
Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus: Delivering What Matters 2016-2019

January 2016

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The Carmarthenshire Homes Standard *Plus* (CHS+) means....

- A standard that continues to evolve; improving the quality of housing and services for tenants and residents in Carmarthenshire. This will be done by focusing on what matters, within available resources.
- A flexibility to deliver our vision around affordable housing and exploit opportunities as they arise.
- Delivering as many wider benefits as possible to get the biggest impact from investments.

Did you know...

- We manage nearly 9,000 homes
- There are over 7,000 households on the Housing Choice Register
- We get about 1,100 empty homes a year between ourselves and Housing Associations
- We carried out over 24,000 repairs to tenants' homes during 2015/16
- We have engaged with over 1000 tenants in our community
- Tenants pay over £35m every year in rent
- We have spent over £200m since 2005 improving council homes

Cllr Linda Davies – Evans - Executive Board Member for Housing

In 2006 the Council started its ambitious programme to achieve the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard (CHS) by the end of 2015.

I am pleased to say that we have delivered the programme, on time, to homes where tenants have agreed to have work. I am really proud of this significant achievement.

Even though the programmes have been delivered, this does not mean the end of the CHS. There remains much more to do.

Last year, we introduced the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus, building on the success of the CHS and extending to ensure we maintain and improve on what we've achieved.

Supporting tenants and residents is a key theme within the plan. Here, we set out how we will deliver what matters in terms of improving services, preparing for welfare reform and saving them money in their home.

We have agreed to maintain homes to the CHS. Over the next three years we will be investing over £44 million improving homes, delivering the CHS to those where tenants have previously declined, as well as maintaining the standard. Last year we agreed that we would replace components such as kitchens and bathrooms based on condition, not time.

There are also opportunities to improve the standard. Improving the energy efficiency of homes is an area where further work is required.

Finally, we have made a commitment to increase the supply of affordable homes. We know that we need to provide 2,000 affordable homes by 2020 for those in greatest need. Over the next five years, we will spend over £30 million of HRA funding to help us achieve this target.

We will only be able to achieve the above by continuing to work together, focusing on what really matters to make the difference in our communities.

I look forward to your support.

Cllr. Linda Evans

Executive Board Member for Housing

Developing THE CHS *plus* - The story so far

By the end of 2015, we have completed the CHS to all homes that wanted work carried out.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
CHS/WHQS	6%	7%	8%	8%	9%	37%	52%	70%	88%	😊
Roofs & Associated Components	100%	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
Windows & Doors	58%	65%	74%	86%	95%	100%	😊	😊	😊	😊
Loft	0	0	19%	67%	89%	100%	😊	😊	😊	😊
Cavity	44%	53%	77%	78%	96%	100%	😊	😊	😊	😊
Hard Wired Smoke Detectors	37%	38%	51%	57%	63%	74%	80%	86%	90%	😊
Electrical Systems	28%	28%	36%	44%	53%	65%	74%	81%	90%	😊
Full Central Heating	73%	78%	79%	83%	86%	91%	94%	95%	97%	😊
Energy Efficient Central Heating	3%	6%	8%	22%	30%	52%	64%	76%	88%	😊
Kitchens	7%	7%	12%	20%	29%	46%	58%	71%	88%	😊
Bathrooms	7%	7%	12%	24%	34%	52%	64%	74%	88%	😊
Security Lighting	10%	10%	16%	26%	36%	48%	63%	74%	88%	😊
CO Detectors	10%	10%	16%	26%	36%	53%	64%	74%	88%	😊
Power Points	4%	7%	14%	24%	35%	51%	63%	74%	88%	😊
Energy Rating (SAP >65)	22%	30%	40%	55%	60%	67%	68%	69%	85%	😊

Tenant Satisfaction

During 2014 we asked all our tenants a number of questions about the services we provide. Over 2,000 tenants responded.

