiences of different groups of residents”.

Response

4.28 Information on the WHQS programme has been made available on the Council’s website, through the use of newsletters, consultation events, social media, working groups, press releases and marketing events. Newsletters have also been issued specifically to leaseholders and further communication provided to them in line with required leasehold legislation.

4.29 In addition each tenant has a letter to advise them of any pending work to their property and when the contract is anticipated to commence. In relation to the internal programme, tenants also receive a letter to confirm the extent of work and their choices and this provides them with 10 days to advise if they wish to make any changes to the choices they have made.

4.30 It is accepted that the precise details of why the work is required may not be communicated to all tenants, but due to the extent of communication being issued, they should be aware that the work is required to achieve WHQS compliance and to ensure their property is maintained.

4.31 The content of the letters will however be reviewed in consultation with the Repairs and Improvement Working Group to establish what further improvements can be made.

4.32 ***“Monitor and report compliance with the Charter for Trust to address any identified issues”.***

Response

4.33 The Charter for Trust is issued to all contractors and included as part of our contract documentation. The requirement of contractors to adhere to the Charter for Trust is also an agenda item for all monthly contract meetings.

4.34 Compliance with the Charter for Trust is monitored through customer satisfaction surveys as there are specific questions relating to standards met. In order to improve customer feedback however and to help to identify any issues, the customer satisfaction process has now been reviewed and changed. The new process will involve satisfaction surveys being undertaken by telephone which will hopefully improve the return rate. This will also provide officers with the opportunity to drill down to establish the cause of any concerns in order for us to learn from the feedback and make improvements for the future.

- 4.35 ***“Analyse complaints about the WHQS programme systematically to address the root causes and share learning to improve tenants and leaseholders experience of the programme”.***

Response

- 4.36 Formal complaints are dealt with in line with our Corporate complaints procedure where the outcome is reviewed to establish if there is a root cause which can be addressed in order to improve our customers experience for the future.
- 4.37 It is accepted however that the customer satisfaction process can be improved in order for us to learn from the feedback received and this is currently in the process of being addressed as mentioned above.

WHQS Follow Up Conclusion

- 4.38 ***“The Council has responded positively to our June 2017 WHQS report and statutory recommendations by making significant improvements and as a result we now conclude that it is likely to meet the WHQS by December 2020”.***

- 4.39 The WAO arrived at this conclusion based on the following:-

- 4.40 ***“The Council has made significant progress in identifying the investment and resources it needs to complete its WHQS programme by 2020”.***

Response

- 4.41 It is pleasing that the WAO have acknowledged the progress made in relation to surveying, which in turn has assisted in the identification and costing of future works to inform our business plan and asset management database.
- 4.42 The introduction of the Dynamic Purchasing System is also seen as a positive improvement to engage external contractors in a timely manner.
- 4.43 The work undertaken demonstrates that we have both the financial and physical resources available to deliver the programme by the end of 2020.
- 4.44 ***“The Council has taken steps to determine the value for money of its procurement arrangements”.***

Response

- 4.45 The report reflects the fact that an independent review was undertaken of our single source supply arrangements which concluded that value for money was being provided.
- 4.46 A separate exercise was also undertaken to compare costs of the in-house team with external contractors. Whilst this identified that costs were 20% higher, there are other benefits which offset this increase which were considered in the assessment of value for money. Feedback from tenants indicate that quality and customer satisfaction levels are higher for the in-house workforce.
- 4.47 ***“There have been improvements to its WHQS performance reports; however there is still inconsistent and inaccurate reporting of performance”.***

Response

- 4.48 Performance information is now more accurate and timely with new validation processes having been introduced, including an independent review of the process being undertaken by our Corporate Audit team.

- 4.49 It is accepted that there were some inaccuracies in data provided in reports during early 2018 and this was due to the source of the data collection, the reports being compiled by different departments and possibly the result of changes in some data following validation checks.
- 4.50 To address this problem, all performance data is managed within a centralised team and the data has been standardised for use in all reports.
- 4.51 ***“The Council now has measurable performance targets to effectively monitor the remainder of its WHQS programme”.***

Response

- 4.52 Standard reporting data now includes information on projected compliance up to the end of the programme, based on average compliance achievements calculated from weekly reports. This is constantly monitored to ensure Caerphilly Homes are on track to achieve the standard by the required deadline.
- 4.53 ***“The Council has strengthened its arrangements to meet its statutory landlord responsibilities”.***

Response

- 4.54 Following a review of our no access procedure and Members’ agreement to proceed with forced entry as a last resort following legal proceedings, performance in relation to gas servicing has improved, with current levels being above 99% compliance.
- 4.55 ***“The Council has invested additional resources to enhance its WHQS programme management, but still lacks a current Local Housing Strategy and does not always produce comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments for key Housing policy documents”.***

Response

- 4.56 The Local Housing Strategy will be developed during 2019 and this will be assisted by the recent approval of the Caerphilly Homes Asset Management Strategy and Homelessness Strategy.
- 4.57 The approval of the Asset Management Strategy supported the progress of a number of objectives and work-streams, which will require further reports detailing their proposed implementation. These further reports will result in the completion of comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments which will be undertaken at the appropriate time.

WAO Follow Up Review – Proposals for Improvement

- 4.58 ***“The Council should ensure that members and tenants receive accurate WHQS performance information regularly about its progress towards achieving it’s 2020 programme deadline”.***

Response

- 4.59 Performance information is now more accurate and timely with new validation processes having been introduced, including an independent review of the process being undertaken by our Corporate Audit team. A copy of the report together with its outcomes was provided to WAO as part of this review.
- 4.60 It is accepted that there were some inaccuracies in data provided in reports during early 2018 and this was due to the source of the data collection, the reports being compiled by different departments and possibly the result of changes in some data following validation checks.

4.61 To address this problem, all performance data is now managed within a centralised team and the data has been standardised for use in all reports which includes projections to provide our overall anticipated compliance date. Reports will continue to be provided on a regular basis.

4.62 ***“The Council should agree a Local Housing Strategy to set out its long-term vision for the future priorities for homes in Caerphilly”.***

Response

4.63 Work has been ongoing to establish a number of strategies which will inform the development of an overarching Local Housing Strategy, these include a Private Sector Renewal Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and a Homelessness Strategy.

4.64 Following approval of the Homelessness Strategy in December 2018 the development of a Local Housing Strategy will now progress in 2019 for its implementation in 2020.

4.65 ***“The Council should ensure that Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken consistently”.***

Response

4.66 This relates to the fact that a full EIA was not undertaken to support the Asset Management Strategy report. Officers took the view at the time that the report was seeking member approval on the principles of the strategy as it is clear that aspects of the strategy would require further specific reports seeking members approval and full EIA's would be considered again at this time.

4.67 To ensure consistency however, refresher EIA training would be provided to relevant officers.

Conclusions

4.68 The follow up reports provided by the WAO provide a far more positive picture on the current position of the WHQS programme and also provides independent confidence that Caerphilly Homes are on track to deliver the full programme by December 2020.

4.69 The methodology for carrying out customer satisfaction surveys is already in the process of being reviewed with the aim of collating more meaningful feedback which will assist us in making further service improvements.

4.70 It is accepted that improvements and consistency in the way performance information is presented was required and this has been addressed as indicated within the report.

4.71 The Local Housing Strategy will be developed during 2019 and EIAs on key policy reports will be carried out at the appropriate time.

4.72 Members will shortly be receiving further reports on the WHQS programme which will provide details on the current progress position and projections for full compliance. A further report will be submitted seeking approval of the re-profiling exercise which has also been undertaken, which demonstrates and informs all stakeholders on the current and projected completion of the programme broken down by community and street level.

4.73 When considering the improvement in performance that has been achieved over the last 12 months together with the latest position on WHQS compliance, Caerphilly Homes are well placed to achieve full compliance (including acceptable fails) by December 2020, and this view has now been supported by the WAO.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 The report outlines the contribution made towards the Well-being Goals as set out in the Links to Strategy section above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act:-
- 5.2 Long-term - Since the Housing Ballot (2012) we continue to make substantial investments and improvements to both the internal and external environments of our social housing stock (Public Sector), including specialised adaptations in accordance with the needs of some of our tenants. Adaptations are also supported and implemented in the Private Sector (often referred to as Disability Facilities Grants).
- 5.3 These fundamental changes and improvements are being achieved through; the implementation of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards; housing adaptations in accordance with tenants and homeowners needs; enhancing the quality of product installations and repairs; improving environments around homes; all aiding the well-being of our communities, its infrastructure and citizens alike, providing homes and communities for now and the future.
- 5.4 Prevention - The works undertaken through Housing Services helps to improve lives and communities, by securing local employment either in-house or through supplier, contractor and partnership arrangements.
- 5.5 Works undertaken by our services make significant visual improvements to housing stocks and their surroundings environments (improved the look and feel) helping to prevent anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime.
- 5.6 By raising standards and conditions with improved quality materials and appropriate service response, should aide and ease future maintenance schedules and requirements, better controlling costs, levels of deterioration/depreciation, improve safety and accessibility, while also reducing disruption to our tenants in the future, and aiding quality of life in both Private and Public Sectors, through intervention and support actions that are fit-for-purpose.
- 5.7 Involvement - Through established governance and performance frameworks, tenants and local residents are consulted on proposed property and environment improvements works along with various initiatives, and they are periodically informed of progress as part of for example, the WHQS delivery programme.
- 5.8 Numerous working groups are established and well embedded with periodic reporting and feedback opportunities exploited. Welsh Government, Environment Standards, Regulatory Controls and Checks, Tenant Engagement are all part of our daily business.
- 5.9 Collaboration - The programme delivery focused on internal collaboration, wider partnership arrangements with suppliers and contractors, joint working with the community and various other interested parties/groups. The delivery of community benefits and tenant engagement by all involved with the WHQS programme is a key focus for the success and delivery of this objective.
- 5.10 Integration - The programme looks to integrate property and environmental improvements that will benefit and transform lives and communities throughout the county borough. It further brings together a variety of stakeholders to deliver long term sustainable benefits for lives and communities including Social Services & Health.
- 5.11 Housing Services and our outlined priorities, contributes to a minimum of 6 out of the 7 well-being goals within the *Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015*, including:-
- A prosperous Wales
 - A resilient Wales
 - A healthier Wales
 - A more equal Wales
 - A Wales of cohesive communities
 - A globally responsible Wales.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report is for information purposes only. There are, therefore, no equalities implications arising from the report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The WAO stated that significant progress has been made in identifying the investment and resources it needs to complete the WHQS programme by the end of 2020. This work has helped to inform the Caerphilly Homes business plan which demonstrates that anticipated borrowing requirements will be sufficient to deliver the full programme and that the business plan remains financially viable.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATION

- 8.1 There are no current personnel implications associated with this report.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 The report has been consulted on and any views received have been considered and incorporated where appropriate.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Members are asked to consider and comment on the WAO reports, note and comment on the officer responses to the reports and the proposals for improvement.

11. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To ensure that Cabinet is aware of the review work undertaken by the WAO and the relevant findings, conclusion and proposals for improvement.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Housing Act 1996.
Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Author: Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
(Tel: 01443 811406/01443 864208, Email: couzes@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Consultees:

Councillor Lisa Phipps	- Cabinet Member for Homes and Places
Christina Harry	- Interim Chief Executive
Dave Street	- Corporate Director of Social Services and Housing
Robert Tranter	- Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Paul Smythe	- Housing Technical Manager
Jane Roberts Waite	- Strategic Co-ordination Manager
Lesley Allen	- Principal Accountant
Alan Edmunds	- WHQS Project Manager
Steve Greedy	- WHQS Project Manager
Colin Roden	- WHQS Project M

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Service User Perspective Review
Appendix 2 Welsh Housing Quality Standard follow-up report



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Service User Perspective Review – **Caerphilly County Borough Council**

Audit year: 2017- 2018

Date issued: November 2018

Document reference: 826A2018-19



This document has been prepared as part of work performed in accordance with statutory functions.

In the event of receiving a request for information to which this document may be relevant, attention is drawn to the Code of Practice issued under section 45 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The section 45 code sets out the practice in the handling of requests that is expected of public authorities, including consultation with relevant third parties. In relation to this document, the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office are relevant third parties. Any enquiries regarding disclosure or re-use of this document should be sent to the Wales Audit Office at

infoofficer@audit.wales.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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

The team who delivered the work comprised Gareth Jones, Kevin Sutch, Matthew Brushett and Lisa McCarthy programme managed by Non Jenkins under the direction of Huw Rees.

Contents

Tenants and leaseholders have positive views about many aspects of the Council's WHQS programme including the quality, but are less satisfied with external works, the timeliness of work, and the extent to which the Council involves them and provides information on the works.

Summary report

Summary	4
Proposals for improvement	6
Understanding the results	6
The Council provides tenants and leaseholders with information about the WHQS programme, but it could better explain why the works are needed	9
The Council could do more to ensure that the works are consistently completed on time across all areas	12
Those who have had improvement works are satisfied with the quality of internal works, but are less satisfied with external works	14
Tenants and leaseholders are involved with the works, but the Council inconsistently applies tenants' choice about electrical wiring	18
Eighty-five per cent of the tenants and leaseholders can quickly and easily contact the Council	20
Appendices	
Appendix 1 – overview of survey participants	27
Appendix 2 – survey questions	29
Appendix 3 – infographic summarising survey results	36

Summary report

Summary

- 1 In 2017-18, the Wales Audit Office completed work to understand the 'service user perspective' at every council within Wales. We followed a broadly similar approach at each council but agreed the specific focus and approach to the work individually. In Caerphilly, we focused on tenants' and leaseholders' views on their experience of Caerphilly County Borough Council's (the Council) Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) programme.
- 2 The WHQS is a Welsh Government policy that applies to all public housing across Wales. Meeting the standard is the responsibility of each social housing landlord. The Council is the social housing landlord for Council tenants across the County Borough. Tenants and leaseholders therefore do not have a choice of service provider. As there is no alternative service provider, the ability of service users to influence services relies on 'voice' rather than 'choice'. This means that ensuring the views of service users are heard is important when the Council designs and delivers services and interventions aimed at meeting people's needs.
- 3 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a duty on local authorities and other public bodies to have regard for the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working that define it. 'Involvement' is one of the five ways of working identified in the Act.
- 4 In 2017, we undertook a review of the Council's progress towards meeting the WHQS by 2020 and concluded that the majority of tenants' homes remain below the WHQS due to longstanding inefficient and ineffective programme management, and the Council was unlikely to achieve the Standard by 2020. One of the reasons that we came to this conclusion was that:
 - although 'the Council has a range of mechanisms to engage with tenants about WHQS, these are ineffective and are not being used to shape planning and drive performance'.
- 5 The Council's response to our 2017 finding was that their own satisfaction surveys pointed to high levels of tenant satisfaction, and that it would be valuable if we were to speak to more tenants.
- 6 We could not speak to all tenants and leaseholders, so we commissioned an independent research company to carry out a telephone survey of a sample of them. Between 23 April and 1 May 2018, 489 tenants and 25 leaseholders completed the survey. [Appendix 1](#) provides more detail about the tenants and leaseholders who completed the survey. We asked them about the quality and timeliness of the works, the communications and service they receive from the Council, and whether they feel listened to/able to influence the WHQS programme. [Appendix 2](#) contains our survey questions.
- 7 We spoke to residents at four Sheltered Housing Schemes in focus groups. Two of the schemes had improvement works being carried out at the time of our focus groups, one scheme had had the works completed and at one the work was yet to start.

- 8 We held focus groups with the tenant members of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and the Repairs and Improvements Group.
- 9 We also interviewed senior housing service managers and managers with responsibility for tenant engagement activities.
- 10 We concluded that: tenants and leaseholders have positive views about many aspects of the Council's WHQS programme including the quality, but are less satisfied with external works, the timeliness of work, and the extent to which the Council involves them and provides information on the works.
- 11 We came to this conclusion because:
- The tenants and leaseholders we surveyed and spoke to tell us that:
 - the Council provides tenants and leaseholders with information about the WHQS programme, but it could better explain why the works are needed;
 - the Council could do more to ensure that the works are consistently completed on time across all areas;
 - those who have had improvement works are satisfied with the quality of internal works, but are less satisfied with external works;
 - tenants and leaseholders are involved with the works, but the Council inconsistently applies tenants' choice about electrical wiring; and
 - 85% of the tenants and leaseholders can quickly and easily contact the Council.

Proposals for improvement

Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

- 12 The table below contains our proposals for ways the Council could improve the effectiveness of its WHQS programme to make it better placed to meet tenants' and leaseholders' needs.

Proposals for improvement	
P1	<p>To ensure that the WHQS programme meets the needs of all tenants and leaseholders the Council should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">strengthen its communication approaches with all tenants and leaseholders, taking account of the experiences of different groups of residents;monitor and report compliance with the Charter for Trust to address any identified issues; andanalyse complaints about the WHQS programme systematically to address the root causes and share learning to improve tenants' and leaseholders' experience of the programme.

Understanding the results

- 13 Our survey sample of 514 tenants and leaseholders provides an insight into their views. The Council has almost 11,000 tenants and leaseholders, and this sample of 514 people provides a confidence interval of 4.2% at a 95% confidence level. This means that if 50% of people chose a response in this survey and the survey was repeated, there would be 95% confidence that the response in the repeated survey would range from 45.8% to 54.2%. The sample includes tenants and leaseholders whose full WHQS works are complete, some that had only external work, others that had internal work only and others that are yet to receive any WHQS work. Further detail on the sample is provided in [Appendix 1](#).
- 14 Some of our survey questions used a five-point satisfaction scale: Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied. The percentages we show in the report combine the very satisfied and satisfied into one score of satisfied, and very dissatisfied and dissatisfied into one score of dissatisfied.
- 15 We provide the responses as percentages, which may not always add up to 100% because of rounding or for multiple response questions.

- 16 To provide further insight we used the following tenant characteristics to analyse the survey questions:
- Age of tenant
 - Gender of tenant
 - Length of tenancy
 - Tenancy status (general needs, sheltered housing tenant, leaseholder)
 - Location of property (the Council has three WHQS delivery areas, the Upper Rhymney Valley, Lower Rhymney Valley and the Eastern Valleys)
- 17 We have set out in the report if any of these tenant characteristics have a significant impact on the responses to any questions. Where we do not set out any impact of tenant characteristics there is no impact of those on the survey responses.
- 18 Leaseholders have a different relationship with the Council around WHQS to tenants. When a tenant becomes a leaseholder and purchases their property through the Right to Buy scheme, they assume certain responsibilities and obligations. Those include the maintenance of their property that they have bought. The terms of the lease issued by the Council includes an obligation on the leaseholder to contribute towards the repair, maintenance and refurbishment of the external structure and communal areas. These are referred to as Major Works, where the Council is legally required to undertake a formal consultation process with all leaseholders. The Council provides information to leaseholders about their obligations in a leaseholder handbook¹. The Council undertakes only external improvement works to leaseholders' properties as part of the WHQS programme. The Council consults with leaseholders if the cost of the external improvements works is likely to exceed £250 per leaseholder or more than £1,000 for the block of flats.

¹ [Caerphilly County Borough Council Leaseholder Handbook](#)

CAERPHELLY TENANTS' WHQS 'JOURNEY'

- 19 From our focus groups, Sheltered Housing residents and Council staff we understand the following as the main parts of tenants' 'journey' through having WHQS improvement works completed in their homes.

Set Up



- 20 The Council informs tenants when WHQS works will take place in their community. Internal and external works take place at different times within communities. Sheltered Housing residents told us that special meetings took place in the communal areas where residents were able to ask questions about how the work would be carried out.

Condition Survey



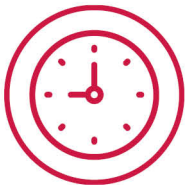
- 21 A Council surveyor visits the resident and explains what works (internal and external) will be carried to bring the home up to the WHQS standard. It is at this stage the resident has the opportunity to make their choices. It is also an opportunity to explain to the resident what can be changed, what will remain as part of the programme and what the residents will have to do. The Council writes to the tenant to set out what works will be completed as part of the WHQS programme.

Works commence



- 22 In sheltered housing schemes the Tenant Liaison Officers (TLOs) help residents to pack and move items away from the work area. The Council informs tenants when the work will start along with the likely time it will take to complete.

Works duration



- 23 During the duration of the works the main point of contact for tenants is either the workforce manager on site or TLO. The Council's 'Charter for Trust' suggests that all residents should have the contact details for the TLO for their area. For sheltered housing the sheltered housing liaison officer or the TLO are available to provide updates about the progress of the work.

Works end



- 24 The Clerk of Works checks that the specified work(s) has been carried out correctly and identifies any work that needs to be completed or has not been carried out to standard.

The Council provides tenants and leaseholders with information about the WHQS programme, but it could better explain why the works are needed

Summary

Exhibit 2: summary of tenants' and leaseholders' views about the information the Council provides to them about the WHQS programme



INFORMATION

62% of residents told us that the Council has told them about WHQS



EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR THE WORKS

55% of residents who have had works told us that the Council explained why the improvement works were needed



NEXT TWO YEARS

51% of residents know if the Council will be making any improvements to their home in the next 2 years

Information about the WHQS Programme

- 25 Sixty-two per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed told us that the Council had told them about the WHQS, whilst 32% said that the Council had not told them, and 6% said they did not know.
- 26 Thirty-seven per cent of the 191 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed in the Upper Rhymney Valley told us that the Council had not told them about the WHQS.
- 27 We asked those tenants and leaseholders who remembered the Council telling them about the WHQS programme, what method(s) the Council had used to inform them. Fifty per cent of the tenants and leaseholders told us that the Council

informed them by letter, 29% told us that the Council used newsletters or told them in person.

