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# Service User Perspective Review – **Caerphilly County Borough Council**

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[Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.]

The team who delivered the work comprised Gareth Jones, Kevin Sutch, Matthew Brushett and Lisa McCarthy programme managed by Non Jenkins under the direction of Huw Rees.

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# Summary report

## Summary

- 1 In 2017-18, the Wales Audit Office completed work to understand the 'service user perspective' at every council within Wales. We followed a broadly similar approach at each council but agreed the specific focus and approach to the work individually. In Caerphilly, we focused on tenants' and leaseholders' views on their experience of Caerphilly County Borough Council's (the Council) Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) programme.
- 2 The WHQS is a Welsh Government policy that applies to all public housing across Wales. Meeting the standard is the responsibility of each social housing landlord. The Council is the social housing landlord for Council tenants across the County Borough. Tenants and leaseholders therefore do not have a choice of service provider. As there is no alternative service provider, the ability of service users to influence services relies on 'voice' rather than 'choice'. This means that ensuring the views of service users are heard is important when the Council designs and delivers services and interventions aimed at meeting people's needs.
- 3 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a duty on local authorities and other public bodies to have regard for the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working that define it. 'Involvement' is one of the five ways of working identified in the Act.
- 4 In 2017, we undertook a review of the Council's progress towards meeting the WHQS by 2020 and concluded that the majority of tenants' homes remain below the WHQS due to longstanding inefficient and ineffective programme management, and the Council was unlikely to achieve the Standard by 2020. One of the reasons that we came to this conclusion was that:
  - although 'the Council has a range of mechanisms to engage with tenants about WHQS, these are ineffective and are not being used to shape planning and drive performance'.
- 5 The Council's response to our 2017 finding was that their own satisfaction surveys pointed to high levels of tenant satisfaction, and that it would be valuable if we were to speak to more tenants.
- 6 We could not speak to all tenants and leaseholders, so we commissioned an independent research company to carry out a telephone survey of a sample of them. Between 23 April and 1 May 2018, 489 tenants and 25 leaseholders completed the survey. [Appendix 1](#) provides more detail about the tenants and leaseholders who completed the survey. We asked them about the quality and timeliness of the works, the communications and service they receive from the Council, and whether they feel listened to/able to influence the WHQS programme. [Appendix 2](#) contains our survey questions.
- 7 We spoke to residents at four Sheltered Housing Schemes in focus groups. Two of the schemes had improvement works being carried out at the time of our focus groups, one scheme had had the works completed and at one the work was yet to start.

- 8 We held focus groups with the tenant members of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and the Repairs and Improvements Group.
- 9 We also interviewed senior housing service managers and managers with responsibility for tenant engagement activities.
- 10 We concluded that: tenants and leaseholders have positive views about many aspects of the Council's WHQS programme including the quality, but are less satisfied with external works, the timeliness of work, and the extent to which the Council involves them and provides information on the works.
- 11 We came to this conclusion because:
- The tenants and leaseholders we surveyed and spoke to tell us that:
    - the Council provides tenants and leaseholders with information about the WHQS programme, but it could better explain why the works are needed;
    - the Council could do more to ensure that the works are consistently completed on time across all areas;
    - those who have had improvement works are satisfied with the quality of internal works, but are less satisfied with external works;
    - tenants and leaseholders are involved with the works, but the Council inconsistently applies tenants' choice about electrical wiring; and
    - 85% of the tenants and leaseholders can quickly and easily contact the Council.

## Proposals for improvement

### Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

- 12 The table below contains our proposals for ways the Council could improve the effectiveness of its WHQS programme to make it better placed to meet tenants' and leaseholders' needs.