- 74% of tenants were very/fairly satisfied with the overall service provided by Carmarthenshire Housing Service
- 74% of tenants were very/fairly satisfied with the current state of repair of their home (up from 62% in 2009)
- Over 90% were very/fairly satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

We will continue to work with tenants to improve these satisfaction rates, ensuring that we not only focus on what really matters to them, but being open in terms of what can and can't be achieved. Updated satisfaction results will be available during the spring of 2016

Health improvements

We are continuing with our Health Impact Study. The annual perception survey, which was last completed in 2014, showed that:

- 90% of tenants now feel that their home suits their needs, this is up from 73% in 2009.
- 60% of tenants now find it very/fairly easy to meet the costs of living in their home, this is up from 34% in 2009.
- 27% of tenants did not visit their GP in the previous 3 months, this is up from 17% in 2009 .

In February 2016, we will be completing our final perception survey to understand, from a tenants' perspective, what impact the CHS has had on them.

In October 2016, we will also be producing the results of the major academic study that has been tracking the improvement work with tenants' actual health over the last five years. This will hopefully show the positive impact this major housing investment is not only having on tenants' actual health but also the local health service.

Valerie's story: Internal work to a home in Cynnwyl Elfed

Over the last nine years, we have provided tenants with new kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems as part of the internal work programmes.

In 2015, Valerie from Cynnwyl Elfed had work done to her home. Valerie said,

"I have a fantastic new kitchen and I am very pleased. I found the contractors very accommodating, and I was informed daily of what was going to happen next. They were very clean and tidy"

Job and training opportunities

The improvement work has helped create training and employment opportunities. Since the start of the programme, over 200 apprenticeships have been delivered.

The Framework used to deliver the CHS comes to an end in 2016, and we are currently completing the procurement process for its replacement. As part of the new framework, we will continue to ask contractors to maximize the benefit of our investment through creating training and employment opportunities.

What matters....?

As we talk to people about the housing service, they tell us what matters to them.

Tenants' lives

General feedback from tenants this year continues to tell us that our current priorities are still really important. Tenants wanted us to ensure that we continue to support them in their home. We also need to ensure we need to maintain standards and are proactive in the

day to day repair service. Tenants also talked about providing more homes as this was important to their own families.

Older tenants talked about social isolation, loneliness and opportunities to remain active through community based activities that give them more confidence and build relationships.

Younger tenants told us of the need for work and training opportunities through delivering the CHS+ as well as things to do to keep active.

Enabling tenants to pay their rent

Rent arrears have reduced over the last 12 months. This has been achieved through focusing our efforts on supporting and trying to engage with tenants. It is likely that we will have to maintain this focus over the coming months to prevent them from rising again. We will focus on distinguishing between those who want to pay, but are finding difficulty and those who can pay, but simply won't.

We also have to do more to help our tenants including opportunities to find work, training or help start their own businesses.

Experience tells us that Universal Credit will have a significant impact, especially the demand for on line claims and access to bank accounts. While welfare reform affects some, the general rise in the cost of living and control on wages affects all.

Maintaining tenants' homes

Tenants regularly tell us that getting repairs done on time and maintaining homes to a good standard is important to them. In addition, maintaining the CHS is now a statutory duty.

In August, staff and tenants took part in a review of the Repairs service. Part of the work involved establishing what good looks like. Comments received are set out below.

From our tenants' point of view, good is:

- Having an appointment at a time that suits them
- Keeping them informed of what's happening with their repair
- Respecting their personal needs
- Knowing who to contact and be advised when they change
- Having confidence that jobs logged are being addressed
- Listening to them and their opinions
- Completing work to a good standard

From our staff's point of view, good is:

- Having more time to communicate with tenants
- Being empowered to make the right decisions
- Having access to full accurate and consistent information (IT)
- Treated as an equal and with respect

- Feeling safe when in tenants homes
- Having multi skills to be more productive on a job
- Feeling part of a single joined up team working together

In November, a small pilot was launched in the Seaside area. Officers from the Communities, Environment and Chief Executives Department set up a multi skilled team to deal with responsive and preventative maintenance. The outcome of the pilot is due in the spring of 2016.

