

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL, 2019

REFERENCE FROM AUDIT COMMITTEE: 25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2019

“749 WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT: VALE OF GLAMORGAN WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (WHQS) REVIEW INCLUDING COUNCIL HOUSING TENANTS PERSPECTIVE (REF) –

The report had been referred to the Audit Committee by the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. Mr. S. Wyndham (Wales Audit Office) advised on the findings of the review which had been undertaken by the Wales Audit Office as part of the Council's Annual Audit Plan for 2016/17. The purpose of the review had been to ascertain how Local Authorities were listening and reacting to the views of its local residents with a particular focus on the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) for Council tenants. The report findings concluded that overall, the Council had met the WHQS with effective arrangements for tenant engagement and most tenants had been satisfied with the quality of their home.

The Wales Audit Office report made two proposals for improvement:

- The Council should evaluate how effective the process was for tenants to report housing repairs via the Customer Contact Centre (C1V);
- The Council should work with tenants to review its approach to assisting people experiencing problems with condensation and damp.

The Operational Manager for Building Services stated that it was in the main a positive report and in line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, the proposals for improvement would be addressed as part of the service planning process for 2019/20. They had also been incorporated within the Council's Insight Tracker which monitored progress on all regulatory actions on a monthly basis.

Members of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee would also receive a six monthly update report on all regulatory actions relevant to the Committee.

In considering the report, a Member queried whether C1V was the standard method of reporting problems with buildings and also queried the response rate. The Operational Manager confirmed that tenants reported issues largely through C1V, which was the preferred avenue, although the Department was considering other avenues that could be utilised to support residents, i.e. smart phones which could document the number of transactions, and the department was considering new ICT software which would alleviate the pressure for C1V.

A Member who had been present at the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting advised that as detailed in the reference, the Committee had

considered the report in detail, commenting that it was also a positive report, but requested an appointment with the officer to consider the concerns raised by residents following telephone interviews. The officer advised that he would be happy to meet the Member.

The Chairman, having regard to the issue of damp, advised that if there was an increase in “black spots” this needed to be drawn to tenants’ attention.

The Chairman stated that in his experience there was only one way communication with C1V and no follow up reports were provided. It was agreed that having regard to the Council’s Digital Strategy and the Council’s move towards interactions online, improving communication would be key.

Having considered the report it was subsequently

**RESOLVED – T H A T** the reference from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee and the comments of the Audit Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Reason for decision

In order that Cabinet can be apprised of the Wales Audit Officer Report and the comments of both Committees.”

Attached as Appendix - Report to Audit Committee: 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE: 25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2019

REFERENCE FROM HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE: 5<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 2018

“543 WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT: VALE OF GLAMORGAN WELSH  
HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD (WHQS) REVIEW INCLUDING COUNCIL  
HOUSING TENANTS PERSPECTIVE (DEH) -

The Chairman invited Mr. Gwilym Bury from the Wales Audit Office to present the report, the purpose of which was to bring to the attention of the Scrutiny Committee, the findings of the relevant review undertaken by the Wales Audit Office as part of the Council's Annual Audit Plan for 2016/17.

Mr. Bury advised that the review took place during the summer of 2017 and involved all 22 Local Authorities in Wales. The purpose of the review was to ascertain how Local Authorities were listening and reacting to the views of its local residents with a particular focus on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard for Council tenants. A telephone survey of just over 300 Council tenants was undertaken by the Wales Audit Office in May 2018 asking for their views following WHQS works undertaken on their properties. This equated to 8% of the Vale of Glamorgan's Council tenants. Audit Officers also spoke to Local Authority Officers, Tenant Working Group Representatives and Elected Members as part of the review.

Mr. Bury drew the committee's attention to the Review generated by the Wales Audit Office at Appendix 1 of the report that was the Review Report and detailed the findings that were generally positive. The report findings concluded that overall 'the Council had met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard with effective arrangements for tenant engagement, and most tenants were satisfied with the quality of their home.' The Wales Audit Office report made two proposals for improvement:

- The Council should evaluate how effective the process is for tenants to report housing repairs via the Customer Contact Centre (C1V).
- The Council should work with tenants to review its approach to assisting people experiencing problems with condensation and damp.

In conclusion, Mr. Bury added that the proposals for improvement were made to ensure that the Local Authority looked into the causes of damp and condensation in its properties and looked into a more specialist telephone service/system which could be more cost effective and allow the Council to resolve customer queries more quickly.

Following Mr. Bury's presentation, the Head of Building Services welcomed the report and advised that the findings were in line with the results of the STAR survey

undertaken previously by the Local Authority. With regards to the two proposals for improvement, the Officer advised that the Local Authority was already looking to generate an online website tool for Council tenants to log enquiries online which would in turn take pressure off from the C1V centre. Therefore, Housing and Building Services Officers were working closely with their colleagues in C1V to provide expert information in preparation for future enquiries.

With regards to issues of damp and condensation, the Officer advised that the Council was aware of a number of calls on the issue and had therefore undertaken research to inform future action planning. Since July 2018, 236 'pre-inspections' had been requested with 46 relating specifically to damp and condensation. Following analysis of the figures, 26 of the 46 were due to requests relating to condensation and in some of the instances the property was treated for mould. However, in 10 out of the 26 no evidence of damp or building related defects were identified. The Officer added that out of the 46 requesting action, 20 were found to be instances of damp from water leaks or minor roof leaks.