Proposals for improvement	
P1	<p>To ensure that the WHQS programme meets the needs of all tenants and leaseholders the Council should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>strengthen its communication approaches with all tenants and leaseholders, taking account of the experiences of different groups of residents;</li><li>monitor and report compliance with the Charter for Trust to address any identified issues; and</li><li>analyse complaints about the WHQS programme systematically to address the root causes and share learning to improve tenants' and leaseholders' experience of the programme.</li></ul>

## Understanding the results

- 13 Our survey sample of 514 tenants and leaseholders provides an insight into their views. The Council has almost 11,000 tenants and leaseholders, and this sample of 514 people provides a confidence interval of 4.2% at a 95% confidence level. This means that if 50% of people chose a response in this survey and the survey was repeated, there would be 95% confidence that the response in the repeated survey would range from 45.8% to 54.2%. The sample includes tenants and leaseholders whose full WHQS works are complete, some that had only external work, others that had internal work only and others that are yet to receive any WHQS work. Further detail on the sample is provided in [Appendix 1](#).
- 14 Some of our survey questions used a five-point satisfaction scale: Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied. The percentages we show in the report combine the very satisfied and satisfied into one score of satisfied, and very dissatisfied and dissatisfied into one score of dissatisfied.
- 15 We provide the responses as percentages, which may not always add up to 100% because of rounding or for multiple response questions.

- 16 To provide further insight we used the following tenant characteristics to analyse the survey questions:
- Age of tenant
  - Gender of tenant
  - Length of tenancy
  - Tenancy status (general needs, sheltered housing tenant, leaseholder)
  - Location of property (the Council has three WHQS delivery areas, the Upper Rhymney Valley, Lower Rhymney Valley and the Eastern Valleys)
- 17 We have set out in the report if any of these tenant characteristics have a significant impact on the responses to any questions. Where we do not set out any impact of tenant characteristics there is no impact of those on the survey responses.
- 18 Leaseholders have a different relationship with the Council around WHQS to tenants. When a tenant becomes a leaseholder and purchases their property through the Right to Buy scheme, they assume certain responsibilities and obligations. Those include the maintenance of their property that they have bought. The terms of the lease issued by the Council includes an obligation on the leaseholder to contribute towards the repair, maintenance and refurbishment of the external structure and communal areas. These are referred to as Major Works, where the Council is legally required to undertake a formal consultation process with all leaseholders. The Council provides information to leaseholders about their obligations in a leaseholder handbook<sup>1</sup>. The Council undertakes only external improvement works to leaseholders' properties as part of the WHQS programme. The Council consults with leaseholders if the cost of the external improvements works is likely to exceed £250 per leaseholder or more than £1,000 for the block of flats.

<sup>1</sup> [Caerphilly County Borough Council Leaseholder Handbook](#)

# CAERPHELLY TENANTS' WHQS 'JOURNEY'

- 19 From our focus groups, Sheltered Housing residents and Council staff we understand the following as the main parts of tenants' 'journey' through having WHQS improvement works completed in their homes.

## Set Up



- 20 The Council informs tenants when WHQS works will take place in their community. Internal and external works take place at different times within communities. Sheltered Housing residents told us that special meetings took place in the communal areas where residents were able to ask questions about how the work would be carried out.

## Condition Survey



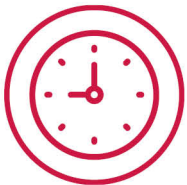
- 21 A Council surveyor visits the resident and explains what works (internal and external) will be carried to bring the home up to the WHQS standard. It is at this stage the resident has the opportunity to make their choices. It is also an opportunity to explain to the resident what can be changed, what will remain as part of the programme and what the residents will have to do. The Council writes to the tenant to set out what works will be completed as part of the WHQS programme.

## Works commence



- 22 In sheltered housing schemes the Tenant Liaison Officers (TLOs) help residents to pack and move items away from the work area. The Council informs tenants when the work will start along with the likely time it will take to complete.

## Works duration



- 23 During the duration of the works the main point of contact for tenants is either the workforce manager on site or TLO. The Council's 'Charter for Trust' suggests that all residents should have the contact details for the TLO for their area. For sheltered housing the sheltered housing liaison officer or the TLO are available to provide updates about the progress of the work.

## Works end



- 24 The Clerk of Works checks that the specified work(s) has been carried out correctly and identifies any work that needs to be completed or has not been carried out to standard.