- 28 Twenty per cent of the 44 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed aged between 45 and 54 told us that the Council had told them through newsletters, but 36% of this age group said that they were told in person. The tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who were aged between 45 and 74 were more likely to say that they had been told in person than those aged 44 and younger or those aged over 75

Explaining why works are needed to achieve WHQS

- 29 Overall, 55% of the 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had improvements works in the past five years told us that the Council had explained why those works were needed to achieve WHQS, whilst 34% told us that it had not, and 10% said that they didn't know/couldn't remember.
- 30 Nine of the 19 of the Sheltered housing respondents and six of the eight leaseholders who have had improvement works said the Council had explained why the works were needed.
- 31 Sixty per cent of the 129 Eastern Valleys respondents we surveyed told us that the Council had explained why the works were needed. Forty-three per cent of the 144 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents we surveyed told us that the Council had not explained why the works were needed.

Information about Future Improvements

- 32 Fifty-one per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed were aware of the Council's plans to make improvements to their homes in the next two years, whilst 34% were not aware, and 15% said they did not know/could not remember.
- 33 Tenants' and leaseholders' awareness varied across the Council's three housing delivery areas, with 44% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents we surveyed were aware of the Council's plans compared to 59% of the 177 Eastern Valley respondents, and 51% of the 146 Lower Rhymney Valley respondents in the Lower Rhymney Valley.

Information about WHQS for leaseholders

- 34 Twelve of the 25 leaseholders we surveyed told us that the Council had informed them about their maintenance responsibilities as a leaseholder, 11 leaseholders told us that the Council had not and two leaseholders did not know.

Sheltered housing residents' views

- 35 Residents in three of the four Sheltered Housing schemes we spoke to told us that they felt that the Council has an inconsistent approach to informing residents about why the works were being carried out and what was required. Some residents recalled having a scheme meeting in the communal room, but others could not

remember. Residents told us that the Council sent letters setting out the works to be carried out a number of months before works began, but some residents did not recall receiving these letters. However, in Tŷ Bedwellty, all the residents were very aware why the works were being carried out and thought the communication about the work was excellent.

- 36 Tenant Liaison Officers are the key link between the residents, sheltered housing wardens and the contractors delivering the improvement works. When it came to advising residents about potential start dates, the TLOs told us that they normally 'err on the side of caution' when providing residents with a start date so that they do not raise the residents' expectations.

Tenant representatives' views

- 37 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvement and Caerphilly Homes Task Group told us that, in their experience, the Council's information about the extent of works, and how and when those will be delivered, does not always reflect tenants' actual experience of the delivery of the works.

The Council could do more to ensure that the works are consistently completed on time across all areas

Summary

Exhibit 3: tenants' and leaseholders' views on the timeliness of the improvement works



TIMELINESS OF WORK

71% of residents told us that the Council completed the works when they said they would

- 38 Seventy-one per cent of 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had WHQS works carried out, reported that the works were completed to the original timescales, 24% reported that the works were not and 6% could not remember.
- 39 Twenty-eight per cent of the 101 Lower Rhymney Valley and 26% of the 129 Eastern Valley respondents we surveyed said that the works were not completed on time, but this figure reduced to 19% of the 144 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents.

Sheltered housing residents' views

- 40 Eighty-four per cent of the sheltered housing tenants we surveyed told us that the Council completed the works when they were told they would.
- 41 In our focus groups, residents from the Sheltered Housing schemes told us that when the planned timescales are not adhered to, it causes confusion and disruption for residents. One resident told us that they went on holiday for the planned period of the works only to return and find the works had not been completed. Some residents told us that the Council, and the teams delivering the works, could improve their communication about changes to timescales. In Tŷ Bedwellty, the Council managed the works by moving tenants temporarily into empty properties whilst the works were being done, meaning that delays did not impact on residents' lives.

Tenant representatives' views

- 42 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvement and Caerphilly Homes Task Group told us that in the initial phases of the WHQS works, tenants experienced

delays, but stated that in their view the Council has now made changes to its delivery processes to try to overcome such delays. The tenants described how delays to completing works can impact on people's daily lives due to the disruption in their homes.

- 43 Tenants' and leaseholders' views indicate that the Council could do more to ensure that works are consistently completed on time across all areas.

Those who have had improvement works are satisfied with the quality of internal works, but are less satisfied with external works

Summary

Exhibit 4: tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with the overall WHQS works and specific elements of the programme (kitchens, bathrooms and outside of their homes)



OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH WHQS WORKS

81% of residents who have had works are satisfied

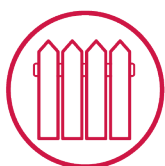


79% of tenants are satisfied with the overall condition of their kitchen



BATHROOM

79% of tenants are satisfied with the overall condition of their bathroom



OUTSIDE OF HOME

59% of residents are satisfied with how the outside of their homes looks

Overall satisfaction with improvement works

- 44 We asked the 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had any improvement works completed in the past five years about their satisfaction with the works. Eighty-one per cent are satisfied with the improvement works to their homes, 8% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 12% are dissatisfied.
- 45 Eighteen of the 19 sheltered housing residents we surveyed who have had works completed are satisfied compared to four of the eight leaseholders we surveyed

and 81% of the other (general needs) tenants who have had works completed. Eighty-five per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had both internal and external works completed are satisfied.

46 When we asked the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed why they had given their satisfaction rating, we found that their satisfaction was related to a few key reasons:

- the lived experience of having the works done to their homes;
- tenants' experiences of the builders who carry out the building works;
- timeliness of the works;
- quality of the works;
- design of the works;
- effectiveness of communication;
- provision of services to disabled families; and
- level of choice provided to tenants.

47 The tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who had had a positive experience provided us with a range of comments that reflect a positive adherence to the Council's Charter for Trust². In 2013, the Council developed the Charter following consultation with tenants and staff and it was agreed by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group. It sets out the standards that tenants can expect from the workforce and how tenants should treat the workforce. Many tenants and leaseholders highlighted positive compliance with the Charter for Trust during the works:

- 'They (the workforce) did a clean and tidy job.'
- 'Every lot of workmen I have had here were all punctual, polite and they all cleaned up after.'
- 'Very nice workmen asked me about my opinion every step of the way.'
- 'It was very good – especially the ones who did the indoor work – they'd explain what they were doing.'
- 'It was all carried out on time and they tidied up after themselves: all good.'
- 'New bathroom, we got a shower, floor no longer squeaks, toilet not leaking.'

48 A smaller proportion of tenants and leaseholders we surveyed, including some who told us that overall they are satisfied with the works they had received, however, provided us with feedback that highlighted non-compliance with the Charter for Trust:

- '(The works were an) absolute shambles and personal belongings were broken.'
- 'The workers ruined my stair carpets, I told the Council and they haven't done anything about it.'

² Caerphilly Homes Charter for Trust
<http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/CaerphillyDocs/Housing/Tenants-handbook/13-CharterForTrust.aspx>

- ‘I was very disgusted at all the disruption caused, we were left without running water etc.’
- ‘We went four weeks without a sink.’
- ‘Some of the workers leave a mess after completing the work.’
- ‘The work’s nice but not happy with the hassle and length it took.’
- ‘They didn’t finish the job straight away and wouldn’t decorate the bathroom to a good standard.’

Sheltered housing residents’ views

49 Sheltered housing residents told us that they were satisfied with the improvement works that the Council has completed, however, residents felt that this satisfaction is only achieved once any snagging is resolved. Some sheltered housing residents expressed dissatisfaction with the electrical works, and in one scheme residents had reported their concerns to the Council about the fitting of new front doors, which they had found to be difficult to open or close.

Tenant representatives’ views

50 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvements and Caerphilly Homes task groups told us that once completed, improvements works are usually finished to a high standard. However, they highlighted that there are examples of tenants having to complain to get to this point, after work had not been perceived to have been done correctly first time.

Satisfaction with Kitchens

51 Seventy-nine per cent of the tenants we surveyed are satisfied with the condition of their kitchen, 12% are dissatisfied and 10% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

52 We looked at the level of satisfaction and whether having works completed affected tenants’ views. Eighty-four per cent of the 364 tenants we surveyed who have had works in the past five years are satisfied with the condition of their kitchen compared to 64% of tenants (120) who have not had works.

Satisfaction with Bathrooms

53 Seventy-nine per cent of the tenants we surveyed are satisfied with the condition of their bathroom, 10% are dissatisfied and 11% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

54 Overall, 75% of the 136 tenants we surveyed in the Lower Rhymney Valley are satisfied with the condition of their bathroom compared to 81% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley tenants we surveyed and 81% of the 177 Eastern Valleys tenants.

55 We looked at tenants’ level of satisfaction and whether having works completed affected tenants’ views. Eighty-five per cent of the 364 tenants we surveyed who

have had works in the past five years are satisfied compared to 65% of the 120 tenants we surveyed who have not had works.

Satisfaction with Exteriors of homes

- 56 We asked all 514 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed whether they are satisfied with the exterior of their home. Fifty-nine per cent are satisfied, with 17% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 23% dissatisfied.
- 57 We found no difference in satisfaction between those that have had improvement works done and those that have not had improvement works.
- 58 Sixty-three per cent of the 177 Eastern Valleys tenants and leaseholders we surveyed are satisfied with the exterior of their homes, with this figure being 59% of the 146 Lower Rhymney Valley and 55% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley tenants and leaseholders we surveyed.

