



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

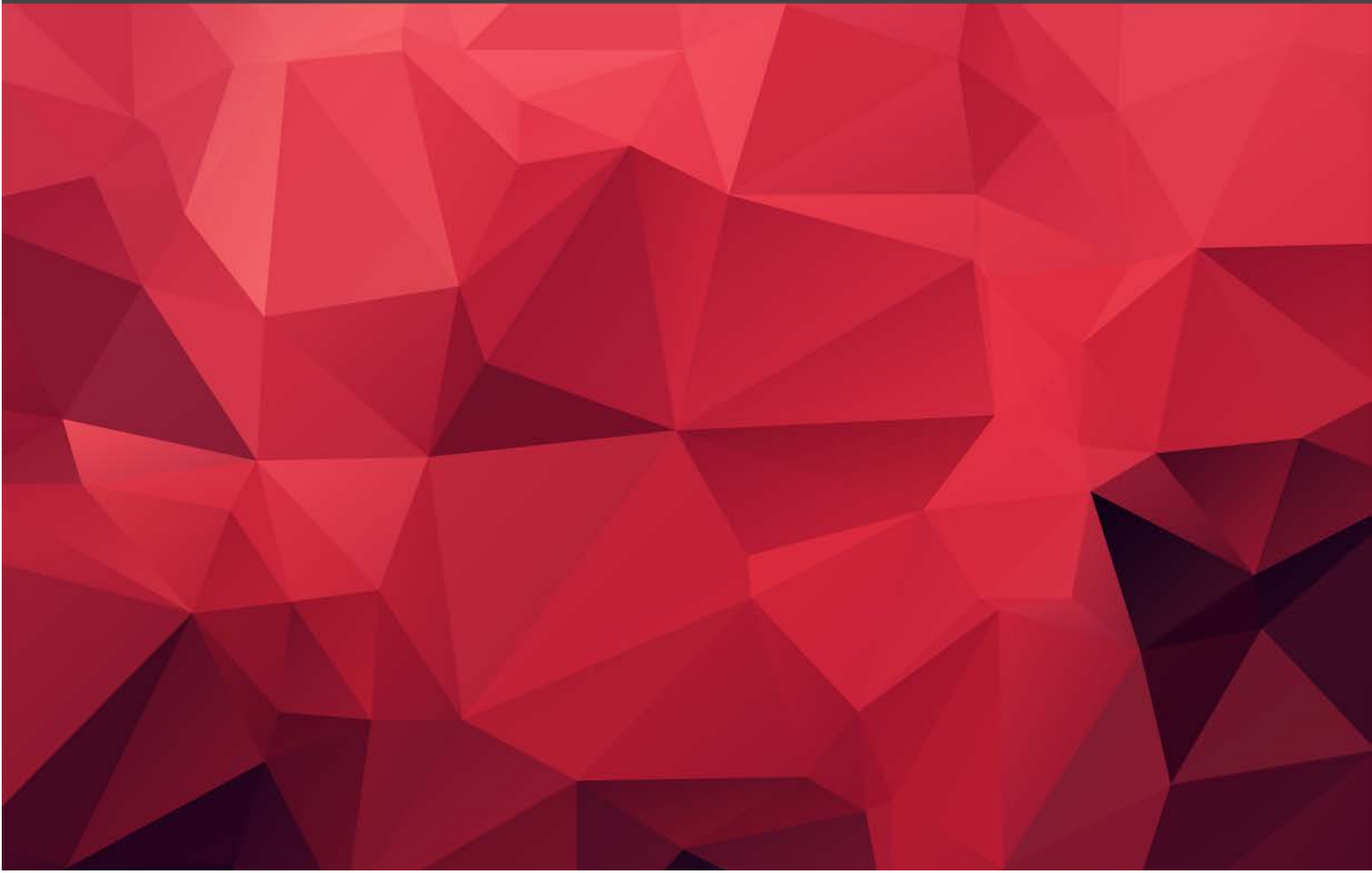
Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru  
Auditor General for Wales

# Welsh Housing Quality Standard review including tenants' views – **Cardiff Council**

Audit year: 2017-18

Date issued: October 2018

Document reference: 807A2018-19



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](mailto: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 Sara-Jane Byrne, Sam Clements, Lisa McCarthy and Ron Price.

# Contents

The Council met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard in 2012, and its arrangements to maintain compliance with the WHQS are effective and making a positive difference to residents' lives.