## The Council provides tenants and leaseholders with information about the WHQS programme, but it could better explain why the works are needed

### Summary

Exhibit 2: summary of tenants' and leaseholders' views about the information the Council provides to them about the WHQS programme



#### INFORMATION

**62%** of residents told us that the Council has told them about WHQS



#### EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR THE WORKS

**55%** of residents who have had works told us that the Council explained why the improvement works were needed



#### NEXT TWO YEARS

**51%** of residents know if the Council will be making any improvements to their home in the next 2 years

### Information about the WHQS Programme

- 25 Sixty-two per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed told us that the Council had told them about the WHQS, whilst 32% said that the Council had not told them, and 6% said they did not know.
- 26 Thirty-seven per cent of the 191 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed in the Upper Rhymney Valley told us that the Council had not told them about the WHQS.
- 27 We asked those tenants and leaseholders who remembered the Council telling them about the WHQS programme, what method(s) the Council had used to inform them. Fifty per cent of the tenants and leaseholders told us that the Council

informed them by letter, 29% told us that the Council used newsletters or told them in person.

- 28 Twenty per cent of the 44 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed aged between 45 and 54 told us that the Council had told them through newsletters, but 36% of this age group said that they were told in person. The tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who were aged between 45 and 74 were more likely to say that they had been told in person than those aged 44 and younger or those aged over 75

## Explaining why works are needed to achieve WHQS

- 29 Overall, 55% of the 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had improvements works in the past five years told us that the Council had explained why those works were needed to achieve WHQS, whilst 34% told us that it had not, and 10% said that they didn't know/couldn't remember.
- 30 Nine of the 19 of the Sheltered housing respondents and six of the eight leaseholders who have had improvement works said the Council had explained why the works were needed.
- 31 Sixty per cent of the 129 Eastern Valleys respondents we surveyed told us that the Council had explained why the works were needed. Forty-three per cent of the 144 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents we surveyed told us that the Council had not explained why the works were needed.

## Information about Future Improvements

- 32 Fifty-one per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed were aware of the Council's plans to make improvements to their homes in the next two years, whilst 34% were not aware, and 15% said they did not know/could not remember.
- 33 Tenants' and leaseholders' awareness varied across the Council's three housing delivery areas, with 44% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents we surveyed were aware of the Council's plans compared to 59% of the 177 Eastern Valley respondents, and 51% of the 146 Lower Rhymney Valley respondents in the Lower Rhymney Valley.

## Information about WHQS for leaseholders

- 34 Twelve of the 25 leaseholders we surveyed told us that the Council had informed them about their maintenance responsibilities as a leaseholder, 11 leaseholders told us that the Council had not and two leaseholders did not know.

## Sheltered housing residents' views

- 35 Residents in three of the four Sheltered Housing schemes we spoke to told us that they felt that the Council has an inconsistent approach to informing residents about why the works were being carried out and what was required. Some residents recalled having a scheme meeting in the communal room, but others could not

remember. Residents told us that the Council sent letters setting out the works to be carried out a number of months before works began, but some residents did not recall receiving these letters. However, in Tŷ Bedwellty, all the residents were very aware why the works were being carried out and thought the communication about the work was excellent.

- 36 Tenant Liaison Officers are the key link between the residents, sheltered housing wardens and the contractors delivering the improvement works. When it came to advising residents about potential start dates, the TLOs told us that they normally 'err on the side of caution' when providing residents with a start date so that they do not raise the residents' expectations.

### Tenant representatives' views

- 37 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvement and Caerphilly Homes Task Group told us that, in their experience, the Council's information about the extent of works, and how and when those will be delivered, does not always reflect tenants' actual experience of the delivery of the works.

# The Council could do more to ensure that the works are consistently completed on time across all areas

## Summary

Exhibit 3: tenants' and leaseholders' views on the timeliness of the improvement works



### TIMELINESS OF WORK

**71%** of residents told us that the Council completed the works when they said they would

- 38 Seventy-one per cent of 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had WHQS works carried out, reported that the works were completed to the original timescales, 24% reported that the works were not and 6% could not remember.
- 39 Twenty-eight per cent of the 101 Lower Rhymney Valley and 26% of the 129 Eastern Valley respondents we surveyed said that the works were not completed on time, but this figure reduced to 19% of the 144 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents.