In conclusion, the Head of Building Services advised that the Local Authority was looking to employ two Stock Condition Surveyors to proactively survey the Councils 4,000 properties over a next five year rolling programme which, in turn, would increase the Council's ability to identify issues relating to damp and condensation at an earlier stage. The Officer also wished to thank Mr. Bury and staff from the Wales Audit Office for their co-operation and partnership working during the review.

A Member thanked both presenters for the good review report and queried whether Council tenanted properties were inspected prior to the WHQS works undertaken, as was her understanding, and therefore questioned why issues caused by damp and/or condensation were not picked up prior to the survey. The Head of Building Services advised Council properties were surveyed previously although; the earlier surveys did not cover every Council property. Some of the issues identified as part of the WAO review were found after external WHQS improvements had taken place to the properties. The Officer also wished to add that there was general confusion over the criteria for damp. It was also fair to say that since the Local Authority had increase insulation within its housing stock the Council was seeing an increase in black spot mould due to extract ventilation not being correctly used in some properties.

In response to the Officer's advice, the Member asked if residents were advised to keep their homes ventilated after improvement works were undertaken. The Officer advised that residents were provided with verbal advice as well as an informative leaflet on condensation. However, officers had noticed an increase in residents choosing not to open trickle vents or run extract ventilators in their property due to fear over the cost of heating the property and avoiding drafts. The Officer wished to add that if an issue regarding damp had been identified within the building then it was actioned upon as soon as possible.

A Member wished to raise the following points following the Wales Audit Office proposals for improvement:

- There was currently a ground floor ventilation issue at the St. Lukes estate, Penarth, due to external vents being blocked by overgrowth outside of the

property and therefore suggested that the Council more regularly check that the vents were clear to avoid instances of damp within the properties.

- It was important to note that although cavity insulation made a property warmer, which benefitted the resident(s) however, within multi-storey buildings there was not adequate drying facilities outside of the property to dry clothes and therefore moisture from freshly washed clothes was generated in the property when drying indoors and as a Council it would be beneficial to be more proactive regarding external drying facilities.
- A recommendation in the Wales Audit Office report referred to training for C1V staff but it was essential that the training be provided to the same members of staff so they developed an expert knowledge to answer any queries. The Member supported the idea of a specialist contact centre and digital access to services however, stated that the Local Authority needed to consider the online access and capability Council tenants had.

In response to the Member's points the Operational Manager for Building Services advised that energy efficiency was a current concern for the Local Authority due to the evidence of climate change and since the WHQS works being achieved the Council's focus was now moving on to carbon reduction. As mentioned earlier in the meeting, the Local Authority was looking to employ officers to survey properties on a rolling five year programme where damp and condensation issues could be identified earlier. Finally, the Repairs Inspection Officers based in the Housing and Building Services section were regularly in attendance at the C1V centre to provide expert advice however, they were not in a position to do this all the time due to their job also requiring them to be visiting tenant properties in person. If an enquiry was received via the C1V contact centre regarding damp or condensation, it was automatically logged as a 'pre-inspection' which was raised with the relevant inspectors.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Building Services and Mr. Bury for their presentation of the report and requested that if the educational leaflet provided to Council tenants regarding prevention of damp and condensation was not on the public website that it be made readily available as soon as possible so that members may refer tenants to the leaflet as a proactive measure to halt the increase in instances of damp. The Head of Building Services advised that if the leaflet was not already available on the website then it would be uploaded as soon as possible and shared with Members of the Committee following the meeting.

#### RECOMMENDED -

- (1) T H A T the content of the report and WAO proposals for improvement be noted.
- (2) T H A T the proposals for improvement be addressed as part of the Service Planning process for 2019/20 and also incorporated within the Council Insight Tracker for monitoring.
- (3) T H A T the report be referred to the Audit Committee and thereafter to Cabinet for their consideration incorporating any comments of the Committee.

Reason for recommendations

(1-3) To ensure Members had the opportunity to scrutinise and review the Wales Audit Office proposals for improvement.”

Attached as Appendix – Report to Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee: 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2018

## **The Vale of Glamorgan Council**

### **Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

#### **Report of the Director of Environment and Housing**

#### **Wales Audit Office Report: Vale of Glamorgan Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Review Including Council Housing Tenants' Perspective**

##### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To bring to the attention of this Scrutiny Committee, the findings of the above review undertaken by the Wales Audit Office as part of the Council's Annual Audit Plan for 2016-17.

##### **Recommendations**

1. That Members note the contents of the report and consider the WAO proposals for improvement.
2. That the proposals for improvement be addressed as part of the service planning process for 2019/20 and also incorporated within the Council's Insight tracker for monitoring.
3. That the report be referred to the Audit Committee and thereafter to Cabinet for their consideration incorporating any comments of this Committee and that of the Audit Committee.

##### **Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 1,2&3 To ensure Members provide for scrutiny and review of the WAO's proposals for improvement.