## Summary report

The Council met the WHQS in 2012, and its arrangements to maintain compliance with the WHQS are effective and making a positive difference to residents' lives	4
The Council's approach to the WHQS is well-integrated into its strategic housing function	6
The Council has comprehensive information on the condition of the whole of the housing stock to direct investment priorities	7
The Council has a financed and deliverable programme for the repair and improvement of the housing stock including addressing acceptable fails	9
The Council has effective arrangements to monitor and scrutinise its progress to maintain the WHQS and has learnt from its progress to date	11
The Council has a strong customer care focus to the way it interacts with its tenants	12
The Council's integrated approach to the WHQS is making a positive difference to the lives of its housing tenants	15

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – WHQS infographic	18
-------------------------------	----

# Summary report

## The Council met the WHQS in 2012, and its arrangements to maintain compliance with the WHQS are effective and making a positive difference to residents' lives

### Summary

- 1 As part of our 2017-18 performance audit programme at Cardiff Council (the Council), we reviewed the Council's arrangements to maintain the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). We also considered the Council's engagement with Council tenants in delivering the WHQS and in planning the Council's forward work programme to maintain the standard.
- 2 In 2001, the Welsh Government set out its vision for housing in Wales, 'Better Homes for People in Wales' and in 2002, introduced the WHQS, with revised guidance issued in 2008, to provide a common target standard for all social housing in Wales. The Welsh Government expected all social housing landlords in Wales to adopt the standard and devise programmes for bringing their homes up to the standard as soon as possible, but by 2020 at the latest, and to maintain standards in the future.
- 3 The Wales Audit Office published its national report 'Progress in delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard' in January 2012. The report concluded that many residents have seen substantial improvements in the quality of their housing, although the original aim that all social housing would achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012 will not be met for some considerable time. Within our report, we stated that the Council had indicated that 40% of its housing stock met the standard by 31 March 2010. The Council estimated that 100% of its housing would meet the standard by 31 March 2013.
- 4 The Welsh Government considers homes fully compliant when they meet all individual elements of the standard. But, social landlords may record one or more element as an acceptable fail, where achieving the standard for an individual element is not possible. The Welsh Government defines what can be determined as an acceptable fail. Examples of acceptable fails include the cost or timing of the work, residents' choice not to have the work done or where there are physical constraints to the work. Where a dwelling contains one or more acceptable fails, but all other elements are compliant, the Welsh Government deems the dwelling compliant subject to acceptable fails.
- 5 The Council owns 13,422 homes of which 10,507 properties fully complied with the standard as at 31 March 2017. The remaining 2,915 properties were judged to be 'acceptable fails' as defined by the Welsh Government in its guidance.

- 6 Our review sought to determine whether the Council has effective arrangements in place to enable it to maintain the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and address the number of acceptable fails.
- 7 We carried out our fieldwork between March and May 2018. We undertook document reviews, interviewed a number of key officers and members, and ran focus groups with a sample of frontline staff and a sample of the Council's housing tenants. As part of our review, we also commissioned a research company to carry out a telephone survey of a sample of the Council's housing tenants. The survey was carried out during April 2018. The research company spoke to 626 Cardiff Council housing tenants. We have referenced the findings of the telephone survey, where relevant, in the body of this report and include an infographic page summarising our findings in [Appendix 1](#).
- 8 We also commissioned Tai Pawb, Diverse Cymru and Ethnic Minorities and Youth Engagement (EYST) Wales to undertake two focus groups: one with disabled Council tenants and one with BME council tenants. Despite considerable effort by all parties, including engaging with the Council's tenant participation team, the numbers of participants at the two focus groups was disappointing. Three tenants attended the BME focus group, but no one attended the disabled tenants focus group. We have included references to the findings from the BME focus group in the report, but given the levels of participation it is difficult to draw any representative findings from these additional focus groups. We have also provided the information from the BME focus group to Council officers separately.
- 9 We concluded that the Council met the WHQS in 2012, and its arrangements to maintain compliance with the WHQS are effective and making a positive difference to residents' lives. We came to this conclusion because:
- the Council's approach to the WHQS is well-integrated into its strategic housing function;
  - the Council has comprehensive information on the condition of the whole of the housing stock to direct investment priorities;
  - a financed and deliverable programme is in place for the repair and improvement of the housing stock, including addressing acceptable fails;
  - the Council has effective arrangements to monitor and scrutinise its progress to maintain the WHQS and has learnt from its progress to date;
  - the Council has a strong customer care focus to the way it interacts with its tenants; and
  - the Council's integrated approach to the WHQS is making a positive difference to the lives of its housing tenants.