## Sheltered housing residents' views

- 40 Eighty-four per cent of the sheltered housing tenants we surveyed told us that the Council completed the works when they were told they would.
- 41 In our focus groups, residents from the Sheltered Housing schemes told us that when the planned timescales are not adhered to, it causes confusion and disruption for residents. One resident told us that they went on holiday for the planned period of the works only to return and find the works had not been completed. Some residents told us that the Council, and the teams delivering the works, could improve their communication about changes to timescales. In Tŷ Bedwellty, the Council managed the works by moving tenants temporarily into empty properties whilst the works were being done, meaning that delays did not impact on residents' lives.

## Tenant representatives' views

- 42 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvement and Caerphilly Homes Task Group told us that in the initial phases of the WHQS works, tenants experienced

delays, but stated that in their view the Council has now made changes to its delivery processes to try to overcome such delays. The tenants described how delays to completing works can impact on people's daily lives due to the disruption in their homes.

- 43 Tenants' and leaseholders' views indicate that the Council could do more to ensure that works are consistently completed on time across all areas.

## Those who have had improvement works are satisfied with the quality of internal works, but are less satisfied with external works

### Summary

Exhibit 4: tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with the overall WHQS works and specific elements of the programme (kitchens, bathrooms and outside of their homes)



#### OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH WHQS WORKS

**81%** of residents who have had works are satisfied

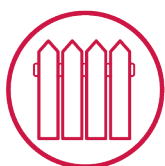


**79%** of tenants are satisfied with the overall condition of their kitchen



#### BATHROOM

**79%** of tenants are satisfied with the overall condition of their bathroom



#### OUTSIDE OF HOME

**59%** of residents are satisfied with how the outside of their homes looks

### Overall satisfaction with improvement works

- 44 We asked the 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had any improvement works completed in the past five years about their satisfaction with the works. Eighty-one per cent are satisfied with the improvement works to their homes, 8% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 12% are dissatisfied.
- 45 Eighteen of the 19 sheltered housing residents we surveyed who have had works completed are satisfied compared to four of the eight leaseholders we surveyed

and 81% of the other (general needs) tenants who have had works completed. Eighty-five per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had both internal and external works completed are satisfied.

46 When we asked the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed why they had given their satisfaction rating, we found that their satisfaction was related to a few key reasons:

- the lived experience of having the works done to their homes;
- tenants' experiences of the builders who carry out the building works;
- timeliness of the works;
- quality of the works;
- design of the works;
- effectiveness of communication;
- provision of services to disabled families; and
- level of choice provided to tenants.

47 The tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who had had a positive experience provided us with a range of comments that reflect a positive adherence to the Council's Charter for Trust<sup>2</sup>. In 2013, the Council developed the Charter following consultation with tenants and staff and it was agreed by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group. It sets out the standards that tenants can expect from the workforce and how tenants should treat the workforce. Many tenants and leaseholders highlighted positive compliance with the Charter for Trust during the works:

- 'They (the workforce) did a clean and tidy job.'
- 'Every lot of workmen I have had here were all punctual, polite and they all cleaned up after.'
- 'Very nice workmen asked me about my opinion every step of the way.'
- 'It was very good – especially the ones who did the indoor work – they'd explain what they were doing.'
- 'It was all carried out on time and they tidied up after themselves: all good.'
- 'New bathroom, we got a shower, floor no longer squeaks, toilet not leaking.'

48 A smaller proportion of tenants and leaseholders we surveyed, including some who told us that overall they are satisfied with the works they had received, however, provided us with feedback that highlighted non-compliance with the Charter for Trust:

- '(The works were an) absolute shambles and personal belongings were broken.'
- 'The workers ruined my stair carpets, I told the Council and they haven't done anything about it.'

<sup>2</sup> Caerphilly Homes Charter for Trust  
<http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/CaerphillyDocs/Housing/Tenants-handbook/13-CharterForTrust.aspx>

- ‘I was very disgusted at all the disruption caused, we were left without running water etc.’
- ‘We went four weeks without a sink.’
- ‘Some of the workers leave a mess after completing the work.’
- ‘The work’s nice but not happy with the hassle and length it took.’
- ‘They didn’t finish the job straight away and wouldn’t decorate the bathroom to a good standard.’

