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*Achieving and  
Maintaining the  
Carmarthenshire  
Homes' Standard +*

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*Compliance Policy  
Appendix F*

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February 2019

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## 1. The purpose....

- 1.1. The purpose of this document is to confirm our approach in achieving and maintaining (and further improving) the Carmarthenshire Homes' Standard (CHS). It takes account of the guidance produced by the Welsh Government in 2015 in terms of compliance and verification.

## 2. The context....

- 2.1. Carmarthenshire has been committed to achieving the CHS by providing homes for council tenants that are modern, safe, fuel efficient, situated in well maintained neighbourhoods and are well managed.
- 2.2. The CHS is an amended version of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard that has been defined by the tenants themselves. In 2006, the Council started its ambitious programme to achieve the CHS by the end of 2015.
- 2.3. We are pleased to say that we have delivered this programme, on time, to homes where tenants have agreed to have the work carried out. Even though these programmes have been delivered, this does not mean the end of the CHS. There remains much more to do.
- 2.4. During 2015, we introduced the concept of the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus (CHS+), building on the success of the CHS and extending to ensure we maintain and improve on what has been achieved.
- 2.5. We have acknowledged the importance of strategic asset management in providing the foundation for our investment plans, as well as the central role of supporting tenants and residents in everything we do, is critical to the delivery of the plan. The 2019/22 business plan covers two key themes that have been identified in terms of future investment. These are:

**1. THEME 1- Investing in our Homes' and the Environment.**

**2. THEME 2 - Providing more homes.**

### 3. Our approach to achieving and maintaining the CHS+ in the future

3.1. The following table will confirm our approach in achieving and maintaining (and improving) the CHS+ in the future. Where appropriate, it will confirm policy decisions that have already been made e.g. through documents like our CHS+ Business Plan 2018-21. It will also identify any current gaps, and how they will be addressed, to deliver the standard in the future.

<p><b><i>What is our policy statement?</i></b></p>	<p>In 2015 we achieved the CHS+ to homes where tenants have agreed to have work completed - well before WG’s target of 2020. This is in line with our agreed assumptions that the standard of our homes will be to the CHS+; and replacement programmes will be based on condition, not time.</p> <p>Tenants tell us that getting repairs done on time and maintaining homes to a good standard is important to them. Maintaining the standard is now a statutory duty, and the Council has made a commitment to achieve and maintain the CHS, which states that all homes will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in a good state of repair;</li> <li>• free from damp;</li> <li>• free from significant condensation;</li> <li>• structurally stable;</li> <li>• in safe and attractive environments;</li> <li>• suitable for the household; and</li> <li>• managed to the CHS+</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>How have we developed the approach?</i></b></p>	<p>The commitment and support of our tenants’ and Members’ continues to be important to us to ensure that we maintain and improve on the CHS+ going forward.</p> <p>Tenant and community engagement has always underpinned the delivery of the CHS+, but we want to do more. We want to get better by engaging as widely as possible and maximising opportunities to help build stronger communities.</p> <p>Tenants and stakeholders have been consulted through the Tenant Consultative Forum and by face to face interviews and their views taken into account in preparing this Plan. The Plan is updated annually taking into account these views, the latest stock condition information, updated financial information, WG Guidance and any revised Council policies.</p> <p>All actions in this Plan will be monitored every two months by the CHS+ Steering Group. This group provides strategic direction and corporate leadership to ensure progress is made on the initiatives in the Plan. The CHS+ Steering Group is also responsible for monitoring progress, reviewing and managing the overall 30 year financial plan that supports our planned investment.</p>

During 2018/19 we have continued to engage with tenants and other stakeholders in a number of ways. One of the key questions we asked during our Home Checker visit was “How happy are you with the service we provide?”

From carrying out this initial work on Home Checker we will:

- Continue with Home Checker and look at ways to improve how we capture data from the visits;
- Further improve our approach to preventative maintenance in next year’s CHS+ Business Plan;
- Develop and encourage tenants to take a proactive approach in maintaining their homes to a high standard;
- Make our services more effective and responsive by tailoring them more closely to the needs of our tenants;
- Help more tenants with a range of issues including saving money on fuel bills, budgeting and financial assistance and housing support; and
- Further develop our approach to tenant feedback in order that we analyse trends over time.

The commitment and support of our tenants’ and Members’ continues to be important to us to ensure that we maintain and improve on the CHS+ in the future.

Tenant and community engagement has always underpinned the delivery of the CHS+, but we want to do more. We want to get better by engaging as widely as possible and maximising opportunities to help build stronger communities.