##### **Background**

2. During 2017-18, the WAO completed work to understand the 'service user perspective' at every Council within Wales. In the Vale of Glamorgan Council, this work focused on the Housing service. In particular, tenants' engagement with, and degree of choice experienced in, delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and their view on the quality of the service they receive from the Council.
3. The Welsh Government set a target for all social landlords to improve their housing stock to meet the WHQS as soon as possible, but in any event by 2020. The Vale of

Glamorgan Council is one of 11 councils in Wales that retained its housing stock and one of six councils reporting 100% compliance with the standard. The Council achieved the standard at the end of March 2018.

## **Relevant Issues and Options**

4. **Appendix 1** contains the review report and details the findings which were generally positive. The report findings concluded that overall the Council, 'has met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard with effective arrangements for tenant engagement and most tenants are satisfied with the quality of their home'.
5. The report makes two proposals for improvement:
  - **P1:** The Council should evaluate how effective the process is for tenants to report housing repairs via the Customer Contact Centre (Call One Vale).
  - **P2:** The Council should work with tenants to review its approach to assisting people experiencing problems with condensation and damp.
6. In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, these proposals for improvement will be addressed as part of the service planning process for 2019/20 and also incorporated within the Council's Insight Tracker, which monitors progress on all regulatory actions on a monthly basis. Members of this committee will also receive a 6 monthly (half-year) update report on all regulatory actions relevant to the committee.
7. It is recommended that the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee consider the content of the report and refers this to the Audit Committee along with any comments of this committee.

## **Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)**

8. There are no additional budgetary implications arising from this report, and work to progress these proposals will be met from existing budgets.
9. Audit and inspection fees for the Council are met from existing budgets.

## **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

10. The Corporate Plan 2016-20 emphasises the Council's commitment to promoting sustainable development and our understanding of our duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The many different aspects of sustainability (environment, economy, culture and social) are reflected within planned activities as outlined in the plan and demonstrate how the Council will maximise its contribution to the national Well-being Goals.

## **Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)**

11. The Auditor General for Wales has a duty under sections 15, 17, 18, 19 and 24 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to assess and report the outputs from corporate and improvement Assessments of all improvement authorities in Wales.
12. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 requires that the Council secure continuous improvement across the full range of local services for which it is responsible.



13. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires the Council to set Well-being Objectives by April each year that maximise its contribution to achieving the Well-being goals for Wales and report its progress annually.

### **Crime and Disorder Implications**

14. Activities to improve community safety are included in the Corporate Plan and one of the Well-being Outcomes is 'An Inclusive and Safe Vale' with a supporting objective 'providing decent homes and safe communities'. The Council's Performance Management Framework supports the delivery of actions associated with these objectives.

### **Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)**

15. 'An Inclusive and Safe Vale' is one of the Well-being Outcomes in the Corporate Plan with a supporting objective 'reducing poverty and social exclusion'. There is also a Well-being Outcome 'An Aspirational and culturally vibrant Vale' with a supporting action 'valuing culture and diversity'. The Council's Performance Management Framework supports the delivery of actions associated with these objectives.

### **Corporate/Service Objectives**

16. The Corporate Plan 2016-20 reflects the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and identifies 4 Well-being Outcomes and 8 Objectives for the Council. These promote improvements in the economic, social and cultural well-being of residents in the Vale of Glamorgan which in turn will contribute to achieving the Well-being goals for Wales.
17. The Council's Performance Management Framework supports the delivery of all of the Council's Corporate Plan Well-being Outcomes and Objectives.

### **Policy Framework and Budget**

18. This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

### **Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)**

19. N/A

### **Relevant Scrutiny Committee**

Achieving and maintaining WHQS falls within the remit of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee.

### **Background Papers**

N/A

### **Contact Officer**

Mike Ingram, Head of Housing and Building Services

### **Officers Consulted**

Andrew Treweek, Operational Manager Building Services

**Responsible Officer:**

Miles Punter, Director of Environment & Housing and Sponsoring Director for Well-being Outcome 1, 'An Inclusive and Safe Vale'.