## Sheltered housing residents’ views

49 Sheltered housing residents told us that they were satisfied with the improvement works that the Council has completed, however, residents felt that this satisfaction is only achieved once any snagging is resolved. Some sheltered housing residents expressed dissatisfaction with the electrical works, and in one scheme residents had reported their concerns to the Council about the fitting of new front doors, which they had found to be difficult to open or close.

## Tenant representatives’ views

50 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvements and Caerphilly Homes task groups told us that once completed, improvements works are usually finished to a high standard. However, they highlighted that there are examples of tenants having to complain to get to this point, after work had not been perceived to have been done correctly first time.

## Satisfaction with Kitchens

51 Seventy-nine per cent of the tenants we surveyed are satisfied with the condition of their kitchen, 12% are dissatisfied and 10% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

52 We looked at the level of satisfaction and whether having works completed affected tenants’ views. Eighty-four per cent of the 364 tenants we surveyed who have had works in the past five years are satisfied with the condition of their kitchen compared to 64% of tenants (120) who have not had works.

## Satisfaction with Bathrooms

53 Seventy-nine per cent of the tenants we surveyed are satisfied with the condition of their bathroom, 10% are dissatisfied and 11% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

54 Overall, 75% of the 136 tenants we surveyed in the Lower Rhymney Valley are satisfied with the condition of their bathroom compared to 81% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley tenants we surveyed and 81% of the 177 Eastern Valleys tenants.

55 We looked at tenants’ level of satisfaction and whether having works completed affected tenants’ views. Eighty-five per cent of the 364 tenants we surveyed who



have had works in the past five years are satisfied compared to 65% of the 120 tenants we surveyed who have not had works.

## Satisfaction with Exteriors of homes

- 56 We asked all 514 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed whether they are satisfied with the exterior of their home. Fifty-nine per cent are satisfied, with 17% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 23% dissatisfied.
- 57 We found no difference in satisfaction between those that have had improvement works done and those that have not had improvement works.
- 58 Sixty-three per cent of the 177 Eastern Valleys tenants and leaseholders we surveyed are satisfied with the exterior of their homes, with this figure being 59% of the 146 Lower Rhymney Valley and 55% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley tenants and leaseholders we surveyed.

# Tenants and leaseholders are involved with the works, but the Council inconsistently applies tenants' choice about electrical wiring

## Summary

Exhibit 5: 67% of tenants and leaseholders who have had work were included in the design of the improvement works