Tenants and leaseholders are involved with the works, but the Council inconsistently applies tenants' choice about electrical wiring

Summary

Exhibit 5: 67% of tenants and leaseholders who have had work were included in the design of the improvement works

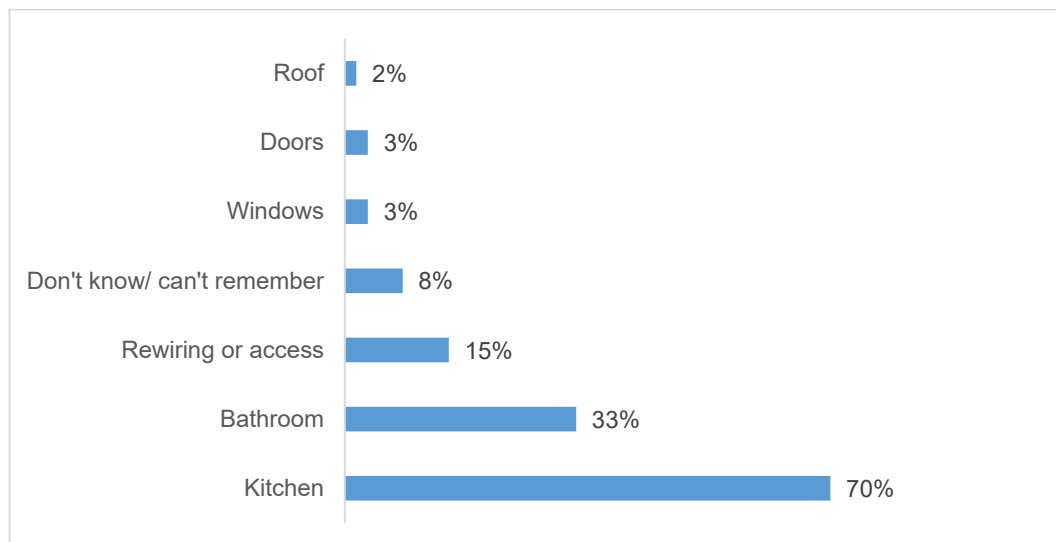


DESIGN

67% of those residents who have had work were included in the design of the improvement works

- 59 We asked the 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had improvements works whether the Council had involved them in the design or specification of any of the improvement works. Sixty-seven per cent of those tenants and leaseholders said the Council had involved them, 29% said the Council had not, and 5% did not know or could not remember.
- 60 Tenants and leaseholders can exercise their right to refuse improvement works. Fifty-five tenants and leaseholders in the survey had refused some improvement works with five having refused all the works.

Exhibit 6: kitchens and bathrooms are the improvement works most often refused by tenants and leaseholders



61 We asked those 60 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who told us that they had refused works, why they had done so. Twenty-five per cent said they were happy with the existing state of their home, with 20% of tenants and leaseholders reporting health issues or the inconvenience of the proposed plan (20%) as their reasons to refuse the works. Thirty-seven per cent reported other reasons, with many of those stating that they had completed the improvements themselves.

Sheltered housing residents' views in focus groups

62 The Sheltered Housing residents we spoke with in our focus groups told us that although the Council offers choice, they felt that the choice was extremely limited, especially colours and kitchen worktops. The Council provided us with examples of the brochure which details the choices which are available. The Council also provided us with an example of the document given to tenants confirming the choices that tenants have made. However, during our focus groups with Sheltered Housing residents, not all recalled receiving these documents.

Tenant representatives' views

63 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvement and Caerphilly Homes task groups told us that overall the level of choices is generally good, but there is still some inconsistency with how much choice is offered to all tenants depending on which builders are delivering the improvement works. The Council's policy is that tenants' choices are discussed and agreed jointly by tenants with the Council's Surveyors and TLOs.

64 Focus groups with tenants highlighted the methods that the Council uses for electrical rewiring as an area where tenants feel they are not always consistently able to influence the works to their homes. The Council maintains that it has a policy to provide tenants with a choice about whether the wires should be chased into the wall or hidden with trunking and wherever possible, cables should be chased into the wall. However, the tenants told us that this is not always the case, or it had not been clearly explained to the individual residents why trunking is needed and could not be chased into the wall. In May 2018, the Council introduced a process to record tenants' choice of either surface mounted (trunking) or buried cables.

Eighty-five per cent of the tenants and leaseholders can quickly and easily contact the Council

Summary

Exhibit 7: summary of tenants' and leaseholders' views of ease of contacting the Council



CONTACTING THE COUNCIL

85% of residents can quickly and easily contact the housing service



RESPONDING TO VIEWS

64% of residents think that the Council listens to their views about their home and neighbourhood and acts on them

Contacting the Council

- 65 Whilst 85% of tenants and leaseholders we surveyed said that they can quickly and easily contact the Council, 9% said they cannot and 6% did not know or have not tried.
- 66 A small number of tenants and leaseholders told us that they are unclear about who to contact if they have any queries. Tenants and leaseholders aged below 45 were less likely to state that they can quickly and easily contact the Council than the overall response.
- 67 Those tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who told us that they were unable to contact the Council quickly and easily, told us about their experience of contacting the Council:
- 'When you call the Council takes ages to get through, hard to get to right department.'
 - 'Contacted the Council about a rat problem and there was no answer from the number they gave me.'
 - 'It takes a long time to get through to Council phone line; last time took me three days.'
 - 'It's difficult to call when Council you're in work.'
 - 'It would be good if you can phone after work hours, 8 am to 8 pm.'

- ‘They could be quicker in responding when you call for repairs.’
- ‘When you get problems they normally respond but we’ve had damp for two years and nothing fixed.’
- ‘Spoke to housing person and didn’t get any satisfactory answers.’

Responding to views

68 Sixty-four per cent of the 514 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed are satisfied that the Council listens to their views and then acts on them, 17% are dissatisfied and 19% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Eighty-five per cent of the 41 sheltered housing residents are satisfied compared with 64% of the 454 other (general needs) tenants. Tenants’ and leaseholders’ satisfaction varied across the age groups from 73% for those aged over 75 to 49% for those aged 35 to 44.

Sheltered housing residents’ views

- 69 Overall, the sheltered housing residents we spoke to told us that communication can be variable and depends on residents’ level of confidence in approaching the TLOs and the teams delivering the works. We found that the Council provides information about how to contact the Council about WHQS works including specific contact numbers, but a small number of tenants still contact the main housing team to resolve issues.
- 70 We found in Tŷ Bedwellty, the one Sheltered Housing Scheme where tenants were very satisfied with the work, that there was very good liaison between the TLO and the warden. The warden acted as the key point of contact between tenants and the TLO.

Appointment system

71 In the phone survey, tenants and leaseholders provided us with generally positive feedback about the Council’s housing appointments system, including the text reminder system and the agreement of dates. However, a small number of tenants and leaseholders expressed negative views about the system including some who felt that there is a need to take a full day off work for an appointment, and some who had experienced appointments not being kept.

Positive

- ‘They’re good, they always give an appointment date so you know when to expect them.’
- ‘No complaints, when I need repairs they will give a date and they keep to their word.’
- ‘If you need a repair they offer convenient time, text reminders.’

Negative

- 'The times that they come out and do repairs can be inconvenient, we work full time and have to take a day off whenever we need a repair.'
- 'Pain when they can't give a time for repairs or visits.'
- 'I'm currently waiting for my roof to be repaired; it's hard to miss work for the repairs.'

72 The Council produces an annual report on the housing-related formal complaints received by its Housing Customer Services Section, which is presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group. In 2017 the report³ highlighted an increase in service requests for both WHQS internal and external works, and also an increase in praise and thanks related to WHQS. The report also outlined how the Council had learnt lessons from the complaints to improve its housing service, including the WHQS programme. We understand that whereas previously WHQS complaints could be logged in a number of systems, there is now a single complaints inbox for the WHQS programme. Whilst this enables the Council to respond to individual complaints, the Council does not currently have a central complaints log for WHQS.

³ [Complaints and Representations – Caerphilly Homes](#)

Good practice example

Tŷ Bedwellty is a Sheltered Housing Scheme in Caerphilly County Borough. It is a block of individual flats with a shared communal area. The residents are capable of independent living but have the back up of a 'warden' on site to help with any difficulties. The Council told us that for this scheme it identified additional resources as the residents of the scheme were considered to be vulnerable, and it needed to be completed quickly.

Introduction

The scheme was updated in accordance with the Welsh Quality Housing Standard (WHQS). The residents we spoke with were extremely impressed with the process and the way in which the works were carried out. We found that this was not consistent across the experience of residents in the other three sheltered housing schemes we spoke to. The apparent reasons for this are set out below.

Communication

All the residents said the Council's communication with them about the improvement works was excellent. The Council held a meeting with the residents before the improvement works started. At that meeting the Council explained what improvement works it would carry out, what it would mean for residents, as well as a timeline of the works. The Council told residents what the work was going to be, and the choices that they could have.

How the work was carried out

There seem to be two reasons for such high satisfaction levels at Tŷ Bedwellty. Firstly, there seemed to be a systematic approach to the work. Two flats were being upgraded at a time and all the required materials were delivered to the site in one container. The second reason seems to be that residents who were having the work carried out were moved temporarily into the two empty flats in the scheme whilst the work to their flats was completed. The residents were therefore able to avoid the mess and dust from the works.

Each of the vacated flats could be worked on quickly and without the worry of the resident being there. We were told that each flat took around two weeks to complete. It was also advantageous there was one team of workers who were available to complete the work.

We were also told that the Tenant Liaison Officers helped the residents pack their belongings, and the Warden was the main point of contact between the scheme and the WHQS team.

Additional survey questions

- 73 We asked the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed additional questions in relation to their home to provide further insight for the Council.

Exhibit 8: summary of tenants' and leaseholders' views about other aspects of their homes



HEATING

34% of residents find it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter.



DAMP

34% of residents have damp in some parts of their homes



SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL HOUSING SERVICE

78% of residents are satisfied with the Council's housing service



SATISFACTION WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD

76% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

Heating

- 74 We asked all tenants and leaseholders we surveyed if they find it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter. Thirty-four per cent told us that they find it difficult and 66% do not find it difficult to heat their home to a comfortable level in winter. Responses differed according to the compliance status of homes with 36% of tenants and leaseholders in non-compliant properties reporting it difficult to heat their home to a comfortable level compared to 23% of those tenants and leaseholders in acceptable fail properties and 16% of tenants and leaseholders in WHQS compliant properties.
- 75 We asked the 175 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who said they have difficulty in heating their home to a comfortable level why. Twenty-eight per cent said it was due to a lack of draught proofing, for 19% it was a lack of insulation,

for 16% the cause was an old or poor heating system, and for 15% the reason was the affordability of fuel.

- 76 Forty-two per cent of those 65 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents who said they have difficulty in heating their home to a comfortable level identified draught proofing as the cause but just 10% of the 51 Eastern Valley respondents identified this as the cause. Twenty-four per cent of the 51 Eastern Valley respondents attributed old/poor heating systems as a cause compared to just 12% of the 65 respondents in the Upper Rhymney Valley
- 77 Thirty-eight per cent of those who told us that they find it difficult to heat their home to a comfortable level gave another reason. Almost all of these people identified issues relating to their windows as the cause for their difficulty in heating their homes. A number stated that their windows are not well fitted leading to drafts. Some said that their windows are currently non-double glazed. A small number of people noted that their radiators are insufficient to heat their rooms and the location of homes was a contributory factor for a very small number of people.