## The Council's approach to the WHQS is well-integrated into its strategic housing function

- 10 The Council achieved the WHQS in September 2012 – the first Council in Wales to do so. Sustained leadership at all levels has maintained a continued focus on the quality of council owned housing, and a continuing commitment to invest in the stock will maintain the WHQS into the future.
- 11 Historically, the Council has maintained its housing stock in a good condition, carrying out investment programmes of window and door replacements between 1990 and 2002. With the introduction of the WHQS, the Council put in place a 10-year programme (2002 to 2012) considering the whole future of the housing stock and how it could achieve the WHQS. The Council demolished unsuitable housing, where appropriate, if costs were too high to be feasible to meet the WHQS, such as some maisonettes and bedsit properties. The Council established plans, in 2002, to meet the WHQS within a ten-year period of investment including a further window and door programme. The Council's approach to meet the WHQS consisted of rolling programmes of roof and external improvements, kitchen and bathroom replacement programmes, window and door replacements and external improvements.
- 12 The Council has robust, comprehensive and wide-ranging plans in place to support its ambitions in maintaining its achievements against the WHQS. These include the Cardiff Housing Strategy 2016-2021, annual Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plans, and annual WHQS Compliance Policies. There is clear evidence in these plans of the position and compliance against the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. There is also adequate and summarised financial information. The Business Plan contains a range of financial information, including clear sensitivity analysis of proposals. Plans link together in a systematic way to give clear guidance to stakeholders, tenants and the service itself on how the Council's ambitions will be realised.
- 13 The Council has an holistic approach to housing with clear links between the Council's plans for the WHQS and other aspects of housing plans and strategies. The Council's Cardiff Housing Strategy – 2016-2021, is an overarching and comprehensive 'whole service' strategy which embraces all aspects of the housing agenda, and how the service can shape the future of the City. The Cardiff Housing Strategy links well with other plans and strategies and gives clear guidance and direction to housing challenges across the City.
- 14 The Council's Service improvement and business plans link to its overarching strategic plans in a clear and systematic way. These include areas for improvement and delegated responsibility for delivering a total package of housing related improvements, including maintaining housing stock condition and the WHQS. The housing service also has plans for specific parts of the service, for example, an Asbestos Management plan, and responsive and planned maintenance plans.

- 15 The Council has plans in place to undertake estate regeneration and refurbishment. This includes a major external refurbishment scheme at a high-rise block of flats at Maelfa House, Llanedeyrn, with redevelopment of the adjacent shopping centre and surrounding land. Remodelling of certain sheltered schemes is also in progress, and there is extensive modernisation of accommodation that is no longer fit for purpose.
- 16 To address concerns about the provision of additional affordable housing, the development of new Council housing is one of the Council's key priorities for the future. New Council housing development plans are well-formulated with 1,000 new homes to be built by May 2022, and a further 1,000 after that.
- 17 However, despite including sections on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in strategic documents, we found little awareness or understanding among staff about the Act. There was little awareness among officers about responsibilities under the WFG Act and how sustainable development principles and the five ways of working would translate from a set of theoretical principles into reality in the housing service. The Council would benefit from addressing this so that it can be assured there is appropriate consideration of the five ways of working in shaping the work of the housing service.

## The Council has comprehensive information on the condition of the whole of the housing stock to direct investment priorities

- 18 The Council has comprehensive and clear housing stock condition information to guide and support investment decisions. It has developed an in-house database to record and monitor progress on the WHQS and to maintain stock condition information. Council staff developed their own Windows based asset management and stock condition recording system, which contains a full range of property information. All the data in the asset management database is actual surveyed data, with no cloned data extrapolated from a percentage survey. This means the data is very specific to individual dwellings and can be used to shape investment decisions and procure investment contracts. The database also contains a significant volume of photographic evidence around property types, which the Council uses for planning purposes and in published information for tenants.
- 19 The Council supplements its stock condition information by using additional internal surveying capacity to regularly check the details of its information about Council owned properties. Whilst the Council has not commissioned an external stock condition survey for the whole of the stock since around 2005, it sees the control over its own data, verified through a number of defined validation checks and audits, as a benefit. Stock condition data is audited both internally through the Council's Compliance Team (who checked 900 properties in 2017-18), and the Planned and Vacant property team (who checked 1,600 in 2017-18) and externally by a property consultant.

- 20 Independent external validation of the housing stock condition information was carried out in 2015. This involved detailed examination of property records in relation to a stratified sample of 300 properties across the City. The validation exercise found that 98.7 percent of property elements were compliant with the WHQS. The Council also commissioned the same company to carry out a Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) in 2015.
- 21 The Council has a separate database of the location of asbestos and related materials. It is positive that the Council has also used this data to create a website where tenants can check the type and location of asbestos in their homes and obtain advice. The Council currently has data about asbestos for around 80% of its housing stock and this percentage increases over time as more asbestos surveys and assessments are carried out. There is good collective knowledge about the condition of the housing stock within management staff.
- 22 In addition to conventional property condition surveys, the Council also undertakes a significant number of annual tenancy management visits. It completed 1,062 tenancy management visits from April to December 2017, inspecting property condition, compliance with tenancy agreements, and reviewing pet ownership. Housing management staff also completed 2,268 proactive visits inspecting the exterior of properties and gardens. This cumulative knowledge about the condition of properties feeds into the stock condition database and the tenancy management system, and helps to contribute to an effective housing management framework which interrelates to all aspects of the housing service.
- 23 The Council has a good understanding about its non-traditional property construction types and their condition. The Council reports regularly, for example through the HRA business plan and WHQS compliance policy, on the condition of these properties and has invested significantly in them over many years. The Council has agreed further financial investment of £1 million during 2018-19 to be spent on the BISF (Bristol Iron and Steel Federation) non-traditional properties that it owns.
- 24 Welsh Government housing staff have checked the Council's information about WHQS compliance, with the last check being undertaken in September 2017. Welsh Government did not raise any concerns with the Council about the WHQS compliance information.
- 25 The Council has a good understanding about the energy efficiency of its housing stock. Around 8,500 properties have a current Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and the average SAP rating is 70.58. This is above the Welsh Government minimum target standard requirement for WHQS of 65. This means that average tenants' homes are easier to keep warm in cold weather, helping to reduce energy bills and protect the environment. A small number of properties do have SAP ratings of between 50 and 60, but these are the non-traditional property types which have significant longer term thermal efficiency weaknesses.