We asked TPAS Cymru to conduct an independent report into tenant participation and involvement with our tenants. As a result, we identified there was a lack of diversity and a low number of tenants who engage with tenant networks. These issues are not unique to Carmarthenshire and can be demonstrated across Wales.

We also believe we should give our tenants the opportunity to influence decisions about their homes, the area they live and ensure the services they receive achieve value for money. Our vision is:-

*“To make it easy and inviting for tenants to get involved in shaping strategic decisions and improve services through meaningful involvement by ensuring residents have the relevant skills”.*

**How are we interpreting the CHS+, and what have we**

In order that our vision for participation fully reflects the work we undertake and for us to be consistent with other social landlords, we believe our vision should be set out along the following key principles:

Improving communities – Ensuring that our communities are positive places to live by fostering a sense of community and ensuring that estates are well maintained;

**done to  
achieve it?**

Improving services – Ensuring that services delivered by us are those that tenants wish to receive, and that these are delivered to the highest standards;  
Improving accountability – Ensuring that the views of our tenants are heard when decisions are made at all levels, and that these decisions are communicated to tenants in a transparent manner; and  
Improving resident skills – Ensuring that tenants have the relevant skills to take part in managing their homes and providing broader support to tenants within the community to develop their skills.

We have reviewed the participation techniques we currently use, and it showed that newsletters are by far the most popular means of communication for tenants. There are three further methods of participation that we can use to improve the way that tenant participation is undertaken. These are:

More use single issue meetings;  
Increased use of digital participation; and  
Strengthening challenge and responsibility.

We aim to deliver on these principles by introducing the following new activities:

Changing the current structures of tenant involvement to encourage more involvement from under-represented groups;  
Improving systems for gathering and acting on tenant feedback;  
Using ‘Planning for Real’ as a method of engagement and consultation on estate issues;  
Increasing the use of digital services to reach out to under-represented groups and to those who do not want to attend meetings;  
Putting forward proposals for a challenge panel for our tenants;  
Holding single issue meetings; and  
Surveying our tenants (STAR Survey) to establish baseline information, and re-survey every three years and periodically on single issues.

As well as giving their views on general engagement activities, tenants and residents have also highlighted other priorities in terms of supporting them. They have told us that they would like us to focus on providing more advice and support for them with bills and benefits that will help them to maintain their homes. We will be addressing these priorities in a number of areas.

**Further  
Development  
and new  
opportunities**

**Roll out of Home Checker visits** - In 2018/19 we carried out basic checks to all Council homes (where we gained access) through servicing contractors, repair visits and tenancy support calls. As a result of these visits about 5% of homes were identified as requiring a more in-depth visit by a housing officer.

Some issues identified and attended to in terms of preventative maintenance, included:

- Leaking showers;
- Loose tiles and guttering;
- Broken windows;

- Window locks and handles not working;
- Plugs and sockets loose;
- Toilet leaks;
- Extractor fans not working;
- Damp; and
- Condensation.

The continuation of our Home Checker visits will enable us to identify specifically what help tenants want, such as support with Universal Credit and household budget management. This will enable us to plan for the future and identify preventative maintenance and component failure.

**Health and Safety – approach to fire management** – We have now further reviewed the fire risk assessments on all of our purpose built blocks of flats, including sheltered schemes. For each block of flats, where we have identified improvements to be made and an action plan has been developed. The risk assessments are monitored by the ‘Investing in our Homes’ Group.

**Investing in sheltered housing** – During 2018/19 we assessed the current standards and condition of our sheltered housing schemes and started a pilot programme of upgrading. We will also continue our annual sheltered housing scheme programme of; Communal boiler replacement, maintaining and servicing lifts, upgrading aerial and satellite infrastructures and transferring lifelines to our Telecare service

**Assisting with regeneration plans** – The Council has been working with local residents, and other key stakeholders, to develop a masterplan for the potential regeneration of the Station Road area in the Tyisha ward, Llanelli. We have adopted the “Planning for Real” approach, which is a nationally recognised community planning process. From this information we have been developing our masterplan for the area, and delivery options, which will be presented to the community in the spring 2019.

**Retrofitting our existing housing stock with low carbon technology** – We are working with the Welsh School of Architecture at Cardiff University on a small number of our homes. The ‘systems-based approach’ combines renewable energy supply, energy storage and energy demand reduction technologies creating a holistic approach to retrofitting. We shall be analysing the results of the installation of low carbon technology in terms of costs, benefits to tenants and ease of use.

