

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET
15 January 2019

REPORT AUTHOR: Councillor James Evans, Portfolio Holder Corporate Governance, Housing & Public Protection

SUBJECT: WHQS Achievement and the adoption of Damp and Energy Efficiency Strategies for Powys

REPORT FOR: Discussion and Adoption

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report also confirms the successful delivery of the programme to achieve compliance with the Welsh Governments WHQS standard
- 1.2 The report also proposes improvements to the strategic and operational approach to dealing with damp and thermal comfort issues in Powys Housing stock. The Cabinet is asked to adopt these approaches, to support a greater focus on resident's health and fuel poverty.
- 1.3 The proposals have been presented to resident groups, and the comments from those consultations are included. The recommendations of the Health, Care & Housing Scrutiny Committee, are also addressed

2. Background

- 2.1 It can be reported that the council have successfully achieved completion of its WHQS programme. Around £72 million has been invested, with just under 14,000 building components being replaced including 3,736 properties receiving energy efficiency works. There have been some challenges with 708 residents declining 2,000 improvements, despite multiple offers being made. The greatest challenge was due to Powys having the largest number of off gas stock in Wales, totalling over 1,500 properties, with 66 homes on large scale special purpose LPG networks. This means that achieving energy ratings of 65 for these homes is very difficult to achieve, hence the number of acceptable fails for energy. This is explored further in the Thermal Comfort Strategy.
- 2.2 Appendix 1 summarises the WHQS outturn, as at the end of December 2018.
- 2.3 The councils WHQS Compliance Policy sets out the approach to meeting the Welsh Governments WHQS Standard. It should be noted that the WHQS system allows landlords to declare that a property has

'acceptable fails', e.g. where a solution is technically difficult to achieve, or where a tenant declines the work.

- 2.4 It was found during the WHQS programmes, and while investigating long term damp problems, that measures beyond replacing the building components are required.
- 2.5 As part of their Wales wide customer experience survey, the Welsh Audit Office conducted a telephone survey of 300 Powys residents. This revealed that while 77% of the tenants had no problems with damp or condensation, 23% were concerned about this. Similarly, 23% of residents reported they found it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter. While these results are typical for local authorities, there is a need to establish why these concerns remain, and to address them. These strategies provide a framework to do that, in partnership with Heart of Wales Property Services, Health and Social Care services. The Welsh Audit Office report is attached at Appendix 2
- 2.6 The development of a Damp Strategy and a Thermal Comfort Strategy, set out at appendix 3 and 4, are part of a vision to develop a 'WHQS Plus' programme, and address WHQS 'acceptable fails'. They precede a more comprehensive asset management strategy, to be produced later in 2019. They also aim to address an increase in fuel poverty caused by rising fuel prices.

3 Strategies for addressing Dampness and Thermal Comfort

- 3.1 The principles within both the Damp and the Thermal Comfort Strategies are as follows:
 - **Consider peoples' health.** Older people and children with health problems, are more likely to operate heating for longer periods, and at higher temperatures. A property that may meet the WHQS standard, can still be expensive to heat in those circumstances. Children are more susceptible to the effects of damp and mould. To assist with discharge of corporate parenting and duty of care responsibilities, we need to ensure the building and its services are not contributing to ill health or distressing families. The strategies aim to support residents at greatest risk.
 - **Consider fuel poverty.** The thermal comfort paper covers the process to manage requests to assist with fuel poverty.
 - **Consider the building as a whole.** For damp issues this is looking in great detail at the building construction, and its heating and ventilation together, rather than in isolation. For thermal comfort, looking at the buildings insulation, heating system, and again ventilation.
 - **Consider and respond to trends.** At present, the numbers of serious damp issues, or complaints about thermal comfort and running costs

are small. These are resolved in isolation. However, trends are developing in certain streets, indicating more widespread investigations and programmes of work will be required.

- 3.2 The damp strategy was considered by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel Response Repairs Sub- Group in November. The thermal comfort strategy was consulted by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel Investing in Homes Sub Group in December. The comments of the residents have been incorporated in the papers, and agreed at the December meeting of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- 3.3 Both strategies were considered by the Health, Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee in November. The recommendations as set out in Appendix 5 have been incorporated into each strategy.
- 3.5 The impact assessment relating to the strategies is set out at Appendix 6. Delivery of these strategies will be overseen by the HRA project board.