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

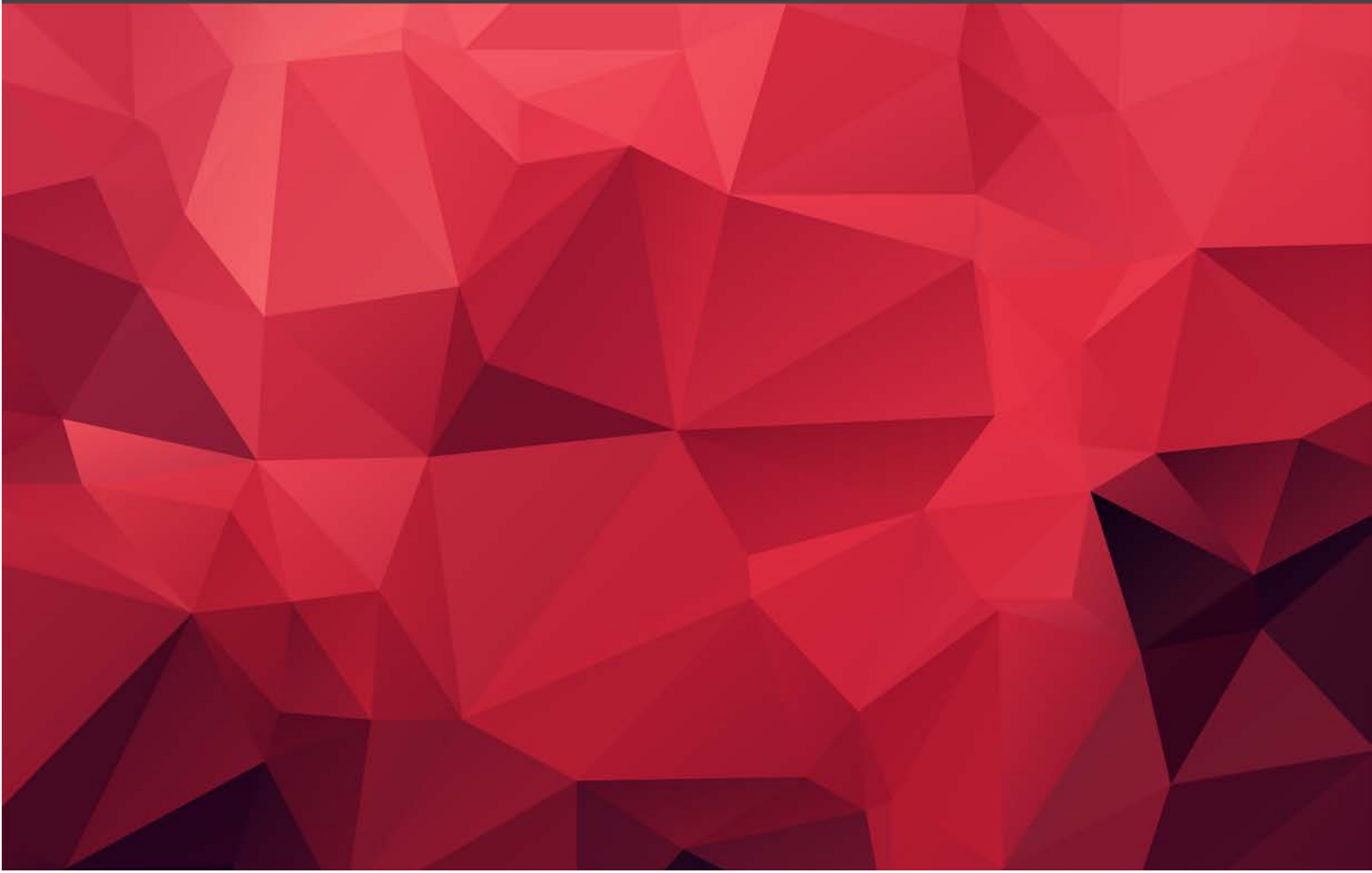
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# Welsh Housing Quality Standard review including Council housing tenants' perspective review – **Vale of Glamorgan Council**

Audit year: 2017-18

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

The team who delivered the work comprised, Richard Hayward, Gwilym Bury, Sara-Jane Byrne and Charlotte Owen, directed by Huw Rees.

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# Summary report

- 1 In housing, as in many local government service areas, users have no choice of service provider or, where alternative providers exist, their choice is limited by cost or other reasons. In this situation, their ability to influence services to meet their needs relies on users having a 'voice' in service design.
- 2 It is especially important that service users can feed in their views, experiences and hopes as the Council decides which services to reduce, increase or change in the current environment where finances are under pressure. Taking account of the users' voice means redesigned services are more likely to meet people's needs and be better value for money.
- 3 The Welsh Government stresses the importance of developing a partnership with citizens. Involvement is one of the 'five ways of working' that local authorities are required to adopt by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG Act). And in its Local Government White Paper (January 2017) the Welsh Government states:  
  
'We want to develop a more equal partnership with citizens. The role of public services should be to support people to live independent lives and to seek to de-escalate demand, intervening only when necessary and only for as long as required. In doing so, the focus inevitably shifts to prevention and a public service that is able to put more effort into helping people to avoid crisis, rather than one which is focused on supporting people in crisis. This is about creating prudent public services for the future.'<sup>1</sup>
- 4 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, although we agreed the specific focus and approach to the work with each one individually. In Vale of Glamorgan Council (the Council), we reviewed the housing service. In particular, tenants' engagement with, and degree of choice experienced in, delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), and their view on the quality of the service they receive from the Council.
- 5 In 2001, the Welsh Government set out its long-term vision for housing in Wales entitled **Better Homes for People in Wales**. The WHQS is the Welsh Government standard of housing quality. The WHQS was first introduced in 2002 and aims to ensure that all dwellings are of good quality and suitable for the needs of existing and future residents. The Welsh Government set a target for all social landlords to improve their housing stock to meet the WHQS as soon as possible, but in any event by 2020. In 2011 the Council decided against transferring its housing stock following a tenant ballot that narrowly rejected stock transfer<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the Council retained its housing stock and role as landlord. It is one of 11 councils in

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, **White Paper Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed**, January 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Tenant ballot on stock transfer in April 2011. 68.4% voted (3,245), 49.2% supported the transfer and 50.8% were opposed. WLGA website report.

Wales to do so. The Council is one of six councils reporting<sup>3</sup> 100% WHQS compliance.

