



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

Summative evaluation of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (summary)

The report aims to understand how the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) was implemented.

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Research aims and methodology

This report summarises the findings of the Summative Evaluation of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), an independent research project completed on behalf of the Welsh Government by a consortium of Three Dragons, Ulster University and Cyngor Da.

The WHQS was introduced by Welsh Government in 2002, to raise the physical standard and condition of social housing in Wales. WHQS applies to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and local authorities with social rented housing stock. The standard does not apply to other housing developed by RSLs or to the private sector.

In order to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, housing must be:

- in a good state of repair
- safe and secure
- adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated
- contain up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms
- well managed
- located in attractive and safe environments
- where possible, suitable for the specific needs of those living there, such as

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people with disabilities

And, within these 7 over-arching categories, 42 individual elements^[1] are measured by the WHQS.

^[1] Welsh Assembly Government, 2008, The WHQS: Revised Guidance for Social Landlords on Interpretation and Achievement of the WHQS.

The current iteration of the WHQS is drawing to a close and Welsh Government is considering what the next iteration of the WHQS (WHQS 2.0) should include and how it should be monitored. This sets the context for this Summative Evaluation for which the main research aims were to:

- assess the extent to which the WHQS has been achieved
- reflect the outputs of delivering the standard (including social, economic and wellbeing, as well as physical improvement to housing stock)
- apply the findings from the Summative Evaluation to producing recommendations for the development of the revised standard

A mixed methodological approach was employed for the research, combining a comprehensive review of the relevant policy literature and analysis of secondary data sources; with additional qualitative insights elicited from discussions with key Welsh Government staff and a workshop of social landlords.

The main limitation of the research was reliance on secondary data and qualitative research. Therefore, some caution should be exercised in terms of the detailed findings presented. Regarding the aims of the research, while the available literature suggests that raising the standard of housing is likely to have social, economic and wellbeing impacts, it was not possible to quantify these impacts as specific outputs of the WHQS.

Main findings

Data reporting, management and compliance

Before 2011, WHQS data capture and the monitoring of compliance was ad hoc,

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with progress towards meeting the WHQS initially slow. The introduction in 2011 of additional monitoring and data collection procedures, enhanced guidance and data quality reporting achieved a clearer focus amongst landlords on achieving WHQS and allowed Welsh Government realistically to assess progress.

In addition, the closer working relationship that Welsh Government has forged with social landlords since 2017 has been an important step towards disseminating good practice and building trust with social landlords in all sectors.

When including ‘acceptable fails’ [2], 93% of all social housing stock in Wales had achieved WHQS at the end of March 2019 and 6.9% of stock remained non-compliant with WHQS [3]. The greatest scope for further targeted improvement would appear to be energy performance.

[2] In some situations, achieving the standard for an individual element is not possible. For example, the cost or timing of the work, residents choosing not to have work done. In these situations, a dwelling may be classified as an ‘acceptable fail.’

[3] [Welsh Housing Quality Standard as at 31 March 2019](#).

UK context to housing quality standards

The other UK jurisdictions have followed a similar pattern to the introduction of the WHQS in Wales, with standards first introduced in the early 2000s, relatively slow initial progress to meeting the adopted standards and reviews currently underway. Comparisons between the standards indicates that there is a case for saying that the WHQS is a more demanding standard than found in the other jurisdictions.

Outcomes and impact of the WHQS

The majority of tenants consider the standards by which social homes are measured as being very important to them. Nevertheless, around two out of five social rented tenants have not heard of the WHQS. [Welsh Housing Quality](#)

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Standard: Tenants' Survey.

Recent feedback from landlords was generally positive, highlighting their success in achieving the WHQS and offering diverse views about how the WHQS might change in the future. Consideration of provision of floor coverings, enhanced digital connectivity and tackling decarbonisation have emerged as elements that Welsh Government should consider taking forward in WHQS 2.0.

Decarbonisation

Welsh Government has legislated for a target of Net Zero carbon by 2050. The **Climate Change Committee's Sixth Carbon Budget** which, in setting out the pathway to Net Zero, recommended there should be a 63% reduction in carbon by 2030 and an 89% reduction by 2040. These targets were approved by the Welsh Parliament in March 2021.