4 Corporate Improvement Plan

- 4.1 The vision and priorities of the new cabinet are to support our residents and communities and to develop a vibrant economy. These proposals enhance the objectives set out in the HRA business plan.
- 4.2 The Housing Service has to date played a key role in contributing to the Public Service Boards Well-being assessment, and the Local Well-being Plan. These proposals will further improve the well-being of the population of Powys, particularly those with health or financial vulnerability.
- 4.3 Housing Service recognises the contribution that it makes to the local economy through its procurement of services from external contractors. The work streams arising from the proposals will be available for Powys based SME's to compete for on a level playing field.

5 Options Considered/Available

- 5.1 Powys County Council will need to address damp issues to fulfil its duties as a Landlord and ensure compliance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and WHQS.

With thermal comfort, there are 2 options available.

1. Continue to treat off gas homes as acceptable fails, leave health issues and fuel poverty in the hands of other organisations, and only address this with any grant funds.
2. Adopt the pro-active approach suggested, to target improvements where the greatest need exists, and reduce the burden of poor health and fuel poverty.

6. Preferred Choice and Reasons

- 6.1 The full adoption of the thermal comfort strategy will provide a measured and prioritised way to address resident's needs, in a fair and equitable manner. It demonstrates leadership from the Council to not stand still, and continue its ambition to achieve WHQS two years early.

7. Sustainability and Environmental Issues/Equalities/Crime and Disorder/Welsh Language/Other Policies etc.

- 7.1 The proposals will increase the use of renewable technology in support of the Welsh Governments decarbonisation agenda.

8 Children and Young People's Impact Statement - Safeguarding and Wellbeing

- 8.1 The proposals will mitigate risks to young people from the effects of mould and damp. There will be £0.7m per year invested either directly to Powys companies, or from support to local SME's by Welsh contractors. The programme will have a beneficial impact on families, and create employment opportunities for young people.

9 Local Member(s)

- 8.1 The proposal will affect all members.

9 Other Front Line Services

- 9.1 Not applicable

10 Support Services (Legal, Finance, HR, ICT, BPU)

- 10.1 Finance – In anticipation of the measures outlined in the strategies, provision has been included in the HRA Business Plan. This includes £200k per annum for additional measures such as Photovoltaic or Solar Panels, and £500k per year for Damp alleviation works. These sums supplement ongoing allowances for replacing and maintaining the fabric of the building.
- 10.2 Legal – “The Professional Lead - Legal supports the recommendation in this report and confirms that the legal services will support this department as and when required.

11. Scrutiny

- 11.1 Has this report been scrutinised? - Yes
- 11.2 If Yes, what version or date of report has been scrutinised? A discussion took place around earlier versions of the Dampness and thermal Comfort Strategies.

11.3 The comments of the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee held on the 3rd October 2018, are attached at Appendix 5, which also shows how the strategies have been amended in the light of comments.

12 Local Service Board/Partnerships/Stakeholders etc.

12.1 This is largely a housing management matter, though to maintain support to Well Being, we will continue to replace or improve heating systems where there is medical need

13 Communications

13.1 Once the proposals have been approved by council, their adoption will be disseminated to members, and published on the Powys website.

13.2 Communications with residents will be agreed with and channelled through the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, and related WHQS and Responsive Repair Sub Groups. This will include publishing initiatives and outcomes in bi annual newsletters sent to every tenant.

14 Statutory Officers

14.1 The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: “I note the legal comments and have nothing to add to the report.”

14.2 The Head of Financial Services (Deputy Section 151 Officer) notes the comments from Finance.

15 Members’ Interests

15.1 The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If Members have an interest, they should declare it at the start of the meeting and complete the relevant notification form.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
<p>That Cabinet notes the successful outcome of the WHQS programme, and approves the adoption of the Damp and Thermal Comfort Strategies</p>	<p>To demonstrate the council’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to meet statutory obligations • Maintain leadership ambition to over achieve in relation to the WHQS standard • Commitment to pro-actively addressing fuel poverty

<p>Relevant Policy (ies):</p>	<p>Powys County Council Housing Services Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Compliance</p>
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	Policy, and Repairs and Maintenance Policy		
Within Policy:	Y	Within Budget:	Y

Relevant Local Member(s):	All Members
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Head of Housing
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	1st February 2019

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