- 6 Based on data from the most recent return to Welsh Government, as at 31 March 2018 the Council stock was 100% compliant with WHQS. The total number of Council properties was 3,873 of which 3,100 met the WHQS standard to 'full compliance' and a further 773 were fully compliant subject to 'acceptable fails'. 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 by the Welsh Government to be compliant subject to acceptable fails.
- 7 Although we could not talk to everyone, we engaged with a sample of service users<sup>4</sup> via a telephone survey to get their view on the WHQS programme. We also held focus groups with tenants from the Tenant Working Group and visited estates to meet the following Residents Associations: Star group from Penarth, Colcot and Compass groups from Barry and Major group from Llantwit Major. This helped us to understand the Council's rationale for their approach to WHQS, and how the Council approaches and responds to the needs and expectations of service users.
- 8 Overall, we found that **the Council has met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard with effective arrangements for tenant engagement and most tenants are satisfied with the quality of their home.**
- 9 We came to this conclusion because:
  - the Council reported it has met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and is working with its IT provider to ensure that compliance data is accurate;
  - arrangements for tenant engagement are effective and the Council is supporting tenants wider needs; and
  - most tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the quality of their homes and the housing service, but some feel their homes are damp and there is scope to review the telephone system for reporting repairs.

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government, **Welsh Housing Quality Standard Welsh Government Annual Report, October 2018**

<sup>4</sup> We spoke to a sample of 300 tenants in the telephone. Appendix 1 shows the results.

## Proposals for improvement

### Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P1	The Council should evaluate how effective the process is for tenants to report housing repairs via the Customer Contact Centre (Call One Vale).
P2	The Council should work with tenants to review its approach to assisting people experiencing problems with condensation and damp.



# Detailed report

**The Council has met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard with effective arrangements for tenant engagement and most tenants are satisfied with the quality of their home.**

**The Council reported it has met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and is working with its IT provider to ensure that compliance data is accurate**

- 10 The Council has clearly outlined the priorities for the Housing service in a range of integrated plans. These include the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, Housing and Building Services plan 2018-2022 and the annual Housing service plan 2018-2019. The plans contain direct links to show how the Housing service contributes to the delivery of the Council's Well-being outcomes and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2016-2020. The financial resources for the delivery of the WHQS are set out in the HRA Business Plan, which is updated annually. The Council policy on the application of the WHQS standards is reviewed annually by the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee and is approved by Cabinet. At the time of our fieldwork in June 2018, the Council had produced a new draft Asset Management Strategy (AMS) 2018-2023. The aim of the AMS is to ensure the effective management and maintenance of all homes and related land assets.
- 11 The Council formally reported that it has achieved full compliance with WHQS in 2018. The Council's business plans reference that the WHQS standard was achieved by 31 March 2018, and the Council is now moving into the maintenance phase of the standard, developing new homes and completing wider estate improvement works. At the meeting on 14 March 2018 of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee, the Head of Housing and Building Services reported the Council was 100% compliant with WHQS.
- 12 The Council's asset management IT system 'Keystone' has been reporting some incorrect data relating to WHQS compliance. During our fieldwork, the Council identified a problem with the Keystone WHQS compliance report function. This resulted in incorrect figures being reported for the number of 'acceptable fails'. The Council has reported this issue to their IT provider who acknowledged the system fault. The provider is working to fix this issue so that future reporting is accurate.
- 13 Following the identification of reporting issues with the Keystone system, the Council produced updated compliance figures. The results show 80% of its housing stock (3,077 properties) is fully compliant with WHQS and 20% (791 properties) is classed as 'acceptable failures'. Most of the acceptable fails are from

where tenants declined the improvements works or where the kitchen is too small to fit the required number of units to achieve WHQS compliance. The Council has a clear process to minimise the number of acceptable fails that starts with contacting tenants who refused WHQS works for a second time to see if their circumstances have changed. Where works are declined again they are scheduled to be completed at change of tenancy. This forms part of the ongoing programme to perform outstanding WHQS works when properties becomes void. The Council has taken a practical approach to the challenges associated with small kitchens. This includes creating an open plan kitchen diner if it is financially viable in properties that have a kitchen with an adjoining second living room.

- 14 As part of the WHQS, the Council must estimate the annual energy consumption for space and water heating using the Government's Standard Assessment Procedure for Energy Rating of Dwellings 2005 (SAP 2005) method. A result of 65 or above out of 100 must be achieved for compliance. During our fieldwork it was identified the data held on Keystone for SAP showed over 400 non-compliant properties. The Council investigated the reason for this and confirmed the result was not accurate due to a lag in updating the Keystone system with information on completed improvement works. The Councils' updated figures show 38 of the 3,868 properties are acceptable fails due to a SAP result of below 65.
- 15 The housing stock condition data that is used to support investment decisions is regularly updated. The Council commissioned an external company to complete an initial stock condition survey for the whole of its stock in 2008. The stock condition data is validated by the Council's own survey team who carry out an annual survey of 20% of stock each year. This forms a five-year rolling programme to review all the housing stock condition data. At the time of our fieldwork in June 2018, 95% of the original stock data has been re-validated and updated in Keystone. Independent external validation of the housing stock condition information has not been carried out.