Tenant Involvement

Our tenants have also developed their own involvement plan “Creating Better Communities Together”. We plan to review this with tenants over the next 12 months in line with their aspirations.

Housing and Regeneration

This partnership will continue with this plan and we are firmly aligning with the new regeneration frameworks in Wales, and in particular the Swansea Bay City Region. We are currently working with regeneration colleagues on schemes in Llanelli Town Centre and are also starting to look at the possibility of changing the housing stock in certain areas to better meet future housing need.

The CHS *plus*

CHS+ will make sure:

- Homes remain in a good state of repair
- Free from damp and significant condensation
- Structurally safe
- In safe and attractive environments
- Suitable for the household
- Well managed

CHS+ will also

- Have regular property MOTs; and
- Base replacement programmes on condition not time e.g. kitchens and bathrooms

AND

- Be flexible enough to meet tenants’ different expectations e.g. older people to remain active
- Ensure the right types of homes are in the right area
- Develop and deliver an ambitious vision to increase affordable housing supply
- Focus on saving money in the home through smarter and more sustainable living
- Promote the use of digital technology in the home
- Change thinking to improve the quality of services provided

- Explore opportunities for CHS+ for other tenures (social housing, private renters and owner occupiers)

Supporting tenants and residents

Welfare reform

We do not underestimate the impact welfare reforms are having on tenants. **We will:**

- Continue to provide as much support and advice to tenants who are impacted by the changes and work closely with other advice providers to ensure this is delivered as efficiently as possible
- Increase the training and employment opportunities for tenants, prospective tenants and the homeless
- Encourage our tenants to use us as a first point of contact for advice and practical help to maintain their tenancies and prevent them from getting in to debt. This will be even more important with the potential introduction of Universal Credit
- Continue to promote a range of measures to support tenants in tackling Welfare Reform (e.g. help to downsize, hardship fund for tenants that are most affected, and links in with Credit Unions and Fuel Clubs)
- Increase our provision to write off bad debts to £705,000 in 2016/17 (up from £652,000 in 2015/16), with a further rise to £708,000 starting in 2017/18 and £709,000 in 2018/19

Getting services right

Tenants have been telling us that the repair service continues to really matter to them. **We will:**

- Continue to check homes to ensure they are in a good state of repair through an annual “MOT”.
- Implement the replacement programme for components (kitchens, bathrooms, central heating etc) based on condition not time.
- Review our approach to maintaining homes following a pilot of the locality based repairs service.
- Carry out improvements to sheltered schemes to ensure they continue to meet the needs of their tenants.
- Look at the way we assist with community activities for residents to deliver things that they want. We will further use Time Credits to do this.

Saving tenants money

Over the last 7 years we have made improvements to our tenants’ homes that will help to reduce their carbon emissions and save them money. Fuel poverty (where people spend more than 10% of their income on fuel bills) remains a major issue for many families. It is estimated that as many as 30% of households in the County are experiencing fuel poverty.

One of the key things we can do is to raise awareness about how things work in the home and how they can be used differently e.g. central heating boilers.

We have already completed (2009) the cavity and loft insulation programme and our window upgrades. Since then our focus has very much been on the delivery of the remaining components e.g. central heating systems and work to non-traditional type homes.

People have been telling us that we can do more to introduce initiatives that save residents money in the home. **We will:**

- Deliver a trial project on the use of LED lighting in homes
- Continue to increase the number of Fuel Clubs where there is no mains gas supply

Len's story – Wireless internet in sheltered housing

In 2015, we completed the installation of wireless internet into the communal lounges in our sheltered housing schemes.

