

Welsh Housing Quality Standard: Ministerial Task Force

Purpose

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) was introduced in 2002 to improve the quality of social housing. It set a minimum standard for all homes provided by local authorities and housing associations. The target date for all social housing to meet the standard was 2012.

The Standard has been instrumental in improving social housing but the Auditor General's report (Progress in delivering the Welsh Quality Housing Standard – 2012) confirmed that the 2012 target will not be met. According to landlords' projections, 98 per cent of housing association owned homes and 51 per cent of local authority owned homes (79 per cent of all social housing) will meet the Standard by 2017. The majority of homes that will not meet the Standard by 2017 are owned by local authorities that have retained ownership of their housing stock.

The White Paper 'Homes for Wales' published in May 2012 reaffirmed the Welsh Government's commitment to the Standard and that all social landlords must meet it by 2020. Three local authorities are currently unable to produce acceptable business plans to meet this date and this was considered of such importance to warrant the establishment of a Ministerial Task Force. Its main purpose will be to help these three local authorities to identify options and produce a costed plan to meet the Standard by 2020.

Remit and Scope

The output of the Task Force is a report that recommends clearly and concisely to the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage how the three local authorities will meet the Standard by 2020 and what action has been agreed with the local authorities individually and collaboratively to enable that to happen. This will include information on the barriers they face

an acceptable timeframe and to co-ordinate collaborative approaches to overcoming them.

The group, made up housing specialists and professionals, will critically consider and challenge potential governance models and financial plan options.

Aim and Objectives

The Task Force will:

1. Understand the barriers to the achievement of the WHQS by 2020 for the three local authorities.
2. Identify the boundaries within which solutions can be shaped and consider the implications of current policy environment, in particular the Rent Policy changes and Housing Revenue Account Subsidy reform.
3. Work collaboratively with them to explore all potential options and alternative financial and governance models to achieve the Standard, calling on expert help as required.
4. Identify and recommend specific strategies appropriate to each local authority to ensure that the Standard is met by 2020.
5. Identify any other major issues relevant to the achievement of the Standard by these local authorities and make recommendations as appropriate.

The Taskforce will need to work jointly and collaboratively with the local authorities, key partners and the Welsh Government. It will also be able to draw on technical and expert help and will have a budget available to support this advice.

The first meeting of the Task Force will determine the work programme, timetable and key milestones to achieve its aims.

The Task Force will be time limited, meeting for a maximum period of 9 months. It will provide report regularly to the Minister on progress, issues and findings.

Membership

The initial membership comprises:

Peter McHugh	Denbighshire County Council
Mike Owen	Merthyr Valleys Homes
Kathleen Kelly	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Bob Smith	Cardiff University
Keith Edwards	Chartered Institute of Housing (Cymru)
Kath Palmer	Welsh Government (Housing Directorate)
Chris O'Meara (Chair)	Cadwyn Housing Association

The Task Force will also be able co-opt additional members when necessary and when appropriate to the matter under discussion. Membership will be non-renumerated.

Meeting Frequency

Initially the Task Force will meet every four weeks with flexibility to vary the frequency as circumstances dictate.

Meeting dates will be agreed by the Task Force in advance. The initial meeting will be in Cardiff on 5 September.