- 26 The Council has sound ongoing arrangements to inform decision making around maintaining the WHQS. The Council maintains a tracker of progress on elemental parts of the WHQS which is publicised in the HRA business plan and other strategy documents, giving a clear graphical representation of the up to date progress in meeting the various elements of the WHQS. This makes it easy for partners, tenants, and stakeholders to be clear about the current situation in terms of compliance with the WHQS.

## The Council has a financed and deliverable programme for the repair and improvement of the housing stock including addressing acceptable fails

- 27 The Council has demonstrated a long-term commitment and programme to meet the WHQS. Incremental progress has been made year on year with a continued focus on achievement of the standard.
- 28 A continued and well-planned programme of work is set out in the HRA business plan for 2018-19, with a total financial commitment in 2018-19 of £15 million on external and internal improvement to dwellings. This includes:
- High rise upgrades – £3.8 million
  - Front door upgrades flats – £1.7 million
  - Kitchens and bathrooms – £1.5 million
  - Roofs – £1.5 million
  - Sheltered accommodation upgrades – £1.25 million
  - Windows – £1 million
  - Non-traditional house refurbishments – £1 million
- 29 The Council has a track record of effectively maintaining the condition of its Council owned dwellings. Shaped by the HRA business plan and the Council's housing strategy, it has an effective response and planned works programme, and completed over 12,300 emergency repairs in 2017-18 with 99% completed within a target time of 24 hours. About 90% of responsive repairs are done by the dedicated in-house workforce, and tenants that we spoke to were very positive about the way in which the Council's workforce carried out repairs and the presence of Council staff was an important factor to them.
- 30 The Council has made recent changes to work done by outside contractors to Council owned housing so that contractors are working on specific packages of work, rather than across all Council owned buildings. It had some contractor problems over the last two years which led to some dissatisfaction among tenants, due to one Council main repair contractor not performing effectively. The Council has now addressed this. The new procurement arrangements now have three contractors who will deal with elements of voids, responsive repairs and minor

planned works. This is in addition to the main input from the Council's in-house repairs service.

- 31 The Council has made improvements to non-WHQS elements of its housing stock on a regular and sustained basis. For example, the Council had a garage improvement programme during 2016-17 with significant improvements made to the conditions of garages, asbestos removal and improved security. Communal areas and courtyard improvements have all featured in recent improvement work programmes.
- 32 The Council has met its requirements in dealing with leaseholders. The legislation around leasehold responsibilities is complex, and the Council has around 1219 leaseholders. However, it has engaged with this group well and not experienced any significant delays to meeting the WHQS where communal or shared facilities or building elements are in place.
- 33 The Council's gas servicing arrangement is carried out by the its in-house repairs and housing maintenance team, and meets statutory landlord responsibilities. The Council has appropriate and well monitored arrangements to maintain an effective gas servicing regime and is proactive in taking action to gain access to properties, including taking prompt legal action to gain entry to properties where tenants refuse access. During the period 11 April 2017 to 9 May 2018 the Council completed 12,904 gas services out of a total stock of 13,435, with 220 void properties. There are a number of sheltered housing properties where no gas heating is installed as the complex will have a communal boiler. The remainder of outstanding gas services are at various stages of the Council's procedures to gain access, following Court proceedings and the Council will use forced access where appropriate to ensure the safety of tenants and the community.
- 34 Incremental progress has been made by the Council in reducing the number of acceptable fails. The number of acceptable fails with kitchens not meeting the WHQS has fallen from 2,479 in 2014 to 1,765 in 2017. The number of acceptable fails with bathrooms has fallen from 2,013 in 2014 to 1,369 in 2017. The number of acceptable fails in relation to energy efficiency has fallen from 1,505 in 2014, to 1,108 in 2017.
- 35 The Council has good up to date information on all aspects of WHQS compliance, and the reasons and factors leading to the numbers of acceptable fails. For example, it has data showing that 1,304 dwellings are acceptable fails due to residents' choice and refusal, and 1,646 are acceptable fails due to timing of remedy (packaging of works, updating of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs).
- 36 Our telephone survey found that 6% of respondents said that they had refused to have improvement works done. Of those who declined improvement works, the main reason for refusing works was because they are happy with the existing state of their home (57%).
- 37 The Council has a microsite computer system which records the reasons and factors for acceptable fails and staff can access this system to engage with the respective tenant when contact is made for other housing related issues. This

enables staff to check on the status of the tenants' preferences. Most of the Council's acceptable fails relate to older tenants where improvements have been made by the tenants themselves and they don't want the disruption of further changes to their homes. There are no acceptable fails due to cost issues with the Council stock.