**Homes as Power Stations** – We want to maximise the impact of the Swansea Bay City Region Deal ‘Delivering Homes as Power Stations’ project which will; carry out an extensive new house build and retrofit programme, develop and seek to attract new sector supply chains help to generate sustainable and affordable homes and address fuel and focus on smart technologies. We see this as a huge opportunity for Carmarthenshire and are currently working up a detailed business plan to confirm what delivery will look like, across tenures, over the next five years.

*What has been achieved to date?*

The following table sets out our achievement of meeting the CHS+ in 2015 by components, together with the annual programme to maintain compliance of the CHS+.

### WHQS Compliance by Component



### 2018/19 main achievements:

- Over £19m spent to maintain the CHS+ in tenants' homes;
- Over 240 additional affordable homes delivered during our third year of delivery;
- Over 530 adaptations completed, with over £1m being invested to ensure tenants' homes meet their needs;
- Over £285,000 spent on 35 Environmental Improvement Projects (plus £60,000 on improving garage plots, demolishing garages, clearing areas and creating car parking spaces);
- Managed improvements and lettings of 900 homes, including new homes added to our stock;
- Started development on two sites for 48 new affordable homes in Llanelli and Pembrey;
- Continued our time-banking initiative, Spice, with over 57,970 of total volunteer hours being given. Over 1,800 tenants and their family members took part;
- Housed over 40 households who have specific needs through our Accessible Housing Register (AHR);
- Introduced a Choice Based Letting scheme, Canfod Cartref, that gave tenants more choice and which will make tenancies more sustainable ;
- The findings of our Health Impact Study with Swansea University showed the positive impact on health of investing over £200m in tenants homes since 2007. This investment also brings social, economic and environmental benefits for all;
- Shortlisted for CIH Cymru Wales Housing awards recognising our work on improving tenants' homes;
- Over 250 people attended 23 comprehensive consultation events using "Planning for Real" to engage with residents of Tyisha ward in Llanelli;
- Taken on three apprentices in Property Maintenance;
- Re-let the gas servicing contract for tenant homes;
- Set up a new minor works framework with up to date Schedules of Rates to ensure value for money for housing repairs; and



- Started to realign our Property Maintenance section to improve arrangements for future lettings and maintenance of Council homes.

**What have been the wider benefits of delivering the CHS+?**

**The Council is committed to:**

- Contributing to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the wider community;
- Asking tenderers to deliver community benefits in our tendering activities through the delivery of the contracts or frameworks awarded;
- Maximising the value for every pound we spend, applying a community benefits approach to any tender valued over £1million; and
- Capturing and recording community benefits utilising WG’s community benefits measurement tool.

For contracts completed in 2017/18, three contractors were used through the South West Wales Contractors Framework. Approximately £1.8m of CHS+ works were carried out in total, achieving the following results:

- For every £1 spent, £1.78 was reinvested into the Welsh economy;
- 75% of the total expenditure was spent on businesses based in Wales
- £43,777 was contributed to the Welsh economy in the form of cash donations
- £18,025 was contributed to the Welsh economy in the form of in-kind donations of labour, goods and services during the period covered by this submission
- 14 people were hired during this period who were previously unemployed, and who will continue to be employed;
- Over 280 weeks of training was provided, including:
  - 7 apprenticeships started and over 122 weeks carried out; and
  - 6 traineeships completed amounting to over 112 weeks in total.
  - 3 work experience / internship opportunities were started and completed with over 36 weeks completed in total
  - 5 work trials were completed with over 10 weeks in total

Since June 2017, Carmarthenshire County Council and Pembrokeshire County Council entered into a joint procurement shared service for a period of two years. The aim of the shared service is to deliver regional benefits and efficiencies through shared use of resources.

**How will we go about maintaining**

Where tenants have already had work completed, the emphasis will be to maintain these to CHS (+) in the future. For each of the CHS (+) components, there is an estimated lifespan built into our planning that allows us to work out the anticipated financial investment that will be needed to maintain the standard.

We have made a policy commitment, however, through the latest version of our business plan to:

- Replace components based on their condition; and
- Implement a programme of inspections to monitor the condition of homes.

Homes will be visited in advance of when components are due to need replacing to assess their condition. At this point we may decide to confirm the component life has been extended or is in need of replacing. We will inform tenants of this decision and the reasons for it.