Len from Capel Hendre is one of the tenants actively using the internet. He says:

“Having the wireless internet available has allowed me to use my tablet at home. There are a few of us here who use it. I hope that other tenants start to see the benefits and possibly use it to keep in touch with friends and relatives and even start using it for their shopping”.

Digital services

People have also been telling us that there is more we can do to help them use, and have access to, digital services, e.g. using phones, TVs or computer to access information and services.

During 2014 and 2015 we installed WiFi facilities to all our sheltered schemes.

People who have access to digital technology can:

- Access training and employment opportunities that will increase chances of getting a job.
- Access Government websites to apply for welfare benefits, maximising income.
- Access cost comparison sites, which can help reduce living costs.
- Interact with others through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter that will reduce potential isolation.
- Access things like health and well-being services that can prevent ill-health.

To enable this, we will:

- Identify opportunities to make the purchasing of broadband more affordable.

- Work with tenants to confirm what services they would like to access through the internet.

Investing in tenants' homes

Improving, maintaining and managing 9,000 homes

In 2015, we have completed the work programmes to achieve the CHS. The programmes, which were developed by tenants, have delivered many improvements, and include:

- Internal works to replace kitchens and bathrooms, upgrade central heating and electrics.
- Installing double glazed uPVC windows and doors.
- Improving energy efficiency through installing cavity, loft, and where necessary, external wall insulation; and
- External work to paint, render and ensure paths and gardens are free from health and safety issues e.g. trip hazards

Even though we have achieved the Standard to homes where tenants have agreed to have work, there remains work to do.

Homes where tenants have declined all or part of the work

Some tenants have declined part, or all of the CHS work. This equates to around 9% of all tenants. These declines have been for a number of reasons, which include:

- Tenants were happy with their homes, or they have made their own improvements
- Some, particularly the elderly, did not want the disruption of having work done

Our approach to complete work which has previously been refused is:

- Existing tenants can request that the work is included in a future work programme, based on condition; and
- Empty homes have any remaining CHS work completed before they're re-let

We will:

- Continue with this approach to maintain the CHS, with funding included in the CHS+ Business Plan based on need.

David's story - External Wall Insulation in Llangennech

David and his family have had external wall insulation applied to her home. The work, as part of the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard, is designed to improve the energy efficiency of her home and reduce heating costs.

External wall insulation is applied to the outside of homes which don't have cavity walls, or are not suitable for cavity wall insulation.

David has said “My home is much warmer since having work done. It has also made a big difference to the appearance of the estate”.

Maintain homes which meet the CHS

As part of CHS+, components such as kitchens and bathrooms will be replaced when they need replacing.

Based on the information we have, we know that some work will be required over the next three years to maintain the Standard. This includes:

- Surveying the condition of nearly 600 kitchens and over 360 bathrooms; replacing ones that no longer meet the Standard
- Upgrading the electrics at nearly 230 homes
- Servicing heating appliances at 8,910 homes, 225 of which will be nearing 15 years old
- Rendering nearly 1,100 homes
- Re-roofing nearly 450 homes

Information on the condition of components will be gathered through the annual property MOTs. The MOTs, which were introduced in the autumn, allow us to:

- Check the condition of components and identify any planned work such as kitchen replacement or rendering that may be needed;
- Ensure tenants' details are correct. This is important as the information can be used to contact tenants when needed, and also, helps identify tenants that may be affected by changes to benefits etc;
- Identify repairs that may be required and ensure tenants are looking after their homes. This allows us to raise jobs for any repairs, and to update tenants on any outstanding repairs;
- Identify environmental improvements in communities.

By the end of December, over 200 MOTs have been completed.

We will:

- Continue to roll out these surveys, and aim to visit all our tenants by the end of October 2016;
- Review information gathered to plan future work programmes;
- Inform tenants, through publishing a planned programme of work, what work is due to be completed to their homes.

Identify ways we can improve the standard of homes

To continue maintaining the CHS, there are additional improvements that we recognise are needed to tenants' homes. Energy efficiency is one area where we know more work is needed.