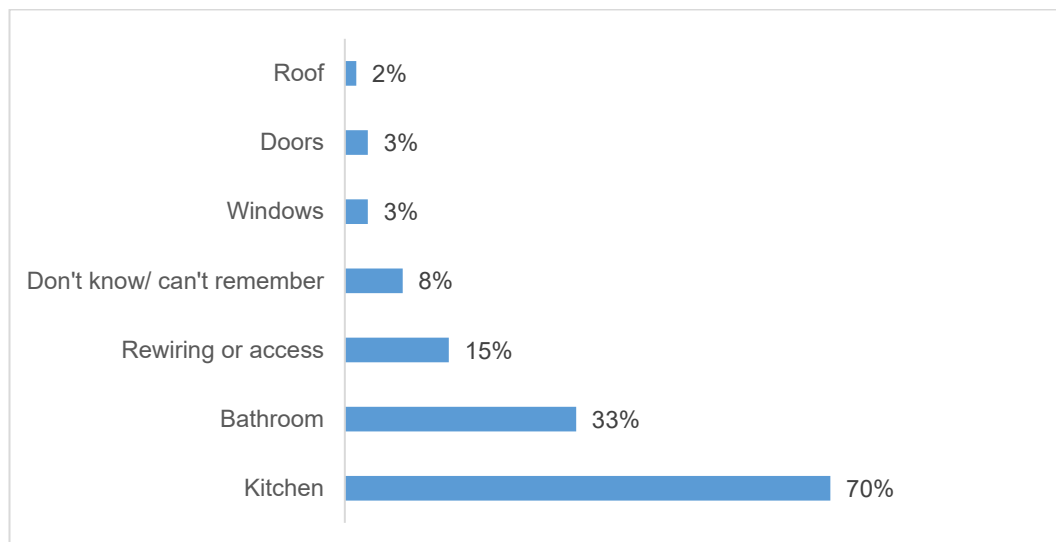


### DESIGN

**67%** of those residents who have had work were included in the design of the improvement works

- 59 We asked the 374 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who have had improvements works whether the Council had involved them in the design or specification of any of the improvement works. Sixty-seven per cent of those tenants and leaseholders said the Council had involved them, 29% said the Council had not, and 5% did not know or could not remember.
- 60 Tenants and leaseholders can exercise their right to refuse improvement works. Fifty-five tenants and leaseholders in the survey had refused some improvement works with five having refused all the works.

Exhibit 6: kitchens and bathrooms are the improvement works most often refused by tenants and leaseholders



61 We asked those 60 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who told us that they had refused works, why they had done so. Twenty-five per cent said they were happy with the existing state of their home, with 20% of tenants and leaseholders reporting health issues or the inconvenience of the proposed plan (20%) as their reasons to refuse the works. Thirty-seven per cent reported other reasons, with many of those stating that they had completed the improvements themselves.

### Sheltered housing residents' views in focus groups

62 The Sheltered Housing residents we spoke with in our focus groups told us that although the Council offers choice, they felt that the choice was extremely limited, especially colours and kitchen worktops. The Council provided us with examples of the brochure which details the choices which are available. The Council also provided us with an example of the document given to tenants confirming the choices that tenants have made. However, during our focus groups with Sheltered Housing residents, not all recalled receiving these documents.

### Tenant representatives' views

63 Tenant members of the Repairs and Improvement and Caerphilly Homes task groups told us that overall the level of choices is generally good, but there is still some inconsistency with how much choice is offered to all tenants depending on which builders are delivering the improvement works. The Council's policy is that tenants' choices are discussed and agreed jointly by tenants with the Council's Surveyors and TLOs.

64 Focus groups with tenants highlighted the methods that the Council uses for electrical rewiring as an area where tenants feel they are not always consistently able to influence the works to their homes. The Council maintains that it has a policy to provide tenants with a choice about whether the wires should be chased into the wall or hidden with trunking and wherever possible, cables should be chased into the wall. However, the tenants told us that this is not always the case, or it had not been clearly explained to the individual residents why trunking is needed and could not be chased into the wall. In May 2018, the Council introduced a process to record tenants' choice of either surface mounted (trunking) or buried cables.

# Eighty-five per cent of the tenants and leaseholders can quickly and easily contact the Council

## Summary

Exhibit 7: summary of tenants' and leaseholders' views of ease of contacting the Council



### CONTACTING THE COUNCIL

**85%** of residents can quickly and easily contact the housing service



### RESPONDING TO VIEWS

**64%** of residents think that the Council listens to their views about their home and neighbourhood and acts on them

## Contacting the Council

- 65 Whilst 85% of tenants and leaseholders we surveyed said that they can quickly and easily contact the Council, 9% said they cannot and 6% did not know or have not tried.
- 66 A small number of tenants and leaseholders told us that they are unclear about who to contact if they have any queries. Tenants and leaseholders aged below 45 were less likely to state that they can quickly and easily contact the Council than the overall response.
- 67 Those tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who told us that they were unable to contact the Council quickly and easily, told us about their experience of contacting the Council:
- 'When you call the Council takes ages to get through, hard to get to right department.'
  - 'Contacted the Council about a rat problem and there was no answer from the number they gave me.'
  - 'It takes a long time to get through to Council phone line; last time took me three days.'
  - 'It's difficult to call when Council you're in work.'
  - 'It would be good if you can phone after work hours, 8 am to 8 pm.'

- ‘They could be quicker in responding when you call for repairs.’
- ‘When you get problems they normally respond but we’ve had damp for two years and nothing fixed.’
- ‘Spoke to housing person and didn’t get any satisfactory answers.’