- 38 The Council has an effective approach to dealing with void and empty properties. It has a policy of bringing all void and empty properties up to the WHQS before they are re-let. However, this policy does lengthen void turnaround times, which were more than 70 days on average during 2017-18. The Council will provide decorating allowances to new tenants who are willing and able to undertake simple decorating tasks themselves, to speed up the letting process. However, the Council could consider how it could expedite bringing void properties up to the WHQS without compromising standards to reduce void times.

## The Council has effective arrangements to monitor and scrutinise its progress to maintain the WHQS and has learnt from its progress to date

- 39 The Council achieved the WHQS in 2012, and the quality of the housing stock condition has been maintained since, with further improvements to housing conditions and reductions in the numbers of acceptable fails year on year. An independent survey of 208 properties was carried out in December 2015 to check WHQS compliance, and 98.7% of all elements were found to be compliant. This external validation of the quality of compliance against the WHQS is an important indication of the progress that the Council has been able to make in meeting the WHQS.
- 40 The Council carries out an annual review of WHQS compliance and reports on the findings in a clear and transparent way to scrutiny committees, Cabinet and to tenants. This analysis feeds into the Council's WHQS compliance policy which has been updated annually. Staff are confident in sharing the progress that has been made in meeting the WHQS with tenants based on clear and common information and performance figures.
- 41 Scrutiny arrangements for monitoring ongoing WHQS compliance are effective and challenging. The Community and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee has reviewed the contents of plans and strategies, most recently on 14 March 2018 when the Committee examined the HRA Business Plan 2018-19. Financial HRA information was presented to the Committee and there was a good level of questioning and challenge of details.
- 42 Performance information is provided to Welsh Government on an annual basis, giving the up to date position on the WHQS. Validation checks have recently been made by Welsh Government housing staff to verify the accuracy of the data provided with no adverse findings reported to the Council to date.

- 43 Meeting the WHQS within the Council's set target of 2012 was a considerable success. It has enabled the Council and its staff to have a common understanding of stock condition and priorities for the future. The Council has learned lessons through the process and staff display a common set of goals and understanding about what now needs to be delivered. For example, the Council has demonstrated that it has learned to use a variety of contact methods to engage fully with tenants and to manage tenants effectively. For instance, if a tenant is being contacted about a rent related issue, but has not allowed access for repair work, the Council's staff use this opportunity to make further enquiries and attempt to gain entry.
- 44 However, there is limited evidence of benchmarking across the Housing service to enable the Council to report on how well it is performing in comparison to other Welsh social landlords. In addition, there is little comparison taking place with other large city social landlords and councils. Therefore, the Council is uncertain about how well it performs in comparison with others.

## The Council has a strong customer care focus to the way it interacts with its tenants

- 45 The Council has effective arrangements and actions to support sound tenant involvement and participation. During the main WHQS works prior to 2012, there was extensive involvement of tenants on the specifics of the WHQS. This included involving tenants in choosing specifications for bathroom and kitchen improvements, colour choices and the timing of programmes of work. At the time of the main WHQS programme work between 2002 and 2012, there was a structured series of tenants' representatives and tenants' panels deciding on colour choices, layouts and programme design.
- 46 Our telephone survey found that two thirds of respondents said that the Council involved them in the design or specification of improvement works. However, the tenants who attended our BME focus group said that the Council had not actively asked them for their view, other than for choices about colours and handles for kitchens. One tenant described that when asking for changes to the standard design, on behalf of a disabled family member, the tenant had to be very pro-active in getting the change agreed and felt that the contractors had limited understanding of people with additional needs. However, given that only three people attended our focus group and no tenants attended our disability focus group, it is difficult to determine whether this view is representative.
- 47 Our telephone survey also found that 83% of respondents said that they had not been told about the WHQS by the Council, with 12% saying that they had been told about the WHQS. However, 72% of respondents who had been in their home longer than 5 years remember, or were aware, of the WHQS works which were completed in 2012. The tenants who attended our BME tenants focus group recalled that they had all received letters about the planned works and had also seen further information in the tenant's newsletters (Tenant Times). However, they

felt the language used in the letters was not easily understandable, particularly for those who had English as a second language.