Damp

- 78 We asked tenants and leaseholders we surveyed if there is any damp in their home. Thirty-two per cent told us that they have damp in their home and this tends to be only slightly more evident with non-compliant properties (34%). We found no difference between the three geographical areas in tenants' and leaseholders' responses to this question.
- 79 Most of the 162 respondents who reported that they have damp in their home generally said they saw evidence of damp in their house from visible mould (62%) and to a lesser extent visible wet patches (26%) and condensation on windows (14%).
- 80 Sixty-seven per cent of the 63 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents who reported damp identified visible mould compared to 56% of the 54 Eastern Valley and 62% of the 45 Lower Rhymney Valley respondents.
- 81 Seventy-five per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who reported that they have damp said that they had reported this to their landlord. Reporting varied across the housing areas with 31% of the Lower Rhymney Valley respondents not reporting the damp to their landlord compared to 27% of Upper Rhymney Valley and 19% of Eastern Valley respondents. Cracks in the walls and missing roof tiles were common causes of damp identified by respondents but a small number of respondents attributed their damp to the cavity insulation.

Satisfaction with the Housing Service

- 82 Overall, 78% of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed were satisfied with the Council's housing service, with 10% dissatisfied and 11% not sure either way.

- 83 Satisfaction varies across the three housing areas with 40% of the 177 Eastern Valleys tenants and leaseholders, 32% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley, and 24% of the 146 Lower Rhymney Valley tenants and leaseholders being satisfied.
- 84 Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with the housing service also varied across the age groups with those aged below 54 less satisfied and those aged 45 to 54 the least positive.
- 85 Seventy-seven per cent of those aged 25 to 34 were satisfied, this decreased to 72% for those aged 35 to 44 and 66% for those aged 45 to 54. Higher satisfaction levels were recorded by those aged 55 or above: 78% of those aged 55 to 65 were satisfied, 84% of those aged 65 to 74 and 86% of those aged over 75 satisfied.

Satisfaction with the neighbourhood

- 86 Eighty-six per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live, with 98% of sheltered housing tenants expressing satisfaction. Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction increased with age with the lowest levels of satisfaction being those aged less than 34 and the highest levels being for those aged over 55. We found no difference in the responses of tenants and leaseholders living in the three geographical housing areas to this question.

Appendix 1

Overview of survey participants

The survey sample of 514 people consisted of 451 who live in non-compliant homes (88%), 26 who live in fully compliant homes (5%) and 37 who live in homes with acceptable fails (7%).

Seventy-three per cent of the tenants and leaseholders told us that the Council has undertaken improvement works to their home to meet the WHQS in the past five years. Twenty-six per cent said that they had had not any improvements and one per cent did not know. Seventy-one per cent of those tenants and leaseholders living in non-compliant households and 78% of those living in acceptable fails reported that the Council has done some improvement works to their homes to meet WHQS.

Two hundred and twenty-five (62%) of those tenants and leaseholders who had had works completed in the past five years have received only internal works, 30% had received both internal and external works with 12% only receiving external works and 2% only communal areas. These data reflect the Council's approach of delivering internal/external works concurrently in different communities. Thirty-nine per cent of those tenants and leaseholders who had had works in the Eastern Valleys had received both internal and external works with this figure being 24% in the Upper Rhymney Valley and 29% in the Lower Rhymney Valley.

Exhibit 9: overview of the tenancy type, age and length of tenancy for people who completed the survey

Tenancy type

	Number	Percentage
Tenant	489	95%
Leaseholder	25	5%
Total	514	100%

Age of respondents

	Number	Percentage
16-34	60	11%
35-44	47	9%
45-54	74	14%
55-64	93	18%
65-74	110	21%
75+	130	25%
Total	514	100%

Length of tenancy

	Number	Percentage
Less than one year	31	6%
One to two years	34	7%
Two to three years	38	7%
Three to five years	55	11%
More than five years	356	69%
Can't remember	0	0%
Total	514	100%

Appendix 2

Survey questions

Exhibit 10: Caerphilly County Borough Council: Welsh Housing Quality Standard Survey:

Q1 Are you a council tenant or leaseholder?
Read out - Tick one box only

- Council tenant 1
- Leaseholder 2
- Tenant of a leaseholder 3

Q2 All respondents
How long have you lived in your home? (or if a leaseholder: How long have you been a leaseholder?)
Read out - Tick one box only

- Less than 1 year 1
- 1 to 2 years 2
- 2 to 3 years 3
- 3 to 5 years 4
- More than 5 years 5
- Can't remember 6

Views on council housing services and improvements

Q3a Council tenants & Leaseholders (Q1 = Codes 1 & 2 only)
Has the council told you about the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)? *Read out if no/ don't know: The Welsh Housing Quality Standard requires all social landlords to improve their housing stock to an acceptable level by December 2020.*

- Yes 1
- No 2
- Don't know/ can't remember 3

Q3b If yes, how did the Council tell you?
Tick all that apply

- Newsletter 1
- Letter 2
- Website 3
- In person 4
- Other 5

Other (please specify) _____

Q4 Leaseholders only (Q1 = Code 2)
Has the council informed you about your maintenance responsibilities as a leaseholder?

- Yes 1
- No 2
- Don't know/ can't remember 3

Q5a All respondents

In the past five years has the council done any improvement works to your home to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard?

- Yes ¹ Go to Q5b
 No ² Skip to Q8
 Don't know/ can't remember ³ Go to Q5b

Q5b Council tenants only (Q1 = Code 1)

If yes, to what parts of your home has the council done the improvement works?
Read out - Tick all that apply

- Internal only (for example, kitchen, bathroom, central heating) ¹
 External only (for example windows or roofs) ²
 Communal areas (for example staircases, stairwells) ³
 Both internal and external ⁴

Q5c Leaseholders & tenants of leaseholders only (Q1 = Codes 2 & 3)

If yes, to what parts of your home has the council done the improvement works?
Read out - Tick all that apply

- External only (for example windows or roofs) ¹
 Communal areas (for example staircases, stairwells) ²
 Structure of the building ³

Q6 Council tenants & Leaseholders (Q1 = Codes 1 & 2 only): Those who recall improvement works (Q5b = Code 1)

Did the council: *Read out - Tick one box on each row*

	Yes	No	Don't know/ can't remember
Explain to you why the improvement works were needed to achieve WHQS?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Complete the improvement works when you were told they would be?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include you in the design or specification of any improvement works for example, to your kitchen or bathroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q7a *Those who recall improvement works (Q5a = Code 1)*
Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the improvement works that the council has carried out to your home?
Read out - Tick one box only

Very satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Dissatisfied.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Very dissatisfied.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

Q7b *All respondents*
Why do you say that?

Q8 *All respondents*
Do you know if the Council is going to make any improvements to your home in the next 2 years such as a new kitchen, bathroom, roof, windows, central heating, electrics, external doors, mains powered smoke detectors, gardens and external storage? (all respondents – although only state external works with leaseholders)

Yes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Don't know/ can't remember	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

Q9a *All respondents*
Have you refused to have improvements made to your home by the council, for example, windows, doors, roof, kitchen, bathroom, rewiring or access?

Yes - all.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Yes - some.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Don't know/ can't remember.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4

Q9b Which works did you refuse?
Tick all that apply - Unprompted

- Windows..... 1
- Doors 2
- Roof 3
- Kitchen..... 4
- Bathroom..... 5
- Rewiring or access 6
- Don't know/ can't remember..... 7

Q9c Why did you refuse?
Tick all that apply - Unprompted

- Health issues (do not specify) 1
- Concerns about the disruption 2
- Proposed plan for the work to be done was not convenient 3
- Uncertain about the nature of the work 4
- Happy with the existing state of my home 5
- Prefer not to say 6
- Other reasons..... 7

Other reasons (please specify) _____

Views on general housing services and the condition of your home/ neighbourhood

Q10a All respondents
Do you find it difficult to heat your home to a comfortable level in the winter?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

Q10b If yes, why is that?

Tick all that apply - Unprompted

- Affordability of fuel 1
- Lack of adequate insulation 2
- Lack of lagged pipes/ tank..... 3
- Draught proofing 4
- Old/ inefficient boiler 5
- Old/ poor heating system..... 6
- Size of property 7
- Other 8

Other reasons (please specify) _____

Q11a All respondents

Is there any damp in any part of your home?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

Q11b If yes, how do you see the damp in your house?

Tick all that apply - Unprompted

- Visible wet patches..... 1
- Water leak 2
- Condensation on windows for example during cooking or on cold mornings 3
- Visible mould..... 4
- Don't know 5
- Other 6

Other reasons (please specify) _____

Q11d Have you reported the damp to your landlord?

- Yes..... 1
- No 2

Q12 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following:
Read out - Tick one box on each row

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
a) <i>Tenants only (Q1 = Code 1)</i> The overall condition of the kitchen in your home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) <i>Tenants only (Q1 = Code 1)</i> The overall condition of the bathroom in your home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The outside of your home such as external walls, doors, windows and boundary fences/ walls?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q12d *All respondents*
Why do you say that?

Q13 *Council tenants & Leaseholders (Q1 = Code 1 & 2 only)*
Can you easily and quickly contact the housing service at times that are convenient for you?

Yes..... 1

No 2

Don't know/ haven't tried 3

Q14 All respondents

Thinking about your home and neighbourhood, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you:
Read out - Tick one box on each row

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
a) That your council listens to your views and acts upon them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) With your neighbourhood as a place to live?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q14c All respondents

Why do you say that?

Q15 All respondents

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the housing service you receive from the Council?

Very satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Neither nor	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Dissatisfied.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Very dissatisfied.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

Q16 All respondents

Is there anything else you would like to say about Council housing services that you have not already mentioned?

Q17 All respondents

Which of the following of age groups do you fall in?

Read out - Tick one box only

16-24.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
25-34.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
35-44.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
45-54.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
55-64.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
65-74.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
75+.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	7

Appendix 3

Infographic summarising survey results

Exhibit 11: infographic summarising survey results



Around a third of residents have problems heating their homes or experience damp



HEATING

34% of residents find it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter.



DAMP

34% of residents have damp in some parts of their homes

Residents do not always get the information that they need about WHQS



INFORMATION

62% of residents told us that the Council has told them about WHQS



EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR THE WORKS

55% of residents who have had works told us that the Council explained why the improvement works were needed



NEXT TWO YEARS

51% of residents know if the Council will be making any improvements to their home in the next 2 years



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

The telephone interviews for **Caerphilly County Borough Council** ran from **23rd April** until **1st May** 2018.