## Arrangements for tenant engagement are effective and the Council is supporting tenants' wider needs

- 16 The Council engages widely with stakeholders in the WHQS improvement programme. At the beginning of the project, tenants were consulted on their preference for starting on the internal or external works. Tenants voted to complete the internal works first, which started in September 2012. Our telephone survey showed that 56% of respondents recalled the Council telling them about WHQS works and 64% felt they were involved in the design or specification of improvement works. During our fieldwork, we found that tenants were given considerable choice on options for new kitchens and bathrooms.
- 17 Fifty-eight per cent of the tenants we spoke to feel the Council listens to their views on their home. Tenant feedback during the early stages of the WHQS programme prompted the Council to employ more Tenant Liaison Officers to support tenants

daily during WHQS works. Tenants can provide feedback to the Council on the WHQS programme through various channels:

- Tenant feedback is provided from the day-to-day repairs satisfaction feedback forms;
  - phone texting repairs feedback service;
  - online comments facility on the Council's website;
  - The housing section of the Council's website provides a convenient way for residents to provide feedback to the Council;
  - The complaints procedure is publicised on the Council website and resulting statistics are centrally monitored and reported to members; and
  - Housing staff also attend local estate events to promote the housing service and speak to members of the public. This includes speaking to non-tenants such as Right to Buy owners and leaseholders, who often form most of the people living on an estate.
- 18 The Council delivers a newsletter twice a year to all tenants' homes to provide information on the Housing service and includes updates on the WHQS programme.
- 19 The Council gathers a range of survey data to measure tenant satisfaction. In August 2016, the Council undertook a Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) on the Housing Service. Over 3,700 tenants were invited to take part and 37% (1,395 tenants) responded. The results of the survey showed satisfaction was highest for 'the neighbourhood as a place to live' and 'rent as value for money'. When we spoke to Council officers we were advised another STAR survey will be carried out in the future to measure progress, but it is unclear when this will be. Tenants are also asked to complete a satisfaction survey following completion of WHQS works, which is used to capture feedback and monitor contractor performance.
- 20 For some years, the Housing service (with the support of WHQS contractors) has run the very successful annual "Festivale" family fun and information event. Over 500 people attend each year to take part in games, activities and visit displays from the Housing Service. The Council staff we spoke to were all very supportive and enthusiastic of this event as a way of engaging with difficult to reach groups such as younger people. At the 2017 Festivale, a tenant engagement questionnaire was used to gather feedback from over 50 tenants on the draft tenant engagement strategy.
- 21 The Council has well established mechanisms for formal tenant consultation. This includes tenant groups and nine residents' associations. Council officers including the Head of Housing regularly meet with the following groups to consult and gain feedback from tenants:
- Tenant Working Group – 15 tenants whose members are individuals from the various sub groups. The Tenant Working Group monitors and coordinates the actions of the sub groups.

- Quality and Design Forum (Sub Group) – six tenants who oversee the WHQS programme and meet with contractors to monitor performance.
  - Sheltered Housing Forum (Sub Group) – meetings are held on a rolling programme at each of the five sheltered housing complexes in the Council.
  - Overview and Scrutiny - four tenants are co-opted onto the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee to review performance and consider new proposals.
- 22 The Council has effective arrangements for tenants to be engaged in monitoring and challenging the Council's performance. The six tenants on the Quality and Design Forum hold quarterly meetings and focus on monitoring and challenging the performance of contractors. The Tenant Working Group meets every three months. Part of the group's remit includes reviewing and monitoring the performance of the Housing Service. The four tenants co-opted onto the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee receive quarterly updates on performance and progress.
- 23 The Council is actively developing new approaches to support tenants' wider needs rather than just housing management, repairs and maintenance. In 2015, the Council set up a Community Investment Team to engage with tenants and strengthen communities. The focus of the team is to support tenants into employment and provide opportunities to gain qualifications and training. In March 2018, the team held an 'employability boot camp' for tenants who were long term unemployed and not in training. The feedback of course attendees was very positive. The team also launched the Timebanking project in October 2017. This project aims to increase volunteering amongst tenants, improve skills and strengthen community spirit. Tenants take part in volunteering activities and are rewarded with credits for leisure facilities. To date, nearly 200 tenants have participated in this project and 20 external organisations are signed up to the scheme.
- 24 Community Investment Officers are working with young tenants and their families to involve them in the football 'Kicks' project. The project aims to create safer, stronger and more resilient communities through the development of young people's potential. The officers we spoke to informed us the project has resulted in a large reduction in anti-social behaviour in Barry in the last year. It has supported over two hundred young people aged 13 to 19 years old, some of whom are not engaged in physical activity, to get involved in weekly football sessions. In the next two years, the 'Barry Kicks' project aims to support a total of five hundred young men and women from across the local area, to develop their leadership and teamwork skills, as well as their confidence.
- 25 The Community Investment Team will work with tenants to deliver a range of environmental and estate projects over the next three years. The Council has allocated a budget of £2 million each year to complete the improvement works, which are outside the scope of the WHQS programme. Tenant engagement is a key principle in this work so tenants are involved in agreeing and developing the

plan of works for each estate. For example, during the engagement with tenants on the Buttrils estate in Barry the consultation helped develop a programme that includes changes to the layout of estate, improved parking, fencing, CCTV and upgrades to communal areas and the exterior of buildings.

