



Welsh Housing Quality Standard

Introduction

The *One Wales* agreement states that good quality affordable homes are the foundation of thriving communities.

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) is a standard the Assembly Government expects all social housing to meet by 2012. However, the Deputy Minister for Housing has stated that extensions to the 2012 deadline will be considered on a case-by-case basis.ⁱ WHQS addresses not just the physical conditions of properties, but also integrates social, environmental and economic concerns. In England, the equivalent of WHQS is the Decent Homes Standard, with a separate target achievement date of 2010.

The 2004 *Living in Wales* property survey estimated that 0.8 per cent of all social housing met the WHQS. The Survey found that 2.7 per cent of Housing Association stock met the WHQS, but none of the local authority stock did so.ⁱⁱ The next *Living in Wales* property survey is being carried out in 2008.

Guidance on bringing housing stock up to the required standard has been published for local authorities and also for registered social landlords. The guidance was revised in June 2008.ⁱⁱⁱ

WHQS aims to ensure tenants live in dwellings that are:

- In a good state of repair;
- Safe and secure;
- Adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated;
- Equipped with up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms;
- Well managed (for rented housing);
- Located in attractive and safe environments;
- As far as possible suited to the specific requirements of the household.

Local authorities are required to improve their housing stock to WHQS levels and to devise realistic programmes to achieve this. As this will require a significant financial investment, and because of the borrowing restrictions local authorities face under Treasury rules regulating public sector borrowing, some authorities have chosen to transfer their stock to new Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to enable them to reach the WHQS. RSLs are able to borrow money without many of the restrictions faced by local authorities.

In England, some local authorities have set up Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) to run their housing stock. This allows the local authority to retain control of its housing stock, with additional funding being provided to the ALMO by central government. The Assembly Government has stated that ALMOs are not a financially viable option in Wales as it would reduce the amount of funding available to remaining local authorities that directly managed their housing stock. In Wales, this means there are only two options for meeting WHQS: stock retention or stock transfer.

Bridgend County Borough Council was the first local authority in Wales to transfer its housing stock. The transfer to Valleys to Coast housing took place in 2003. Rhondda Cynon Taf, Monmouthshire and Torfaen have since also transferred their stock. Tenants have also supported transfer in Merthyr, Conwy and Newport, with the transfers due to take place later in 2008. Tenants in Wrexham and Swansea have both voted against stock transfer.

Blaenau Gwent, Ceredigion and Gwynedd have all resolved to ballot their tenants on stock transfer.

Current and proposed legislative competence of the Assembly

Under the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, the National Assembly for Wales can seek legislative competence through Acts of Parliament or Legislative Competence Orders (LCOs) to make a piece of law in the form of an 'Assembly Measure'. Measures can only be made in a specific policy area (or 'Matter') added to one of the 20 'Fields' (or broad subject areas) which are contained in Schedule 5 of the Act.

As "Housing" is Field 11 of Schedule 5 to the Act, the National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers in this area. There are currently no Matters in this Field.

During the Third Assembly, one LCO in the field of housing has been sought: the National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (No.5) Order 2008 (Affordable Housing). This LCO was proposed by the Welsh Assembly Government and, If approved, the Assembly Government has stated it will ask the Assembly to pass a Measure allowing the Right to Buy (in relation to local authority housing) and Right to Acquire (in relation to RSL properties) to be suspended for a set period of time in areas of housing pressure.

Forthcoming EU and UK primary legislation

The *Housing and Regeneration Act 2008* received Royal Assent on 22 July 2008. The Act makes it a statutory requirement that tenants are balloted before permission being sought from the Welsh Ministers to transfer housing stock to a private landlord. Previously, this was merely Assembly Government policy.

Key Welsh Government strategy documents and action plans:

In January 2008, the Deputy Minister for Housing announced that *Better Homes for People in Wales: A National Housing Strategy for Wales*, would be replaced. The new strategy should commence during 2009/2010.^{iv}

Useful links

- WHQS section of the Assembly Government website:
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/social/whqs/?lang=en>
- Community Housing Cymru information on stock transfer:
<http://www.chcymru.org.uk/stock-transfer/index.html>

Further information

For further information about the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, please contact Jonathan Baxter, Members' Research Service, (Jonathan.Baxter@wales.gsi.gov.uk), 029 2089 8993

ⁱ Deputy Minister for Housing, [Written Submission, Communities and Culture Committee, CC930-08-08](#), 7 May 2008

ⁱⁱ Welsh Assembly Government, [Living in Wales 2004](#), Revised June 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Assembly Government, [Decision Report: Welsh Housing Quality Standard – Revised Guidance](#), June 2008

^{iv} Welsh Assembly Government, [Decision Report: The Preparation of a New Housing Strategy for Wales](#), January 2008