The Wales Audit Office requested from the Council the full list of its residents. The Wales Audit Office then spoke to a sample of around **5%** of all of the Council's tenants and leaseholders. The sample of **514** respondents was divided between tenants and leaseholders based on the WHQS compliance status of the **10,477** homes that the Council provided. Homes can be fully compliant, non-compliant or acceptable fails. The sample also reflects the WHQS status of homes across the area based on the data provided by the Council. **489** tenants and **25** 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



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

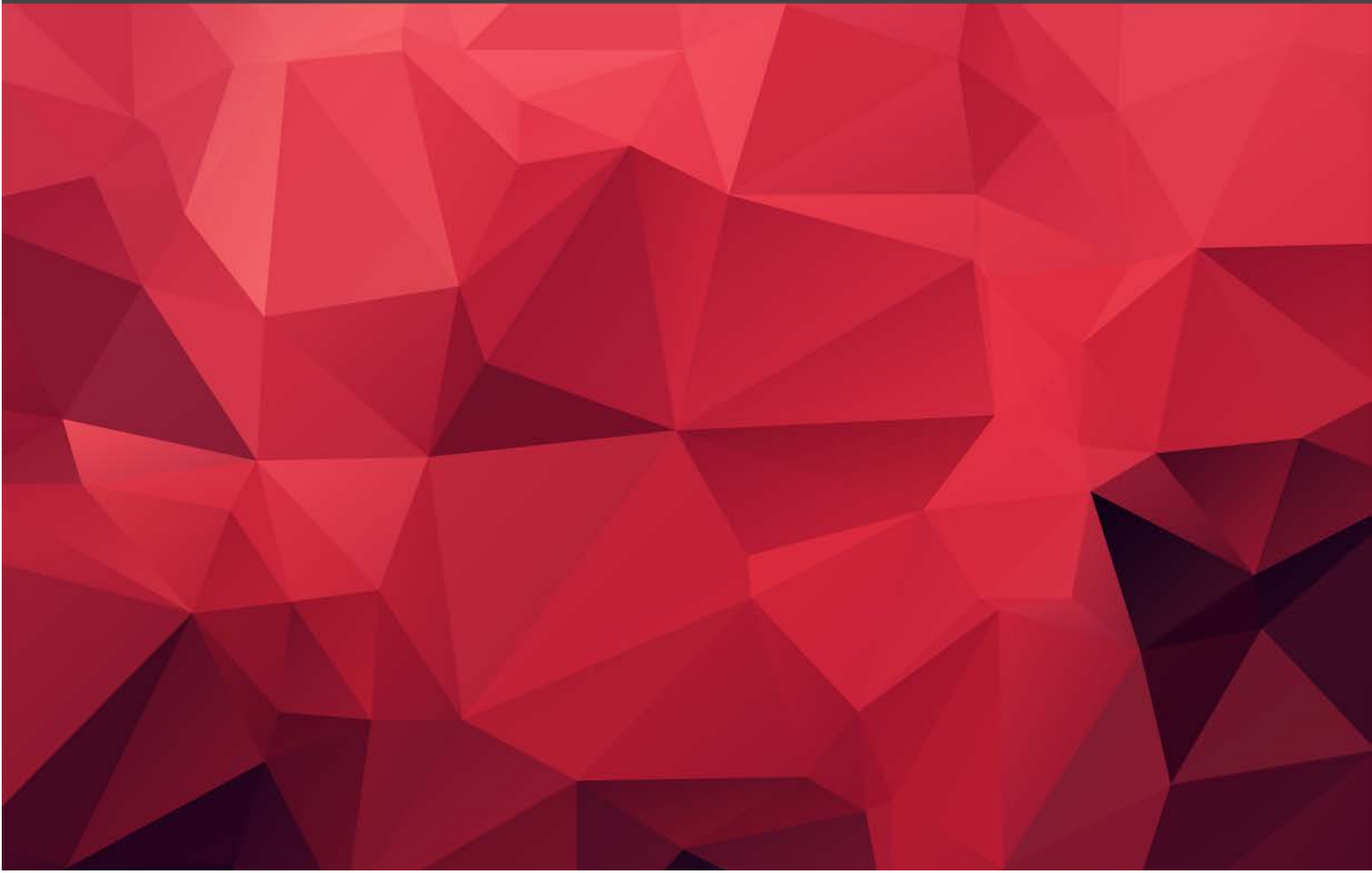
Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Welsh Housing Quality Standard follow-up report – **Caerphilly County Borough Council**

Audit year: 2018-19

Date issued: January 2019

Document reference: 994A2018-19



This document has been prepared as part of work performed in accordance with statutory functions.

In the event of receiving a request for information to which this document may be relevant, attention is drawn to the Code of Practice issued under section 45 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The section 45 code sets out the practice in the handling of requests that is expected of public authorities, including consultation with relevant third parties. In relation to this document, the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office are relevant third parties. Any enquiries regarding disclosure or re-use of this document should be sent to the Wales Audit Office at

infoofficer@audit.wales.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Gareth Jones, Gwilym Bury and Allison Rees programme managed by Non Jenkins under the direction of Huw Rees.

Contents

The Council has responded positively to our June 2017 Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) report and statutory recommendations by making significant improvements and as a result we now conclude that it is likely to meet the WHQS by December 2020.

Summary report 4

Proposals for improvement 7

Detailed report 8

The Council has responded positively to our June 2017 Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) report and statutory recommendations by making significant improvements and as a result we now conclude that it is likely to meet the WHQS by December 2020 8

The Council has made significant progress in identifying the investment and resources it needs to complete its WHQS programme by the end of 2020 9

The Council has taken steps to determine the value for money of its procurement arrangements 10

There have been improvements to its WHQS performance reports, however, there is still inconsistent and inaccurate reporting of performance 11

The Council now has measurable performance targets to effectively monitor the remainder of its WHQS programme 13

The Council has strengthened its arrangements to meet its statutory landlord responsibilities 13

The Council has invested additional resources to enhance its WHQS programme management but still lacks a current local housing strategy and does not always produce comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments for key housing policy documents 14

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Caerphilly County Borough Council WHQS review action plan – updated October 2018 16

Summary report

Summary

Why the Welsh Housing Quality Standard is important

- 1 In 2001, the Welsh Government set out their long-term vision for housing in Wales entitled Better Homes for People in Wales. The Welsh Government then introduced the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) in 2002, with revised guidance issued in 2008 to implement this vision. The Welsh Government developed the WHQS to provide a common target standard for all housing in Wales and is primarily used to assess the social housing provided by councils (consistent with the term used in the rest of the report) and housing associations (social landlords). The Welsh Government expected all social landlords in Wales to adopt the standard and devise realistic programmes for bringing all their homes up to it as soon as possible, but by the end of 2020 at the latest, and to maintain standards into the future.
- 2 As at March 2018, Caerphilly County Borough Council (the Council) owned 10,801 properties. In August 2018, the Council reported that 3,501 properties met the standard to 'full compliance' having had certain improvement works undertaken, with a further 794 properties meeting the standard as 'acceptable fails' as defined by the Welsh Government in its guidance on compliance. 6,506 were not fully compliant as at 31 March 2018¹.

What we looked at

- 3 Between May and October 2018, we carried out a review of the Council's progress in addressing the three statutory recommendations in our Welsh Housing Quality Standard report issued to the Council in June 2017.
- 4 Our 2017 statutory recommendations were:

¹ Welsh Government Statistical Release. Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), as at 31 March 2018. 'This annual release presents information from the annual data collection measuring the progress made by social landlords in achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) for their stock. The release covers compliance with the standard as at 31 March 2018 and information on compliance with the WHQS by individual component type. Full compliance refers to dwellings where the WHQS standard is achieved for all individual elements, but there can be situations where achieving the standard for an individual element is not possible. Such situations may include the cost or timing of the work, residents choosing not to have the work done or where there are physical constraints to the work. In these instances, the social landlords may record one or more elements as acceptable fails. Where a dwelling contains one or more acceptable fails, but all other elements are compliant, the dwelling is deemed to be compliant subject to acceptable fails.'

Exhibit 1: recommendations on action to achieve the WHQS by 2020

Statutory Recommendations	
The Council should take urgent action to achieve WHQS by 2020. It should:	
R1	<p>By September 2017, develop a comprehensive, overarching, financial and operational programme setting out how the Council will achieve WHQS by 2020. This programme should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• establish the full scope of investment needed in the Council's housing stock based on accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date stock condition information;• set out how the Council, by March 2018, will:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– review its procurement arrangements to ensure value for money;– provide clear and transparent information to members and tenants about the current position of the programme and a commitment to stakeholders with accurate projected completion dates; and– secure the resources needed to deliver the programme by 2020.• contain clear and measurable milestones and relevant performance measures for delivering the programme up to 2020; and• set out the programme management, governance and accountability responsibilities and arrangements so that urgent remedial action can be taken if further slippage occurs and those tasked with delivering the programme can be held to account at appropriate decision-making levels.
R2	<p>Assure itself that it is meeting its statutory landlord responsibilities by ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• all properties have a valid gas safety certificate in place, or are having the Council's non-compliance arrangements applied to them fully; and• arrangements for undertaking asbestos surveys and recording the results of these surveys are robust.
R3	<p>Ensure it has sufficient project management capacity to deliver the Council's WHQS programme effectively by 2020.</p>

How we approached the review

- 5 We undertook the follow up review work in two phases. During the first stage we reviewed the Council's WHQS progress reports to Cabinet, Policy and Resources scrutiny committee and Caerphilly Homes task group since 1 November 2017. In this first stage of the review we established the Council's own assessment of progress. The output from Phase One was fed back to senior Council officers and the relevant Cabinet Member in July 2018. The Phase One review informed the planning and delivery of Phase Two.
- 6 During the second phase, we interviewed officers, contractor representatives and members and visited some properties undergoing WHQS works. We sought to

verify the Council's progress on delivering the WHQS programme and the effect of that progress on the Council's achievement of the WHQS by the end of 2020.

- 7 As part of a separate project, we surveyed a sample of 500 tenants about their experiences of the Council's WHQS programme during April and May 2018. A report on this Service User Perspective project will be issued separately.

Overall findings

- 8 Overall, we found that: **The Council has responded positively to our June 2017 Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) report and statutory recommendations by making significant improvements and as a result we now conclude that it is likely to meet the WHQS by December 2020.** We came to this conclusion because:

- the Council has made significant progress in identifying the investment and resources it needs to complete its WHQS programme by the end of 2020;
- the Council has taken steps to determine the value for money of its procurement arrangements;
- there have been improvements to its WHQS performance reports, however there is still inconsistent and inaccurate reporting of performance;
- the Council now has measurable performance targets to effectively monitor the remainder of its WHQS programme;
- the Council has strengthened its arrangements to meet its statutory landlord responsibilities; and
- the Council has invested additional resources to enhance its WHQS programme management but still lacks a current Local Housing strategy and does not always produce comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments for key housing policy documents.

Proposals for improvement

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

Exhibit 2: proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P1	The Council should ensure that members and tenants receive accurate WHQS performance information regularly about its progress towards achieving its 2020 programme deadline.
P2	The Council should agree a Local Housing Strategy to set out its long-term vision for the future priorities for homes in Caerphilly.
P3	The Council should ensure that Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken consistently.