The following table identifies the components needing inspection over the next three years to ensure they continue to meet the CHS (+):

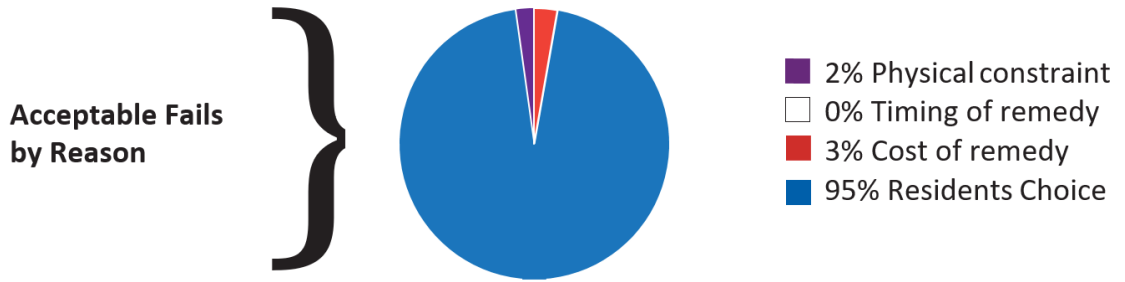
**CAPITAL SPENDING TO:**

CAPITAL SPENDING TO:-	Budget 2019/20 (£000s)	Budget 2020/21 (£000s)	Budget 2021/22 (£000s)
<b>Maintain the standard:</b>			
Internal works - kitchens, bathrooms, electrics, heating etc.	1,178	998	1,066
EWI, Render and Fascia (including gardens)	1,770	3,478	3,652
Roofing	1,292	1,086	1,140
Boiler replacements	680	563	941
Structural works - Estates and boundary walls	1,704	600	600
Voids and Major Works to homes	4,014	2,000	2,000
<b>Support Tenant and Residents:</b>			
Sheltered Scheme Investment (communal boilers)	499	714	0
Sheltered Scheme Investment	1,500	3,000	3,000
Adaptations	1,700	1,500	1,500
Environmental works	303	309	309
<b>Provide more affordable homes:</b>			
Housing Development Programme	15,452	15,952	13,000
<b>Support the delivery of CHS+:</b>			
Programme management	198	200	201
Stock condition information	150	100	100
Risk Reduction Measures	254	258	261
Sewerage treatment works & associated costs	184	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30,878</b>	<b>30,758</b>	<b>27,770</b>

There are some homes that currently fail to meet the CHS+. These are known as “acceptable fails”.

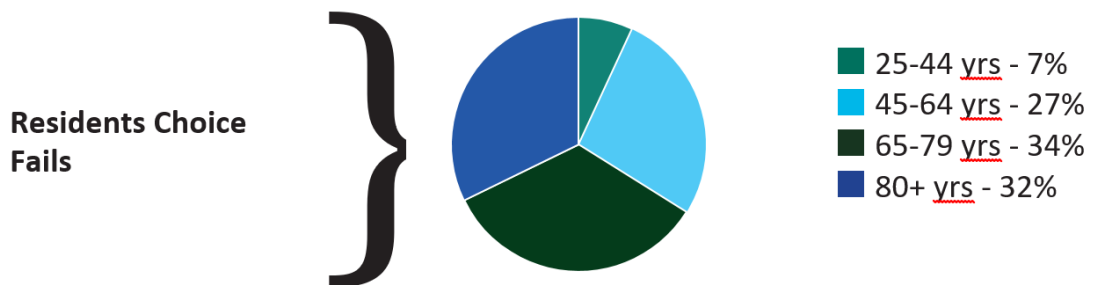
**do not currently meet the CHS+?**

Some tenants have chosen not to have the work done (Residents' choice) because they were happy with their homes, have made their own improvements or some, particularly older tenants, do not want the disruption. This is, by far, the main reason why homes do not currently meet the standard.



We know that 95% of our acceptable fails are as a result of residents' choice. The remaining 5% being the cost of the remedy or physical constraints.

We also know that 32% of the residents who chose not to have the CHS+ works completed are aged 80 or over and a further 34% are between the age of 65 and 79.



**For homes where part or some of the work has previously been declined we will:**

- Contact tenants who have previously declined CHS+ works to discuss any issues they have and agree with them when works are to be programmed; and
- Ensure homes have the appropriate smoke alarms, heat detectors or carbon monoxide devices, and discuss with tenants how we can upgrade these to improve the fire safety within their homes.