- 48 In our survey 62% of respondents were satisfied that the Council listens to their views and acts upon them, and 21% were dissatisfied. 88% of respondents said that they could easily and quickly contact the housing service at times that were convenient for them, whilst 11% were dissatisfied with this element of the housing service. Generally, the tenants who attended our BME tenant focus group were very negative about Cardiff Council as a landlord. Whilst they acknowledged that the Council was easy to contact, they expressed frustration at a perceived lack of action when they did contact the Council.
- 49 The Council has a small dedicated team of tenant participation staff who are based in the Council's central library building, with their own dedicated facilities for tenants to meet and engage with staff. The service maintains a database of tenants with a dedicated website and uses a specific Facebook account to interact with tenants. In our survey, 78% of respondents were satisfied with the housing service that they receive from the Council and 11% were dissatisfied.
- 50 There are substantial events and engagement with tenants annually. These include flower competitions, dog show days, engagement with schools and an annual Tenants conference. The last Tenants Conference was held in November 2017. The Council provides grants of up to £1000 to support community projects and other community led events. The Tenant participation team has organised several Community 'let us know' events during 2017, giving communities an opportunity to engage more informally with the Council's housing service.
- 51 The development of Community Hubs serving the whole of Cardiff is a key priority for the Council. The Hubs represent a substantial financial investment and are seen by tenants and residents as supportive and popular. The Hubs are proportionally funded by the Housing Revenue Account and General fund, depending on the population in each community, and 153,412 people visited Hubs during November 2017 alone. A network of 12 hubs exists in priority neighbourhoods, providing joined up customer services involving collaboration with South Wales Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner. There are service satisfaction forms for tenants at each Hub and users of the Hubs are invited to carry out exit interviews to get feedback on the quality of the service they received.
- 52 The Council carried out a substantial tenants' satisfaction survey in 2016, with a further survey underway in 2018, the results of which are due out shortly. The Council's 2016 tenants' satisfaction survey found that 81.6 % of tenants surveyed were satisfied with the general condition of their property, and 85% were satisfied with how their landlord deals with repairs and maintenance. This is relatively consistent with the findings from our telephone survey where, of those who recalled having improvement works undertaken, 73% confirmed they were satisfied with the completed works, and only 17% were dissatisfied.

- 53 The Council has committed substantial investment in facilitating appropriate feedback from tenants. The Council widely circulates information to tenants about progress on key issues and priorities including the WHQS, for example via the Council's quarterly housing magazine 'Tenants Times'. The BME tenants who attended our focus group were positive about Tenants Times stating that it contained useful information with pictures and illustrated plans.
- 54 The Council faces a major challenge with cladding fixed to the exterior of high rise blocks of flats. The tragedy that occurred at Grenfell Tower in London in June 2017 has exposed weaknesses in the fire protection capabilities of certain types of external cladding materials across the United Kingdom. Despite initially being given assurance by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that the cladding was not the same as that on Grenfell (Aluminium Composite Material) the Council undertook its own independent tests of the material. The results were received by the Council on 6 March 2018, which indicated that some of the materials on the Council's high-rise blocks of flats were flammable. Therefore, there was an increased risk of the spread of fire in the six high rise blocks where the material was installed. The Council immediately took action to protect the residents of these blocks which included:
- making all tenants and residents aware of the findings of the independent testing of the external cladding;
  - meeting with representatives of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service to develop joint external risk assessments and plans, and evacuation arrangements at high rise blocks, particularly for Nelson House which has significant numbers of vulnerable tenants and residents;
  - putting in place plans to replace 30-minute fire doors, with 60-minute fire protection doors during 2018; and
  - establishing a 24-hour walking watch arrangement of fire wardens in each of the affected blocks of flats.
- 55 Representatives of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service confirm the positive way in which the Council has responded to these challenges. However, due to the recent receipt of the cladding material fire test information the Council has committed to the removal of all potentially hazardous cladding materials. The UK Government confirmed on the 16 May 2018 that it would cover the costs of removal for all social landlords.