Detailed report

The Council has responded positively to our June 2017 Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) report and statutory recommendations by making significant improvements and as a result we now conclude that it is likely to meet the WHQS by December 2020

- 9 The Council has responded positively to our June 2017 WHQS report which concluded 'the majority of tenants' homes remain below the Welsh Housing Quality Standard due to long-standing inefficient and ineffective programme management and the Council is unlikely to achieve the Standard by 2020'.
- 10 **Appendix 1** contains the Council's action plan to address the three statutory recommendations made in our 2017 WHQS report. Following our presentation on the 2017 WHQS report to Cabinet on 1 November 2017, the Council set up a Cross Party working group of members of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to consider the Council's progress in addressing our statutory recommendations. This Cross Party working group reported their satisfaction that progress was being made to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 27 February 2018.
- 11 The Council is making a number of positive changes to the planning, management, delivery and monitoring of the WHQS programme. In particular, we note that the Council:
 - a. is undertaking a full stock condition survey of all Council owned properties;
 - b. is improving WHQS project management and capacity;
 - c. has a comprehensive financial and operational programme outlining how it will achieve WHQS by the end of 2020;
 - d. has a Caerphilly Homes Asset Management Strategy which is focused on maintaining WHQS after 2020;
 - e. has a comprehensive 30-year Housing Investment Business Plan;
 - f. has made significant improvements in its arrangements to meet its statutory landlord responsibilities;
 - g. has a more comprehensive asbestos management policy;
 - h. has sought to improve its reporting of performance of its WHQS programme; and
 - i. has increased the number of WHQS fully compliant properties from 5.7% in 2016-17 to 39.76% in 2017-18.

- 12 During this review, we also note that there are other aspects of the WHQS programme and wider Council housing programme that require improvement. In particular:
- a. there remains inconsistent and inaccurate reporting of WHQS performance to members and the public despite the Council introducing a performance data validation process and WHQS strategic scorecard;
 - b. the continued lack of a Local Housing Strategy; and
 - c. a limited Equalities Impact Assessment for the Caerphilly Homes Asset Management Strategy.
- 13 The remainder of this report provides the context and detail of how the Council is addressing our statutory recommendations.

The Council has made significant progress in identifying the investment and resources it needs to complete its WHQS programme by the end of 2020

- 14 The Council has made substantial progress in developing a comprehensive financial and operational programme outlining how the Council will achieve WHQS by the end of 2020.
- 15 Since our 2017 review, the Council has embarked on surveying all Council properties that do not meet the WHQS standard. The Council now has a more accurate understanding of the individual requirements of each Council property which is improving the planning and delivery of its WHQS work. The Council intends to complete these surveys by December 2018.
- 16 Since our 2017 review the Council has established average costs of each internal and external elements required to achieve WHQS. The Council can now more accurately forecast future programme expenditure to inform its business plan.
- 17 As a result of the surveying non-WHQS compliant properties, the Council is now predicting an increase in the overall projected costs to deliver WHQS by the end of 2020 from £220 million to £250 million. The Council will need Housing Revenue Account (HRA) contributions and an element of 'borrowing' to fund the difference, however, the amount needed is within the Council's agreed borrowing threshold set up at the start of the WHQS programme.
- 18 The Council's IT asset management system – called Keystone – records all the data related to each individual social housing property and includes the costs associated when updating each property to WHQS. Keystone is critical to monitoring compliance with each of the components used to assess progress in achieving WHQS.
- 19 The Council's HRA Business Plan, Caerphilly Homes Asset Management Strategy and other associated detailed documents we reviewed demonstrate that the Council has a detailed costed plan to achieve WHQS by 2020. The Council's in-

house workforce, or Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) as it is also known, as well as private contractors are delivering the WHQS programme.

- 20 Following the introduction of the Council's Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) in 2017, the Council's ability to engage local specialist contractors in a timely manner to complete WHQS works on properties has improved. At the time of this review, about 80 contractors were available through the DPS.
- 21 At the time of our fieldwork for our previous review in March and April 2017, the Council did not have a contractor in place to undertake the external works to tenants' homes in the Lower Rhymney Valley. Through the DPS and the Council's DLO, all areas of the county now have WHQS work planned.
- 22 The Council spent £42 million on WHQS programme delivery in 2017-18. This represents the highest annual amount since WHQS programme delivery started and reflects the significant increase in fully compliant homes in 2017-18.

The Council has taken steps to determine the value for money of its procurement arrangements

- 23 Since June 2017, the Council commissioned an independent review of its single source supplier² arrangements for its WHQS programme and undertook an exercise to compare costs of its DLO workforce to those of external contractors.
- 24 The independent review of the single source supplier looked at 72 products, purchased by the Council for its WHQS programme that have the highest annual expenditure. The review concluded that the arrangement provides value for money for the Council for the products used, although some rates could be improved. The review gave two recommendations:
 - ensure that the Council pays the most competitive prices for plasterboard; and
 - ensure a consistent classification of products that would assist any future pricing reviews.
- 25 Cabinet received a report in November 2017 which included the findings of the Council's comparison of the costs undertaken by private contractors and the Council's DLO team. The Council reported that its DLO are 20% more expensive than the private contractors due to a number of factors including superannuation, living wage, leave, sickness, overheads linked to support service costs. In its report, the Council set out factors that it had used to consider the value for money that it was achieving through its arrangements. These factors included greater tenant satisfaction reported from those receiving works from the DLO, comparative performance of the in-house and external contractors, reduced number of complaints.

² In 2012, the Council entered into a single source supply arrangement for all materials in relation to Council-house maintenance and the WHQS programme.

There have been improvements to its WHQS performance reports, however there is still inconsistent and inaccurate reporting of performance

- 26 The Council has taken action to ensure that key WHQS performance information and key dates are on Keystone in a more timely manner.
- 27 In early 2018, the Council reviewed the process of performance reporting and the inputting of performance data onto Keystone. This review highlighted delays and occasional incorrect recording of performance. As a result, the Council introduced revised weekly responsibilities and timescales to record WHQS performance into Keystone. All WHQS project managers interviewed by us for this review are aware of the revised responsibilities and timescales for the recording of performance.
- 28 The accuracy of the Council's performance recording and reporting is now subject to a more rigorous validation process. Following our Phase One feedback to the Council, the Chief Housing Officer requested the Council's Internal Audit service to review the WHQS data validation processes. This took place during August to October 2018.
- 29 The report concludes that:

'The control procedures which were in place were:

In need of improvement – based on the results of the audit work undertaken it is considered that the control framework that was in place was in need of improvement. In May 2018 however, new procedures were introduced which are well documented and set out the processes for relevant staff to follow. These address the control issues going forward, but procedures now need to be developed to address historical issues identified by the audit. In addition, staff resources, in the form of a dedicated team of Officers supported by the Housing Technical Manager and Housing Group Accountant, have been made available to evolve and introduce new validation processes to address the main subject of this audit.

Compliance with the controls are considered to be:

In need of improvement – based on the results of the audit work undertaken it is considered that the control framework that was in place was in need of improvement. In May 2018 however, new procedures were introduced which are well documented and set out the processes for relevant staff to follow. These address the control issues going forward, but procedures now need to be developed to address historical issues identified by the audit. In addition, staff resources, in the form of a dedicated team of Officers supported by the Housing Technical Manager and Housing Group Accountant, have been made available to evolve and introduce new validation processes to address the main subject of this audit.

Due to the levels of Conclusions above the Chief Housing Officer will be invited to the next audit committee.'

- 30 The Council's 2018 annual performance submission to the Welsh Government states that 39.76% of its properties are fully compliant with WHQS as of 31 March 2018. However, this is not the figure it has used in any of its end of year performance reports to members since its annual performance submission to the Welsh Government. This provides members with an inaccurate picture of the Council's performance.
- 31 The Council reported its 2017-18 WHQS performance in three end of year performance reports during September and October 2018:
- a. Well-being Objective 5;
 - b. Caerphilly Homes end of year performance report; and
 - c. the Council's Annual Performance Report.
- 32 We found discrepancies in different aspects of the 2017-18 WHQS performance in these reports and there was no clear rationale as to why the Council reported different performance information in the different reports. In particular, we note that the overall WHQS compliance rate in these reports was lower than the performance reported to the Welsh Government in August 2018. Therefore, WHQS performance for 2017-18 was under reported to members and the public after it made the submission to Welsh Government.
- 33 To improve WHQS performance reporting, a WHQS strategic scorecard accompanies performance reports to elected members. The scorecard shows:
- a. levels of compliance for internal and external works;
 - b. weekly targets and actual key performance for the completion of internal and external works. A Red, Amber, Green (RAG) system highlights whether weekly targets are achieved or not;
 - c. tenant satisfaction levels;
 - d. targets for each quarter up to March 2020;
 - e. projected and actual programme expenditure until March 2020; and
 - f. the number of WHQS fully compliant properties.
- 34 We found that the programme targets are not clear and the number of compliant properties in the end of year 2017-18 scorecard is different to the number reported to the Welsh Government. Additionally, the scorecard has inaccurately recorded the previous year's performance.
- 35 The WHQS strategic scorecard shows future quarterly targets for internal and external works and overall compliance. However, the design of the scorecard means it is difficult to read the actual targets and would benefit from presenting this information more clearly.
- 36 In our previous report issued in June 2017, we noted that the Council's WHQS performance reports focused more on completion of internal and external works and not full compliance. The Council now clearly reports the number of properties

that are fully compliant, but due to inconsistent and inaccurate performance information reported to members, officers, tenants and leaseholders, effective challenge and oversight of WHQS progress is hampered.

The Council now has measurable performance targets to effectively monitor the remainder of its WHQS programme

- 37 In 2015, the Council commenced WHQS work on its properties. The annual rate of properties fully compliant for 2015-16 and 2016-17 was low at 2.5% and 5.7% respectively. The number of fully compliant properties increased significantly to 39.76% for 2017-18. As at the end of September 2018, the Council reported to the Audit Committee on 16 October that its overall compliance rate was 51%.
- 38 The Council has weekly completion targets for both internal and external works. The Council's WHQS team monitor the weekly delivery of both internal and external works and this monitoring is showing that internal works are delivering to target but the external works are slightly behind schedule.
- 39 All officers and members we interviewed are clear that March 2020 is its deadline to fully deliver its WHQS programme although the Welsh Government's deadline is December 2020. However, the WHQS strategic scorecard (as at 28 September 2018) gives the projected deadline for full internal works compliance as 1 May 2020 and 20 May 2020 for full external works compliance. Setting a deadline that is earlier than the Welsh Government deadline is prudent and allows for potential slippage to complete external WHQS works due to any severe weather in the winters of 2018 and 2019.

