



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Cymru

What you need to know about Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023



What you need to know about Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Cymru

The following briefing provides an overview of some of the key components currently being consulted on by the Welsh Government as it continues to develop the future standard for housing in Wales. In this briefing, we have focussed in particular on parts of the standard that are completely new and are mainly linked to the sustainability credentials held within the new standard.

Background

Since the early 2000's the quality of social and affordable housing in Wales has been on a transformative journey. The creation of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) was introduced in 2002 with an initial deadline of 2012 but progress was initially hampered by variations in how the standard was interpreted and a lack of monitoring data. This saw the deadline change to 2020, and with the impact of the pandemic this then moved to 2021. By this point 99% of social housing in Wales met the standard.

WHQS 2023

The new iteration of WHQS includes 8 different components. To meet the standard homes must be:

- In a good state of repair
- Be safe and secure
- Are affordable to heat and have minimal environmental impact
- Have up-to-date kitchen and utility area
- Have an up-to-date bathroom
- Are comfortable and promote wellbeing
- Have a suitable garden
- Have an attractive outside space

An evolution in standards

For the first time WHQS now includes a number of environmental and comfort-based elements. In this section we'll consider these in more detail but a timeline is provided below as an initial overview:

2023 -----

- Water efficiency
- Flooring
- Biodiversity

2026 -----

- Whole stock assessment
- Low carbon heat
- Minimise noise
- Bike & recycling storage
- Water butts

2029 -----

- Fabric first measures

2031 -----

- Additional fabric first measures
- Energy storage/generation

2033 -----

- EPC A & EIR 92
- Ventilation
- Net zero stock



One of the main aspects of the new standard are the measures to promote affordable warmth. **A minimum of EPC A** will need to be achieved on existing homes so that homes are economical to run in normal weather conditions. **This will need to also achieve an EIR of 92**, in-line with reducing carbon emissions from homes.

Landlords will need to undertake a whole-stock assessment and produce target energy pathways for homes under their management/ownership. Although not prescriptive, the following 4 step approach is suggested:

1. Install fabric first measures to achieve a high EPC C.
2. Complete additional fabric first measures alongside energy generation and storage systems to achieve EPC B.
3. Install a low-carbon heat source
4. Net Zero for housing stock **Important to note** here that the standard suggests Net Zero should apply to a landlord's stock when considered as a whole, rather than individual properties. In theory this could mean that landlords could feasibly offset poorly performing homes with those that are more environmentally friendly.

On water efficiency landlords will be expected to use modern components and aeration systems to increase efficiency. In addition to the installation of water butts.

Ventilation measures specify mechanical ventilation, particularly in kitchens and bathrooms to aid heat capture.

Whilst **flooring** has always been a feature of the standard in kitchens and bathrooms from a health and safety perspective, WHQS 2023 requires that suitable floor covers be installed at the change of tenancy in all habitable rooms.

The standard sets out a requirement to **minimise noise** travelling between homes and from external sources, such as traffic/road noise.

External lockable **storage for bikes** equal to the number of bedrooms in each home will be required alongside suitable storage for **recycling containers**.

The biodiversity requirement of the standard could be satisfied by a wide variety of activity so landlords will be asked to consider how to achieve this by for example, installing bird boxes, planting pollinator friendly plants and reducing grass cutting to encourage wildlife.

Assessment and compliance

The deadline for achieving WHQS 2023 is set at 2033. Landlords will need to make progress on three activities over the shorter term by:

- Estimating the initial investment needed to achieve the standard
- Complete a tenant consultation on the draft programme of works
- Prepare and submit a compliance policy to the Welsh Government

Grading

In general homes will have a pass or fail against each element – everything must be passed to achieve the standard

A conditional pass will be permissible where work cannot be completed due to heritage considerations or physical constraints

Temporary fail can be used where landlords can't make changes due to circumstances outside of their control e.g tenant refusal, or works already programmed during later years

There's an ongoing dialogue around reason codes, recognising that these could be created as new circumstances arise.

Compliance policy

All landlords will need to create and maintain a compliance policy to include:

- Approach to WHQS – going through each element setting out the rationale in relation to local context and available resources
- The kind of database/management software being used in terms of asset management
- How tenants have been engaged in informing how landlords meet the standard
- Independent verification - Landlords will need to develop means to independently verify their compliance with the standard – setting out how the party is independent, links to data capture and monitoring etc. that gets reviewed every 2 years.
- Compliance statement – A statement issued at point of re-letting setting out benefits of the standard, how the home meets it, or doesn't and why/what will be done etc. in a format tenant will be able to understand.

- Explanatory statements will be needed for elements not explicitly measured but included in the standard, namely:
 - Attractive outside space
 - Biodiversity
 - Broadband
- Cost prohibitive activity with landlords setting out their rationale
- How carbon considerations (both embodied and operational) have been factored into any decisions around demolition or redevelopment
- How community benefits will be provided, monitored and evaluated

Lastly...

As part of the Task and Finish group supporting the Welsh Government to shape and finalise the standard we'll continue to advocate on behalf of members to help ensure the standard is ambitious yet achievable in practice.

If you would like to contribute your views to help form both our consultation response, or our work on this group, please contact matthew.dicks@cih.org

Interplay with other standards

Secure by design is used as the bar to understand if a home has a reasonable level of security within the standard.

And the Lifetime homes standard requirements must be properly considered and implemented if achievable alongside a requirement for housing bodies to collect data on the need for wheelchair accessible housing