**For empty homes where there is some or all of the CHS+ work to be completed we will:**

- Complete individual options appraisals if homes are no longer fit for purpose to determine best course of action, including considering demolishing homes, or disposing of them;
- Make sure that homes are maintained to our standards and any repairs from previous tenants have been carried out before a new tenant moves in, together with making sure gardens are clear of rubbish and safe to use;
- Bring all homes up to the CHS+, except in exceptional circumstances, such as people fleeing domestic violence, flood or fire (this list is not exhaustive);

- Ensuring every new tenant receives a home information pack, to include information on boiler inspections, asbestos advice, Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs), electrical tests, recycling and service charges if applicable; and
- Provide additional investment to bring the “back-log” of major works voids back into use.

We have recently reviewed our approach to fire safety across all our stock, and our approach to when tenants have requested not to have work carried out. We believe that it is in the best interest of tenants, and to protect our investment, that tenants will no longer have the option to decline electrical works including the installation of hard wired smoke detectors and Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors.

**For homes where we believe the above work has not been upgraded, we will:**

- Continuing our annual programme of safety checks on gas fires, and gas or oil boilers, and only replace boilers with energy-efficient condensing boilers, when defective and no longer economical to run; and
- Checking homes have the appropriate smoke alarms, heat detectors or carbon monoxide devices, and discussing with tenants how we can upgrade these;
- Gain access to ensure that the necessary works are completed; and
- Install servicing timers when we gain access (where a tenant repeatedly does not give us access), to help tenants understand and manage their responsibilities under their tenancy agreement and help us to protect the lives of tenants.

**Have we any plans to improve the CHS +?**

As has been stated our CHS(+) Business Plan takes account of supporting tenant’ and residents in their home, increasing the supply of affordable of homes as well as maintaining the standard to existing homes.

We are looking to improve the existing standards to maintain and this will need to be carried out in partnership with tenants and members.

CHS was originally set by our tenants and it is very important that any changes are driven by them, within the financial resources that are available. Examples of areas that may be considered include:

- Reviewing specification of key components e.g. bathrooms/kitchens
- Increasing technology in the home to save money; and
- Developing a different standard for older people’s accommodation to suit future needs

**How do we go about monitoring progress on the CHS+?**

As well as our reporting mechanisms to Welsh Government our CHS(+) compliance is monitored and reported through a robust governance structure that includes:

- A cross departmental Director led Steering Group
- Operational sub groups aligned to our three main themes

- A Project Working Group focusing on financial monitoring
- A Housing Services Advisory Panel consisting of tenants, members and officers; and
- A CHS+ Consultative Group

We also have a Corporate and Departmental Performance Management Framework that monitors quarterly/ monthly performance on key CHS+ measures. Measures are also reported through our Scrutiny and Improvement Plan processes.

**How do we prepare our financial plan to deliver our work programmes to maintain the standard?**

As part of the development of the annual CHS+ business plan we;

- Assess variations in forecast expenditure and income, including likely rent increases and interest payments,
- Consider emerging pressures and opportunities in consultation with service managers and tenants e.g. relating to what matters to tenants, new legislation, demographic changes and asset management priorities,
- Carry out a cost certainty exercise over three, five and 30 years (three year detailed component analysis); and
- Confirm level of investment possible in relation to our borrowing cap.

In order to make sure we are fully equipped to maintain the CHS (+) in the future we are now investing in a new HRA Business Planning model, developed by Capita Housing and Consultancy. The model is specifically designed for use with the new financing regime for local authorities with retained stock.

The model generates a full set of revenue and capital cash flows, based on the best currently available local information. It produces a range of summary tables and charts, offering flexibility in how we use it. With a relatively few number of inputs, the model will produce a full set of forecasts. More complex modelling can also be carried out if needed.

**How do we manage the stock information to inform future planning to maintain the CHS+?**

### Stock Condition

Before implementing the CHS an internal asset management database was developed to produce the programme of works. This was populated through an 80% stock condition survey and information received from major works programmes at the time. The remaining property data was modelled giving a high level of accuracy to achieve the CHS.

Managing housing assets goes beyond just investing in good repair and improvements. Asset management is also about reviewing and potentially changing the asset base to end up with the right accommodation in the right location, supported by excellent, flexible services for our tenants. It must consider quality and value for money, particularly the whole life of a home and how running costs will affect tenants.

By applying an effective asset management strategy to our 9,000 plus homes, it will also enable us to meet our legal requirement of maintaining the CHS+ in the future.