Delivering decarbonisation through the WHQS programme would provide a clear pathway and structure for delivery within a framework that can be monitored. Alongside this, the WHQS would need to ensure that dwellings are capable of being adequately heated at an affordable cost. The new standard would require intelligent improvements to data collection and monitoring as well as improvements to market capacity (skills and materials) for both industry and landlord organisations. Welsh Government has recognised this imperative and has introduced a number of pilot projects through its Optimised Retrofit Programme. Its aim is for the target of Net Zero carbon to be achieved across social housing stock by 2033 in a way that aligns with its policy on fuel poverty.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Summative Evaluation has demonstrated that the WHQS has been instrumental in improving social housing quality standards across the range of measures that it encompasses. This is so for the stock held both by local authorities and RSLs.

The Evaluation puts forward a number of recommendations to Welsh

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Government, central of which is that the WHQS should be continued but that WHQS 2.0 should include a number of updates. The recommended updates are described as follows.

Decarbonisation

It is recommended that a staged approach to the new standard for WHQS 2.0 is taken as below.

- Long term objectives/target established by Welsh Government to a defined deadline.
- WHQS 2.0 to ensure tenants are no worse off as a result of decarbonisation work in their homes and to aim to improve comfort levels and further reduction in fuel poverty.
- Provide an initial two-year period for landlords to prepare a costed programme of actions to achieve the target, including meaningful tenant engagement and identification of gaps in skills and capacity to deliver the programme.
- An approach to measuring performance is derived including the definition of 'acceptable fails', or any replacement system.
- In parallel, Welsh Government to work with landlords and tenant organisations to develop good practice (sharing lessons from the Optimised Retrofit Programme), establish holistic intelligent data collection and stock monitoring systems, alongside a realistic funding strategy.
- WHQS 2.0 to define a programme to meet the target against which landlords are monitored.
- Implement a process to review progress and make adjustments to the target, programme and funding as necessary with first review to be at end of the 2 years when landlord programmes are in place.
- The second stage would be the implementation of improvements, potentially alongside the RMI programme to minimise waste of components during their operational lifetime.

Data collection and direction

Through the overarching approach to data collection and analysis, Welsh Government should set out how WHQS 2.0 is to be evaluated before, during and after the programme has been implemented.

There also needs to be a drive towards individual property compliance reporting. This will also improve the potential of checking data across and between other relevant policy areas and health outcomes.

To support standards and data quality moving forward, annual workshops should be held with data providers to showcase how data collected is being used, good practice in data collection and the associated benefits the analysis brings.

For 'acceptable fails' Welsh Government should consider introducing a 'traffic light' system; to differentiate between properties that could, with intervention, meet targets and those that will not ever be in a position to attain compliance on a given component.

As the WHQS evolves to encompass new standards and forms of assessment on decarbonisation there will invariably be data gaps and breakages in the data value chain. Where individual property level data is unattainable, for example, then credible proxies should be used where possible for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

With the substantial capital spend required for decarbonisation and achieving full compliance for WHQS 2.0 as a whole, there will be a need to integrate data collection procedures to ensure Value for Money (VfM) can be clearly monitored and demonstrated in terms of the money spent and achievement of WHQS 2.0. This will need to be systematically collected and reported to Welsh Government by the landlords.

Improving the quality and depth of data capture will require significant levels of investment, both in technology and in personnel. Welsh Government should work with the landlords to introduce data management systems across the network of landlords, helping to share good practice.

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Reflecting the two-year review programme for newly introduced decarbonisation measures and an introduction of monitoring VfM, it is recommended that there are two yearly reviews of data collection practices and consistency across the sector.

Communications

WHQS 2.0 will need to be written in plain language and sensitive to the use of terminology that would be unacceptable to groups in the population. It will be of continuing importance for Welsh Government to communicate effectively with the landlords to take forward WHQS 2.0, explaining what the standard and data collection methods mean and sharing interpretation and good practice. The programme for this should be set out as WHQS 2.0 is introduced, including updating the website. Welsh Government should consider setting up a standing technical advisory group to support the roll-out of WHQS 2.0.

Flooring

There is insufficient evidence to make a specific recommendation on future provision of flooring. Welsh Government should work with landlords and tenant organisations to devise a standard that ensures incoming tenants are not faced with the burden of finding the resources to purchase floor coverings when they move into a new property.

Broadband

Again, there is not sufficient evidence available to make a specific recommendation about the provision of broadband but it is recommended that Welsh Government seeks expert advice about the most effective way of delivering broadband to tenants; and that it should work with the landlords and tenant organisations to identify a new standard of broadband provision for WHQS 2.0.

Contact details

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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