## The Council's integrated approach to the WHQS is making a positive difference to the lives of its housing tenants

- 56 In our telephone survey, 73% of respondents were satisfied with the improvement work carried out to their homes, with 17% dissatisfied. 73% of respondents were satisfied with the overall condition of their kitchen, 76% were satisfied with the overall condition of their bathroom and 74% were satisfied with the outside of their home.
- 57 The tenants who attended our BME focus group were generally positive about the WHQS works they had received, even though they had found the work itself quite disruptive and time consuming.
- 58 The Council has also effectively considered the wider benefits of achieving and maintaining the WHQS. This includes consideration of the diverse needs of tenants, estate improvements, fire safety and dealing with anti-social behaviour. The Council is using all elements of housing management to maintain the condition of tenants' homes and following sound housing management practices.
- 59 Continued investment in the housing stock has resulted in homes that have improved thermal efficiency. The average SAP<sup>1</sup> rating of the Council's housing stock is over 70, substantially above the WHQS target of 65. Warmer homes bring wider benefits to tenants in lower fuel bills, warmer homes improve health conditions and are good for the environment.
- 60 In our telephone survey, 64% of respondents did not find it difficult to heat their home to a comfortable level in winter but 36% of respondents said that they did. The main reasons given for this are varied and include an old or poor heating system (41%), lack of draught proofing (23%) or affordability of fuel (15%).
- 61 Our survey found that 65% of respondents said they did not have damp in their home whilst 35% of respondents said that they did. Out of those who suffer with damp, the most visible signs are visible mould (69%) and to a lesser extent visible wet patches (22%) and condensation on windows (19%). 74% of the same respondents had reported it to their landlord while the remainder had not (26%).
- 62 The Council has developed a WHQS Environmental Toolkit to provide a method of collating and scoring data on the local and wider environment. This toolkit uses a variety of information to give an environmental score at a post code level to inform planning and investment decisions, and to enable tenants to choose environmental priorities.
- 63 The Council has extensive programmes of regeneration and improvement to estates, which bring wider benefits to tenants and residents and the communities they live in. The regeneration of Edinburgh Court and South Morgan Place in the Riverside area of the City Centre are examples. Both estates have benefited from

<sup>1</sup> SAP rating definition

the delivery of sustainable building and infrastructure improvements to address poor historical estate design, improve access and tackle anti-social behaviour risks. In addition, projects like the 'Greener Grangetown' initiative has improved the environment and helped to alleviate urban flooding by the planting of trees and the creation of grassed areas.

- 64 In our survey, 79% of respondents said they were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live and 11% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. However, the tenants who attended our BME focus group expressed particularly negative views about their local community but as only three tenants attended, it is difficult to conclude whether this reflects wider views in the area or whether it was limited to this group. The tenants we spoke to during our other focus groups highlighted some concerns with us about delays to specific estate challenges that they had raised with the Council. These are around road traffic calming measures in Butetown, and delays to 'alleygating' in the Riverside areas. Ensuring that tenants are aware of the specific progress of proposals or initiatives does not appear to have fully occurred in these specific examples.
- 65 The Council has made extensive plans and implements actions to make good use of the housing stock to meet needs, and to ensure effective tenancy management. For example, it has introduced 'sensitive lettings' schemes to comply with legislation and greatest housing need but is also aware of other considerations like intergenerational disputes and differing cultural norms. The Council's Accommodation Solutions Team also provides support and financial assistance for those tenants who wish to downsize from large family accommodation. Its approach to tenancy management enables the Council to make good use of the housing stock and to maximise occupancy.
- 66 The Council has made substantial improvements to sheltered schemes to make them more attractive, lettable and suitable to modern standards and requirements. In addition, the Council has also improved communal areas and access and worked with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) on colour contrasts in kitchens to make them easier to use for those tenants with sight impairments.
- 67 Strong customer care principles underpin the Council's arrangements to undertake repairs and maintenance to its housing stock. The Council makes appointments for all repairs and it met 95% of appointments during 2017-18. Repairs work is issued to operatives with hand held electronic devices to reduce travelling time, and materials are collected from building suppliers, or delivered to kerbside. All Council vehicles have tracking devices fitted to ensure they are used effectively. The Council has a dedicated repair reporting telephone number and makes use of a diagnostic repair finder process to identify tenants' problems during the initial reporting of repairs.
- 68 The Council improves the security in homes of potentially vulnerable tenants. This includes doing additional 'target hardening' work to tenants' homes where domestic violence might exist, in support of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (Wales) 2015 (VAWSDW) where items like additional