## Most tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the quality of their homes and the housing service, but some feel their homes are damp and there is scope to review the telephone system for reporting repairs

- 26 Our telephone survey of tenants showed that most respondents are generally satisfied with the quality of the housing service:
- seventy-eight per cent of the tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the improvement works the Council has carried out to their homes;
  - seventy-four per cent of the tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the housing services they receive;
  - eighty-three per cent of the tenants we spoke to were satisfied with the condition of their kitchen;
  - eighty per cent of the tenants we spoke to were satisfied with the condition of their bathroom; and
  - eighty-four per cent of the tenants we spoke to thought that their neighbourhood is a good place to live.
- 27 Most of the tenants we spoke to during the focus groups we held also value the housing service. Many commented on the high quality of customer service provided by most housing staff. There was a general view that over the past five years, the Housing service has improved and there is now a much greater focus on the quality of work carried out. Tenants were grateful to still have what they regarded as a generally good service for carrying out repairs by the Council's own directly employed staff.
- 28 The satisfaction data from the Council's 2016 STAR survey shows most tenants are satisfied with the Housing service, quality of their home and feel they are listened to. The STAR results are benchmarked against comparable national data in the same financial year to show the performance relative to other landlords. The results are shown below:
- eighty-three per cent of tenants were satisfied with the quality of their home – benchmarked in the middle upper quartile;
  - eighty-one per cent of tenants were satisfied with the overall service – benchmarked in the middle lower quartile; and
  - sixty-nine per cent of tenants were satisfied that views were listened to and acted upon – benchmarked in the middle upper quartile of results.

- 29 The results for tenant satisfaction with WHQS works are positive. Following completion of WHQS works, tenants are sent a survey to complete to give feedback and provide a score of one to ten (ten being exceptionally satisfied) for satisfaction. The areas covered by the survey are: safety measures; communication; overall process; quality of work; and the overall service. An average is taken to give an overall score out of ten for each property. The Council sets a challenging target of eight out of ten to identify tenants who are classed as satisfied.
- In 2017-18, 67% of the 517 tenants who responded were satisfied; and
  - in 2016-17, 72% of the 326 respondents were satisfied.
- 30 The Council has also analysed its performance to consider the reasons for any tenant dissatisfaction. The 2017-18 end of year performance report to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee identified two main factors that had a negative impact on tenant satisfaction: external works taking a long time to complete from the tenants' perspective and poor communication between contractors and tenants. The Council addressed this with contractors, which resulted in the removal of work from three contractors and withholding payments for works that were not fully completed.
- 31 Another challenge for the Council was some large national firms sub-contracting works that in some instances resulted in poor workmanship. The Council responded to poor performance by insisting standards improved or the contract would be terminated. This happened for two of the main contractors who failed to improve.
- 32 Our telephone survey showed that 27% of the tenants we spoke to felt they had problems with damp in their home. Most of these tenants (72% of the respondents) had reported the damp to the Council where the main way of identifying it was visible mould in the property (71% of cases). We have conducted a similar survey in the last 12 months at all 11 councils that retained their housing stock and this issue is a significant problem elsewhere in Wales. Damp and condensation issues are a complex problem, and without conducting a full house survey we cannot determine the reasons for this. During our fieldwork some of the staff and tenants we spoke to felt there are damp issues in some homes, which previously had cavity wall insulation installed that has now failed. Nevertheless, a breakdown of the respondents in our survey shows the WHQS works have had a positive impact on damp in properties. Respondents reported damp in 37% of non-compliant properties, 28% of compliant properties and 16% of properties classed as acceptable fails.
- 33 The Council has a process for investigating damp but not all tenants are satisfied with the outcome. The Council investigates reports of damp to identify the reason, which may in some cases be due to tenant lifestyle and issues with condensation. Our conversations with tenants in focus groups suggests the Council is investigating complaints for damp but the problem is not usually resolved to the tenants' satisfaction.