We will:

- Survey a sample of homes that do not have an Energy Performance Certificate of 65 by the end of September 2016;
- Engage with tenants of these homes to identify which improvements we can make;
- Develop a work programme to deliver cost effective improvements to these homes.

Tenants have also told us that homes which have previously been painted are due to have re-painting completed over the next few years.

We only paint homes where the rendering is in a good condition. Homes which need rendering are included in the relevant programme.

We will:

- Survey homes which have previously been painted to establish their condition;
- Plan the necessary work and inform tenants when it will be completed.

Providing homes suitable to tenants needs'

One of the key priorities of CHS+ from the engagement carried out was how could we ensure we had the right type of homes in the right area.

There is no doubt there is a significant shortage of affordable housing in the County, but we sometimes have difficulty allocating some of our existing homes. Whilst we will do everything we can to match suitable households to these homes, we believe that it would be sensible to change these homes into ones that better meet future housing need.

We will continue to:

- Complete options appraisals on sites which may need changing / converting into homes that can help meet housing need
- Consider demolishing homes, or disposing of them, if they are no longer fit for purpose including if it does not make financial sense in keeping them or if they are no longer desirable. The site can be recycled for new, more appropriate uses or sold.

Selling land where there is no purpose holding on to it

We have housing land located across the County. Some of this land has been identified as being suitable for providing more affordable homes. These areas of land are included in our Affordable Homes Delivery Plan.

We also have other land.

We will:

- Dispose of land that we no longer need

Garage sites

Garage areas continue to be a concern in terms of perception. In some instances, the costs of repairs and maintenance far outweigh what we will get back in as income.

We have already demolished 14 garage sites and there are another 12 due to be demolished before the end of the year. We will continue with this approach, in consultation with the local community. In each instance we will consider whether to:

- Continue to use as garage site
- Sell sites on for development
- Demolish or convert to general car parking areas or other community benefits
- Transfer site for residents to manage if they want to do so

We are required by law to ensure that we achieve market rent for garages or land that we let or sell. During 2015, we will:

- Complete an exercise benchmarking our rents to those charged by other private and public sector organisations.

Providing more homes

Increasing the supply of affordable homes

In 2015, we launched our Affordable Housing Commitment.

The Commitment brings together the results of our consultation and research and sets out our vision on how we can maximise the supply of affordable homes over the next 5 years.

The result of our consultation has allowed us to develop 5 key principles that commit us to:

- Targeting help on where the need is highest, in both urban and rural areas, by delivering more affordable homes for rent
- Being more flexible - whether by bringing wasted homes back into use, buying existing homes or building new ones.

- Doing whatever it takes by developing innovative and creative ways to deliver more
- Using our resources in the best possible way to ensure as many new homes as possible
- Using the expertise, skills and resources of those we work with

Our research into housing need tells us that to meet the highest housing need we would have to provide at least 2,000 homes by 2020, an average of 400 every year.

To allow us to deliver against our commitment and meet housing need, over the next five years we will spend over £60 million which we have allocated to provide over 1,000 homes. £31 million of this funding comes from the Housing Revenue Account.

This funding will be used to fund the solutions we've identified. **We will:**

- Increase the number of tenancies managed by our Social Lettings Agency
- Bring empty homes back into use
- Buy back private homes
- Use developers' contributions to affordable homes in more creative ways

The Plan also identifies opportunities that could allow us to provide even more affordable homes.

We will:

- Consider the use of alternative delivery models that will allow us to better meet housing need

Further information on our approach to maximise the availability of affordable housing can be found in the Affordable Housing Commitment and the Delivery Plan.

How we will pay for this

Planning Assumptions

To help us plan our investments, we must make certain assumptions. At the time of writing this plan, we are still awaiting confirmation of rent increase for 2016/17 from Welsh Government. The assumptions made below are in line with the modelling data requested by Welsh Government during autumn 2015.