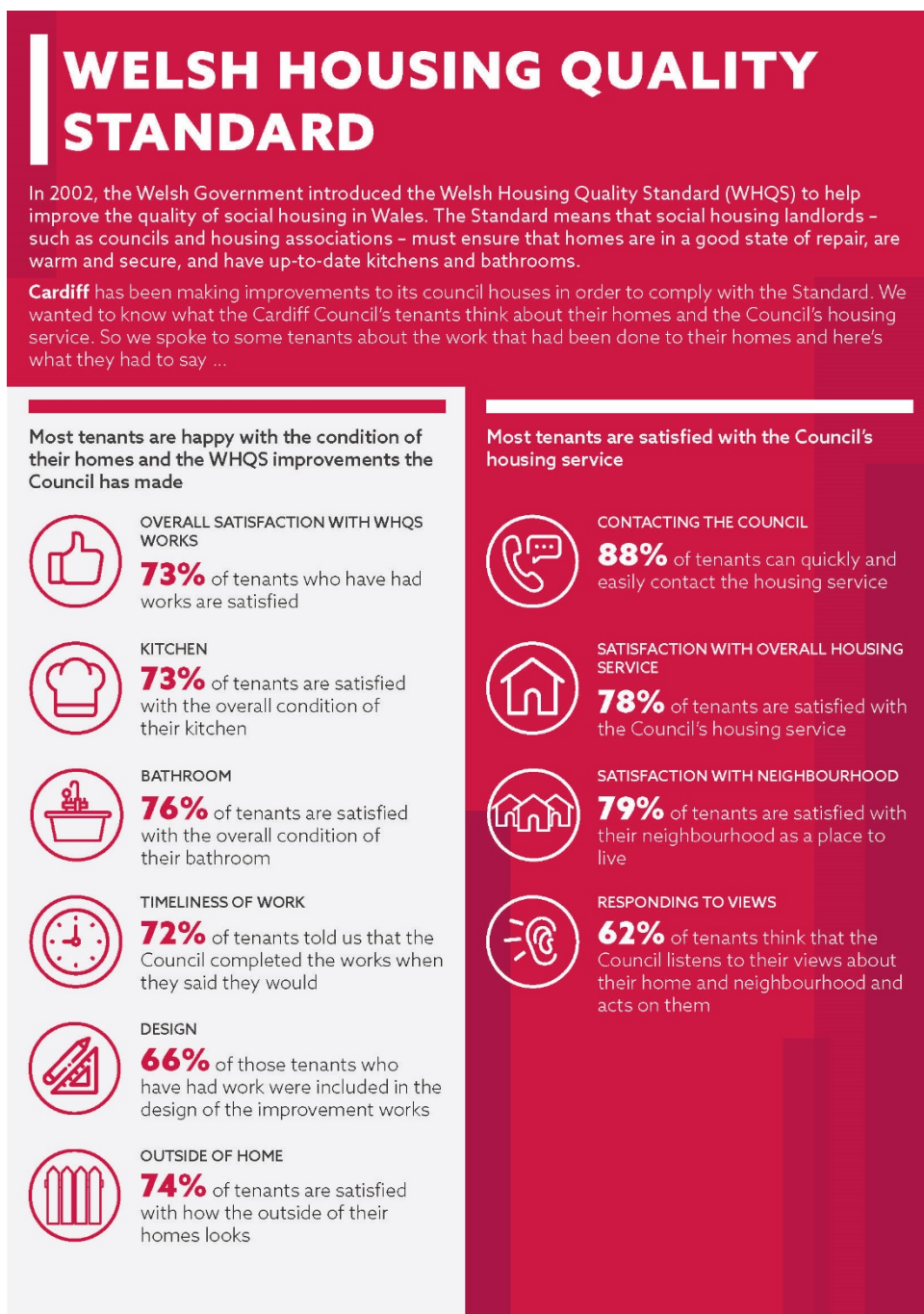
window and door locks can provide extra protection and reassurance. The Council also provides doors that are 'Secure by design' and it considers the need for door chains and additional security when appropriate. This enables vulnerable tenants to be better protected in their homes.

- 69 The Council has a focus on customer care with the use of its own multi skilled and specialist trades workforce. The Council has a focus on local labour initiatives and has recently recruited to trainee housing posts and apprenticeships. In developing local skills and the workforce, it is working with local colleges on local labour issues and skills enhancing.
- 70 The Council has arrangements are in place to maintain community cohesion. For example, the Council's Caretaking Services Team ensure that 100% of offensive graffiti is removed within 24 hours. During a recent case of racist graffiti in Grangetown, the Council ensured that it was removed immediately, and was working the local police to ensure that community cohesion was maintained.

# Appendix 1

## Infographic summarising the key findings from our telephone survey

Exhibit 1: infographic summarising the key findings from our telephone survey with a sample of the Council's housing tenants



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



HEATING

**66%** of tenants do not find it difficult to heat their homes in the winter



DAMP

**35%** of tenants said they have damp in some parts of their homes

Few tenants know about the WHQS as the programme was completed in 2012



INFORMATION

**17%** of tenants told us that the Council has told them about WHQS



REFUSAL TO HAVE WORK DONE

**6%** of tenants refused improvements to their homes



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

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

The Auditor General requested a sample of around 5% of all of the Council's tenants. The sample of **626** respondents was based on the WHQS compliance status of the **13,642** properties that the Council provided. Properties can be fully compliant, non-compliant or acceptable fails. The sample also reflects the WHQS status of properties across the area based on the data provided by the Council.



promoting equality in housing  
hybu cydraddoldeb ym maes tai

Focus Groups with Council Housing Tenants – Swansea  
and Cardiff Councils  
for the Wales Audit Office

# **Tenant Focus Group Cardiff (BAME Group) Report and Recommendations**



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](mailto:info@audit.wales)

Website: [www.audit.wales](http://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](mailto:post@archwilio.cymru)

Gwefan: [www.archwilio.cymru](http://www.archwilio.cymru)