The Council has strengthened its arrangements to meet its statutory landlord responsibilities

- 40 At the time of our fieldwork for our previous review in March and April 2017, there were over 400 council properties which did not have a valid CP12 gas safety certificate. As at 28 April 2017, just over 98% of the council's properties had a valid CP12 gas safety certificate meaning that 221 properties did not.
- 41 During our fieldwork for this review, we found that the Council has made significant improvements in its arrangements to meet its statutory landlord responsibilities. The Council has made revisions to its gas safety procedures which are now fully compliant with UK Health and Safety Executive guidance for landlords. Where tenants do not provide access to their homes to allow the Council to undertake gas servicing, there is staged approach for the Council to gain access.
- 42 If the Council cannot gain access through these steps, the Council's policy states that the Council can take legal proceedings to gain access. Since the introduction of the new policy on commencing legal proceedings the Council has obtained access to 50 properties where it has been determined that there has been a

breach of their tenancy agreement, by the issuing of formal Notices of Seeking Possession (NOSP).

- 43 In the Council's regulatory proposal for improvement progress report for its Audit committee on 24 July 2018, it reported that 99.3% of its properties now have the gas servicing certificate. Those properties where a certificate had expired and access was not agreed were subject to ongoing legal proceedings.
- 44 The Council's asbestos procedures comply with Health and Safety Executive guidance and no property has WHQS or other repairs work undertaken without a full survey being available prior to the commencement of work. To address our statutory recommendation, the Council appointed an asbestos technical officer to coordinate the completion of all asbestos surveys and ensure the recording of asbestos surveys onto Keystone. The officer ensures that the findings of the surveys are available to operational staff. The Council now has clear arrangements and a dedicated member of staff and anticipates that all properties will have asbestos information recorded on Keystone by January 2019.

The Council has invested additional resources to enhance its WHQS programme management but still lacks a current Local Housing strategy and does not always produce comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments for key Housing policy documents

- 45 The Council is improving project management capacity in delivering and managing the WHQS programme. A new role of housing technical manager has been created and appointed to increase project manager capacity. This officer oversees the WHQS programme, the housing repairs team as well as the work of the surveyors and Gas Servicing team.
- 46 The Council has also appointed an additional foreman, assistant project manager and surveyor to increase its capacity to manage and deliver its WHQS.
- 47 The Council is alert to the prospect that properties currently fully compliant as an 'acceptable fail' due to residents' choice³, may become available for WHQS internal and or external works in the future. The Housing Repairs team is creating a new sub-team to complete works in those homes if they become available and the DLO or external contractor are not working in the area where the property has become available for works.

³ Source: Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), as at 31 March 2018. Welsh Government press release dated 4 October 2018.

There can be situations where achieving the standard for an individual element is not possible. Such situations may include the cost or timing of the work, residents choosing not to have the work done or where there are physical constraints to the work. In these instances, the landlords may record one or more element as acceptable fails.

- 48 Although the Council's procedures for encouraging residents to allow access to their homes for WHQS work are in line with the Welsh Government guidance the Council does not have a robust system in place to periodically check if residents change their minds. For example, the Council could after 2019 contact residents at least once a year to offer previously refused WHQS works.
- 49 Our previous 2017 report highlighted that the Council did not have an up-to-date local housing strategy. This remains the case.
- 50 During our fieldwork for this review, both officers and members expressed their own views as to how housing should evolve and what the Council's future responsibilities are in providing social housing. Therefore, by not having a strategy there is the potential to create a fragmented and inconsistent vision for the service. The absence of a Local Housing Strategy also may prevent the Council from fully demonstrating how it is addressing the five ways of working to meet the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 51 The Council is considering and planning for the continuation of Caerphilly Homes maintenance and investment beyond 2020. In September and October 2018, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, Policy and Resources scrutiny committee and Cabinet considered a draft Caerphilly Homes asset management strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to understand and commit to maintaining the quality of all Council housing properties post-2020.
- 52 The Housing Asset Management Strategy did not include a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment. The Council did not consider it necessary for a full Equality Impact Assessment, but during our review the explanation as to why was not clear. At the time of our fieldwork, there has been few Equality Impact Assessments in relation to Housing service change proposals were available to the public or members to consider. The Council will need to assure itself that the absence of an Equality Impact Assessment for key strategic decisions, does not put it at risk of not complying with the 2010 Equality Act. The Council should also assure itself that it fully demonstrates how it is addressing the five ways of working which Councils are required to adopt to meet the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG Act).

Appendix 1

This is the Council's action plan to address the Wales Audit Office's three statutory recommendations made in our 2017 WHQS report:

WALES AUDIT OFFICE WHQS REVIEW – ACTION PLAN – AUGUST 2017

Recommendations	Actions	Owner	Progress / Due Date
Recommendation 1 Develop a comprehensive, overarching, financial and operational programme setting out how the Council will achieve WHQS by 2020.	1. Ensure that the Keystone Asset Database provides up to date survey information.	MRL	Sept 2017/ Completed
	2. Review projected programme costs by replacing Savill's estimates with more accurate actual costs based on recently completed contract information.	LA	Sept 2017/ Completed
	3. Amend existing programme in order to reflect communities where work has been completed, is currently ongoing or is planned. Programme to also incorporate a breakdown of the communities to clarify which streets are included.	MRL	Sept 2017/ Completed
	4. Ensure adequate resources to enable surveys to be completed at the earliest opportunity in order to better inform future investment requirements and budget forecasting.	MRL	Ongoing

Recommendations	Actions	Owner	Progress / Due Date
<p>Recommendation 1a</p> <p>Review procurement arrangements to ensure value for money.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure adequate procurement arrangements are in place to cover all aspects of the programme. 2. Undertake an independent benchmarking exercise in relation to the single source supply arrangement to assess value for money. 3. Undertake an exercise to compare costs of the in-house workforce to those of external contractors, whilst also considering quality and performance to determine value for money. 4. Introduce a flexible Dynamic Purchasing System for the external works in the lower Rhymney valley, whilst also providing options to deliver contracts for internal and external works throughout the borough. 5. Contracts for internal works are in place until 2020 and were procured in open competition. External work packages are tendered individually from existing frameworks and more recently the D.P.S. Tenders are evaluated on receipt and if deemed to be uncompetitive, the work is re-tendered in an attempt to improve value for money. 	<p>MRL</p> <p>KRW</p> <p>MRL</p> <p>MRL</p> <p>MRL</p>	<p>April 2017/ Completed</p> <p>March 2018/ Completed</p> <p>March 2018/ Completed</p> <p>April 2017/ Completed</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

Recommendations	Actions	Owner	Progress / Due Date
<p>Recommendation 1b</p> <p>Provide clear and transparent information to members and tenants about the current position of the programme and a commitment to stakeholders with accurate projected completion dates.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review existing programme information being provided to members and tenants and amend this to ensure it is accurate, easily understood and timely. 2. Review the way performance information is presented to all stakeholders to ensure that this provides a good overview on the progress of the overall programme is easily understood and timely. <p>Performance information is regularly being updated and amended to improve the way data is presented.</p>	<p>MRL</p> <p>SC/MRL</p>	<p>March 2018/ Completed</p> <p>December 2017/ Ongoing</p>
<p>Recommendation 1c</p> <p>Secure the resources needed to deliver the programme by 2020.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Business case approved for the appointment of additional staff and operatives to support the in-house team in view of the additional work they will be undertaking to deliver WHQS works to our sheltered housing schemes. 2. Business case approved for the appointment of Surveyors/Clerks of Works to support the delivery of the external works programme following the implementation of the DPS. 3. Use of agency workers ongoing to supplement directly employed staff as workforce will need to reduce post 2020. 4. Introduction of DPS has provided an additional pool of contractors to deliver all aspects of the programme and to act as a contingency in case any issues are encountered with existing contracts. 	<p>MRL</p> <p>MRL</p> <p>MRL</p> <p>MRL</p>	<p>April 2017/ Completed</p> <p>April 2017/ Completed</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>April 2017/ Completed</p>

Recommendations	Actions	Owner	Progress / Due Date
	<p>5. Use of other in-house teams, both within and outside Caerphilly Homes, has been implemented to provide further assistance and resources for the delivery of the programme, eg Housing Repair Operations, Network Contracting Services, Highways Operations Group, Grounds Maintenance.</p> <p>6. Additional financial resources being sourced to assist with the delivery of the programme and to provide additional improvements to the housing stock and communities, eg ECO, Arbed, V.V.P.</p>	<p>SC/MRL</p> <p>MRL/JRW</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

Recommendations	Actions	Owner	Progress / Due Date
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>Assure itself that the Council is meeting its statutory landlord responsibilities in relation to gas servicing.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council's performance in relation to gas servicing averages 98% which results in approximately 200 properties not having a valid gas safety certificate, which has been identified as an issue with no access. A review of the no access procedure has been undertaken. 2. To improve compliance the gas servicing cycle will be changed to operate on a ten-month cycle rather than the existing 11 months. 3. To reduce issues with no access, a charge will be introduced for tenants who fail to provide access at the appointment time. 4. The timescales for issuing letters to tenants seeking access will be reduced and if required a Notice of Seeking Possession will be issued prior to the expiry of the gas certificate. 5. Failure to provide access during the NOSP period will result in arrangements being made to force entry, with the tenant being provided with advanced notice of such action. 	<p>SC</p> <p>PS</p> <p>PS</p> <p>Housing Managers</p> <p>Housing Managers/ PS</p>	<p>July 2017/ Completed</p> <p>Sept 2017/ Completed</p> <p>August 2017/ Completed</p> <p>August 2017/ Completed</p> <p>Sept 2017/ Completed</p>
<p>Recommendation 2a</p> <p>Ensure that arrangements for undertaking asbestos surveys and recording the results of these surveys, is robust.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the accuracy and timeliness of asbestos information being recorded within the Keystone Asset Database. 2. Ensure that all relevant staff have access to asbestos records to ensure these are checked prior to commissioning surveys. 	<p>PS</p> <p>PS</p>	<p>August 2017/ Completed</p> <p>December 2017/ Completed</p>

Recommendations	Actions	Owner	Progress / Due Date
	3. Submit a business case to appoint a Technical/Admin Officer to input surveys and cleanliness certificates into Keystone in a timely manner, and also act as a central point of contact.	PS	August 2017/ Completed
<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>Ensure the Council has sufficient project management capacity to deliver the WHQS programme by 2020.</p>	<p>1. Business case approved for the appointment of additional resources, allowing recruitment to take place as and when required.</p> <p>2. Project management of the sheltered housing programme being carried out by the in-house team following consultation with tenants.</p> <p>3. Project management of various aspects of the programme is being undertaken by other services to spread workload and maximise use of existing resources, eg work to leaseholder properties being managed by Private Sector Housing, WHQS work to voids and statutory maintenance being undertaken by Housing Repair Operations Team, environmental programme being progressed by utilising services of Grounds Maintenance, Highways Operations Group, Network Contracting Services.</p> <p>4. A restructure of Caerphilly Homes to be undertaken to further improve integration and better align key functions with the aim of improving capacity to support the programme.</p>	<p>MRL</p> <p>MRL</p> <p>SC/MRL</p> <p>SC</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

Shaun Couzens

Prif Swyddog Tai/Chief Housing Officer

Updated October 2018

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