Changes to our assumptions may mean that we have to re-visit the objectives included in this plan.

Income

Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) <i>i.e. the amount of capital funding we get from the Welsh Government</i>	£6M each year. This is on the basis that we receive £673 for each home.
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Rent increase 2015/16	1.6%, in-line with autumn modelling for Welsh Government.
Future rent increase levels <i>Based on Welsh Government Policy</i>	Welsh Government CPI estimates plus 1.5% along with progression towards harmonisation of rents.
Borrowing <i>i.e. the amount we need to borrow to support our investment</i>	TBC

Expenditure

Assumed Borrowing costs <i>i.e. the amount it costs to borrow money</i>	Cost of existing and new debt: 2016/17: 4.89% 2017/18: 4.77% 2018/19: 4.71%	Cost of exiting HRAS: Average of 4.19%
Provision for Bad debt <i>i.e. debt that we will be unable to recover</i>	2016/17: £702,000 2017/18: £705,000 2018/19: £708,000	

OTHER

Expenditure/income inflation	Employees' pay at 1% per year for the next three years. As per assumptions for Council Fund.
Right to Buy receipts <i>i.e. Money we get from tenants' buying their home</i>	No receipts from 1 st April 2015 following suspension of Right to Buy
Balances on the revenue account <i>i.e. the amount of money we need to keep in reserve</i>	Minimum of £900,000 (based on £100 per property)

CAPITAL SPENDING

SCHEME	Budget 2016/17 (£000s')	Budget 2017/18 (£000s')	Budget 2018/19 (£000s')
Improving / Upgrading kitchens, bathrooms, heating and electrical	1,733	4,208	2,187
Environmental works, including garage sites	380	395	401
Rendering	1,652	1,316	1,285
Energy efficiency works	40	526	632
Adaptations	926	506	514
Affordable Housing Delivery	6,498	6,480	6,480
Re-roofing	706	759	771
Empty homes needing major work	300	304	308
Planned replacement programme i.e. Boiler replacements	782	356	343
Sheltered Scheme Improvements	100	354	360
Structural works on estates i.e. Boundary walls	501	304	308
Programme management	167	169	172
TOTAL	13,785	15,677	13,761

FUNDING SOURCE			
	Budget 2015/16 (£000s')	Budget 2016/17 (£000s')	Budget 2017/18 (£000s')
Major Repairs Allowance	6,025	6,025	6,025
Useable receipts	0	620	0
External income	0	0	0
Direct revenue financing	463	445	445
Borrowing	7,297	8,587	7,291
TOTAL	13,785	15,677	13,761

REVENUE SPENDING			
	Budget 2016/17 (£000s')	Budget 2017/18 (£000s')	Budget 2018/19 (£000s')
Repairs and maintenance	8,692	8,962	9,284
Supervision and management	6,202	6,303	6,396
Central support charges / Recharges	3,034	3,054	3,080
Direct revenue financing of work	463	445	445
Provision for bad debt	705	708	709
Capital financing cost	13,981	14,353	14,613
TOTAL	33,078	33,825	34,488

REVENUE FUNDING			
	Budget 2016/17 (£000s')	Budget 2017/18 (£000s')	Budget 2018/19 (£000s')
Rents	-35,816	-37,035	-38,500
Service charges	- 659	-672	-690
Interest	- 48	-72	-100
Recharges from other departments)	-366	-370	-375
Grants / other income	-1,031	-707	-721
TOTAL	-37,920	-38,857	-40,385

HRA END OF YEAR POSITION			
	Budget 2016/17 (£000s')	Budget 2017/18 (£000s')	Budget 2018/19 (£000s')
Balance Brought Forward	-7,916	-12,804	-17,880
HRA Budgeted Surplus (-) / Deficit (+)	-4,888	-5,076	-5,905
BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD	-12,804	-17,879	-23,785