

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**HEALTH, CARE AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**8<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

**REPORT AUTHOR:** County Councillor James Evans  
Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Housing and  
Public Protection

**SUBJECT:** Damp and Thermal Comfort Strategies for Powys

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**REPORT FOR:** Discussion and Information

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**1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposal to improve the strategic and operational approach to dealing with damp in, and improving further the thermal comfort of, Powys County Council's HRA housing stock. The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider these approaches, which have an increased focus on tenants' health and alleviating fuel poverty.

**2. Proposal**

- 2.1 These measures are proposed as part of a vision to develop a 'WHQS Plus' programme, and address WHQS 'acceptable fails'. They are proposed ahead of a more comprehensive asset management strategy to be produced later next year.
- 2.2 The WHQS Compliance Policy sets out the approach to achieving WHQS compliance, and the council will complete its targeted programme of component replacement works by December 2018. The WHQS system allows landlords to declare that a property has 'acceptable fails', where a tenant refuses the work or where a solution is technically difficult, or too expensive to achieve. Powys has a large number of acceptable fails for energy efficiency, given that the county has high numbers of properties in off gas areas, or on mains or bottled Liquid Petroleum Gas systems.
- 2.3 It has been found during the WHQS programmes, and following requests from tenant groups and members to solve isolated long term damp or heating issues, it has become clear measures are required beyond replacing the building components.
- 2.4 Furthermore, a telephone survey conducted by Welsh Audit Office, as part of their study into the council's achievement of the WHQS in the spring of 2018, revealed that while 77% of tenants felt they had no problems with damp or condensation, 23% were concerned. Similarly, 23% of residents found it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable

level in the winter. Whilst these results are typical for a local authority with an ageing housing stock, there is a need to establish why these concerns remain, and to address them. These strategies aim to provide a framework to do that, to work in partnership with Heart of Wales Property Services and health services, so that individual cases are referred to the council for investigation.

- 2.5 The damp strategy focuses on ensuring there is detailed investigation to establish the type of damp, and its true cause i.e. could it be contributed by unseen as well as visible building faults. This will address concerns expressed by tenant groups that there is too much reliance on the cause being condensation caused by tenant lifestyles.
- 2.6 Rising fuel prices are causing difficulties for some tenants, even where modern heating systems are fitted. Historic building faults, such poorly installed or deterioration of heating systems and insulation schemes also contribute to problems within the housing stock. The measures contained in the Thermal Comfort Strategy relate to the management of requests, consideration of tenants' health and vulnerabilities, as well technical solutions.
- 2.6 The thermal comfort and damp strategies focus on considering the residents age, health and lifestyle profile, and tailoring solutions to meet their needs. The proposals also:
- **Consider people.** Older persons, or other ages 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 discharge corporate parenting and duty of care responsibilities we need to ensure the building and its services are not contributing to this. The strategies provide a means to support residents at greatest risk, to ensure appropriate solutions can be found.
  - **Consider the building as a whole.** For damp issues this is looking 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 known persistent damp issues, or complaints about thermal comfort and running costs are small. These are resolved in isolation. However, trends are developing in certain streets of increased problems, indicating more widespread investigations and programmes of work will be required.
- 2.7 These strategies will be consulted with the Response Repairs Sub Group, and Investing in Homes Sub Group in November, and the Tenant

Scrutiny Panel in December. Following this engagement full proposals will be presented to the Cabinet in the New Year.

2.8 Delivery of these strategies will be over seen by the HRA project board.

### **3. Finance**

- 3.1 In anticipation of the measures outlined in the strategies, £200k per annum has been set aside for additional measures such as Photovoltaic or Solar Panels to roofs. A further £500k per year is put aside for Damp alleviation works. These sums are included in the HRA Business Plan, accepted by the Welsh Government. Tackling and pro-actively preventing damp will reduce the likelihood of residents withholding rent. Easing residents fuel bills will increase their ability to pay their rent.
- 3.2 Proposals for investment will be reviewed arising from investigations that have taken place, and feedback from residents. These will be presented as part of the annual budget setting process for the Council, reported to Cabinet later in 2018.

### **4 Views of the Scrutiny Committee**

- 4.1 The views of the Heath, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee are sought on the proposed Damp and Thermal Comfort Strategies.

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### **Appendix 1 – Damp Strategy**

### **Appendix 2 – Thermal Comfort Strategy**