**Consequently our approach is underpinned by the following principles:**

- Carrying out regular stock condition surveys to assess condition, use and required investment;
- A planned maintenance programme achieving economies by replacing components e.g. kitchen, bathrooms etc. based on need, not time;
- A regular cyclical maintenance programme for certain components in a home e.g. heating appliances, electrical upgrades and external painting;
- A continual programme of works to meet Health and Safety requirements e.g. asbestos removal and structural repairs;
- A maintenance service to respond to unplanned failures in homes and to prevent deterioration in their condition e.g. boiler replacements;
- An efficient and effective voids repair service, helping to quicken the repairs process and save money by carrying out CHS+ works when a home becomes empty;
- A programme of environmental estate improvements that is strategically targeted;
- A basic check to all homes on an annual basis through our existing visits;
- A more in-depth visit to homes where there are potential issues in terms of condition, tenancy or welfare issues;
- Continuing to invest in adapting homes to suit the needs of tenants;
- Understanding the future investment needs for our sheltered housing stock, linking in with our Care Home development programme;
- Completing individual options appraisals if homes are no longer fit for purpose to determine the best course of action, including considering demolishing homes, or disposing of them;
- Completing options appraisals on sites that may need changing/converting into homes that can better meet housing need; and
- Delivering the targets within the Affordable Homes Delivery Plan.

**When considering the above we will:**

- Engage with tenants, stakeholders and Members using new ways of participation and challenging;
- As far as is possible, meet tenants aspirations and priorities;
- Maximise our assets and minimise liabilities;
- Seek value for money in all investment decisions and contract procurement;
- Comply with current and future regulations;
- Create good neighbourhoods for council tenants and their neighbours; and
- Provide assurance to the council's auditors and regulators that its housing service is well managed.

**We fully recognise that in order to achieve the above we must ensure that:**

- The right structures, skills, resources and capacity are in place to manage future programmes, procurement and contract management effectively;
- Robust stock condition information, data and analysis is in place to produce programmes of investment that will appropriately maintain and improve standards, as well as services to tenants;
- Our data is further enhanced and regularly validated by feedback from all programmed and cyclical repairs, and maintenance activities; and
- We complete our cost certainty exercise for our overarching 30 year financial plan.

Over the next 12 months we will be specifically focusing on ensuring that asset management resources, both people and systems, are challenged to make sure they are in the right areas for the future. Our joined-up approach will enable us to:

- Commence a rolling programme of stock condition survey to verify our cost certainty business plan, identify gaps and provide independent verification;
- Understand why work has not been completed within the stock e.g. the tenant has requested that no work be carried out; and
- Review our Asset Management Systems and Strategy to ensure all stock is fit for both current and emerging needs.

**How do we link Welsh Government reporting with our business and asset plans?**

We submit a three year Business Plan to the Welsh Government on an annual basis that reports progress on the delivery of the CHS (+). Underpinning our business plan will be our stock condition, asset management information and our 30 year financial projections.

We also provide quarterly monitoring reports on progress of the Business Plan to the Welsh Government as part of our Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) application, which is an annual grant of over £6 million to support investment in tenant homes.

Maintaining the CHS+ is now considered a medium risk by the Authority as part of its risk assessment process, and is still supported by robust governance arrangements through the Director led cross departmental Steering Group.

**How will we go about verifying progress in the future?**

**Compliance and Acceptable Fails**

Recording compliance and acceptable fails is not a simple collection of condition information for things like kitchens, bathrooms, electrics etc. It is a combination of occupancy and property condition information. Surveying of homes, collating of information, how we manage our data, and the ability to report 100% accurate information, are all data-hungry activities.



## Energy Efficiency

We have had a number of different programmes running to improve the energy efficiency of homes. These programmes have helped save tenants money on their heating costs and improve the SAP rating of our homes. The average SAP across our stock is 65 out of 100.

## Independent Verification

Whilst we believe that we are, and will continue to, accurately report compliance in achieving and maintaining the CHS+, we will also back this up with further verification by:

- Demonstrating compliance by ensuring there is a clear separation of duties between Carmarthenshire County Council staff reporting compliance and those staff responsible for delivering the CHS+;
- Using internal staff in conjunction with Internal Audit to undertake desktop reviews;
- Agreeing and commencing a sample programme of stock condition visits every year, carried out by an independent verifier;
- Asking tenants how they would like to be part of the process of verification;
- Continuing to use service reviews to assess compliance. Some data is already independently collected, e.g. boiler inspections, EPC's and electrical tests; and
- Introducing Home Information packs for all new tenants, informing them of boiler inspections, Asbestos advice, Energy Performance Certificates, electrical tests and when any outstanding CHS+ work will be carried out.



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