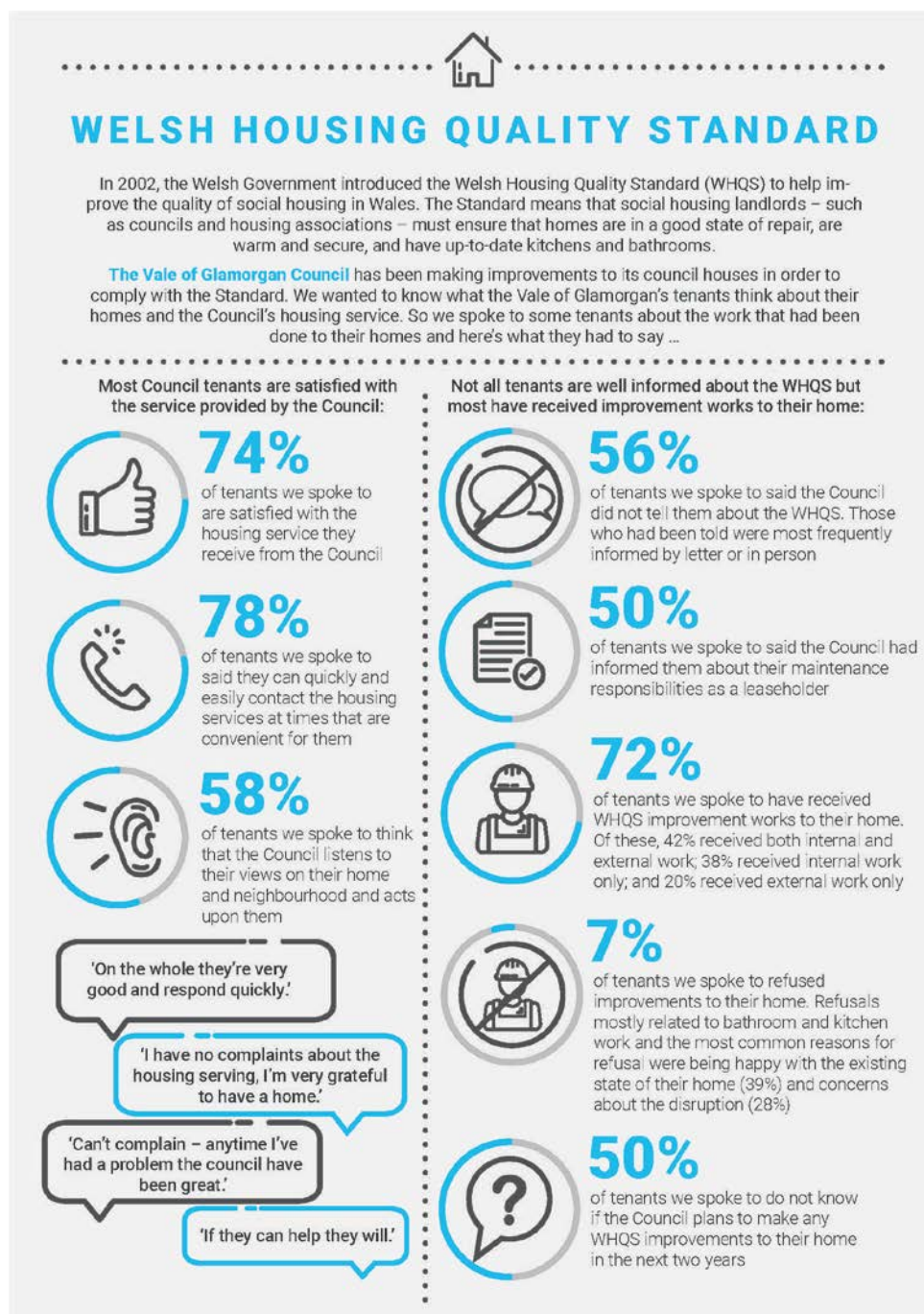
- 34 Most tenants we spoke to in our phone survey felt their homes were warm enough in winter, but 27% did not. The main reason for not being able to heat their home in winter was draft proofing (38% of the respondents). The Council has relatively few homes (37 out of 3,868) which do not meet the WHQS standard for warmth (SAP 65<sup>5</sup> or above rating). Over recent years, the Council has invested in a range of new approaches, such as external wall insulation, to help overcome the problem of cold homes. The Council is investing additional resources in future years to address the issue of the remaining homes that do not meet the WHQS standard for warmth.
- 35 Most tenants we spoke to are satisfied that they can easily contact the Housing service, but there are concerns with the telephone process of reporting repairs. Most of the tenants we spoke to in our telephone survey (78% of all respondents) thought they could easily and quickly contact the Housing Service at a time that was convenient to them. However, when we held our focus groups many tenants informed us they were not satisfied with the process for reporting repairs via the generic contact centre 'Call One Vale'. Common problems identified by focus group participants were the length of time taken to navigate through the automated phone system to report a repair, the lack of technical knowledge of contact centre staff and the frequent errors by the Contact centre in correctly reporting repairs to the Housing service staff. These issues were acknowledged by some of the Council staff that we spoke to during our review who informed us the Council is looking into introducing an online system for reporting day to day repairs.

<sup>5</sup> SAP 65. 2015. WHQS states the Welsh Government vision that 'all households in Wales... shall have the opportunity to live in good quality homes that are adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated.' The target energy rating to comply with the WHQS is a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of 65.

# Appendix 1

## Infographic summarising the key findings from the completed surveys

Exhibit 2: housing service infographic





.....  
**Most tenants are happy with the condition of their homes  
and the WHQS improvements the Council has made:**



**78%**

of tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the improvement works the Council has carried out on their home



**59%**

of those we spoke to said the Council completed the improvement works within the specified timescale



**64%**

of tenants we spoke to were involved in the design or specification of some of the improvement works to their home



**83%**

of tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the overall condition of their kitchen



**80%**

of tenants we spoke to are satisfied with the overall condition of their bathroom



**67%**

of tenants we spoke to are satisfied with how the outside of their home looks



**84%**

of tenants we spoke to are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

'The improvements are great.'

'All good – the outside took ages but we are warmer and our bills have gone down.'

'I'm very happy with the works, they've been wonderful.'

'I'm delighted to have a nice modern kitchen.'

.....  
**Most tenants find their homes warm enough in winter  
but some told us they had problems with damp:**



**27%**

of tenants we spoke to find it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter. Draught proofing was the most common reason cited



**27%**

of tenants we spoke to had experienced problems with damp in their home. In most cases, tenants identified the damp through visible mould and had informed the Council of the problem



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Read the full report on the Vale of Glamorgan Council's housing service on our website: [www.audit.wales](http://www.audit.wales)

This survey was delivered as telephone interviews by Strategic Research and Insight from 30 April to 11 May 2018. We spoke to 300 tenants from across the county. This represents around 8% of all council tenant households.

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