## Responding to views

68 Sixty-four per cent of the 514 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed are satisfied that the Council listens to their views and then acts on them, 17% are dissatisfied and 19% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Eighty-five per cent of the 41 sheltered housing residents are satisfied compared with 64% of the 454 other (general needs) tenants. Tenants’ and leaseholders’ satisfaction varied across the age groups from 73% for those aged over 75 to 49% for those aged 35 to 44.

## Sheltered housing residents’ views

- 69 Overall, the sheltered housing residents we spoke to told us that communication can be variable and depends on residents’ level of confidence in approaching the TLOs and the teams delivering the works. We found that the Council provides information about how to contact the Council about WHQS works including specific contact numbers, but a small number of tenants still contact the main housing team to resolve issues.
- 70 We found in Tŷ Bedwellty, the one Sheltered Housing Scheme where tenants were very satisfied with the work, that there was very good liaison between the TLO and the warden. The warden acted as the key point of contact between tenants and the TLO.

## Appointment system

71 In the phone survey, tenants and leaseholders provided us with generally positive feedback about the Council’s housing appointments system, including the text reminder system and the agreement of dates. However, a small number of tenants and leaseholders expressed negative views about the system including some who felt that there is a need to take a full day off work for an appointment, and some who had experienced appointments not being kept.

### Positive

- ‘They’re good, they always give an appointment date so you know when to expect them.’
- ‘No complaints, when I need repairs they will give a date and they keep to their word.’
- ‘If you need a repair they offer convenient time, text reminders.’

### **Negative**

- 'The times that they come out and do repairs can be inconvenient, we work full time and have to take a day off whenever we need a repair.'
- 'Pain when they can't give a time for repairs or visits.'
- 'I'm currently waiting for my roof to be repaired; it's hard to miss work for the repairs.'

72 The Council produces an annual report on the housing-related formal complaints received by its Housing Customer Services Section, which is presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group. In 2017 the report<sup>3</sup> highlighted an increase in service requests for both WHQS internal and external works, and also an increase in praise and thanks related to WHQS. The report also outlined how the Council had learnt lessons from the complaints to improve its housing service, including the WHQS programme. We understand that whereas previously WHQS complaints could be logged in a number of systems, there is now a single complaints inbox for the WHQS programme. Whilst this enables the Council to respond to individual complaints, the Council does not currently have a central complaints log for WHQS.

<sup>3</sup> [Complaints and Representations – Caerphilly Homes](#)

## Good practice example

Tŷ Bedwellty is a Sheltered Housing Scheme in Caerphilly County Borough. It is a block of individual flats with a shared communal area. The residents are capable of independent living but have the back up of a 'warden' on site to help with any difficulties. The Council told us that for this scheme it identified additional resources as the residents of the scheme were considered to be vulnerable, and it needed to be completed quickly.

### **Introduction**

The scheme was updated in accordance with the Welsh Quality Housing Standard (WHQS). The residents we spoke with were extremely impressed with the process and the way in which the works were carried out. We found that this was not consistent across the experience of residents in the other three sheltered housing schemes we spoke to. The apparent reasons for this are set out below.

### **Communication**

All the residents said the Council's communication with them about the improvement works was excellent. The Council held a meeting with the residents before the improvement works started. At that meeting the Council explained what improvement works it would carry out, what it would mean for residents, as well as a timeline of the works. The Council told residents what the work was going to be, and the choices that they could have.

### **How the work was carried out**

There seem to be two reasons for such high satisfaction levels at Tŷ Bedwellty. Firstly, there seemed to be a systematic approach to the work. Two flats were being upgraded at a time and all the required materials were delivered to the site in one container. The second reason seems to be that residents who were having the work carried out were moved temporarily into the two empty flats in the scheme whilst the work to their flats was completed. The residents were therefore able to avoid the mess and dust from the works.

Each of the vacated flats could be worked on quickly and without the worry of the resident being there. We were told that each flat took around two weeks to complete. It was also advantageous there was one team of workers who were available to complete the work.

We were also told that the Tenant Liaison Officers helped the residents pack their belongings, and the Warden was the main point of contact between the scheme and the WHQS team.

## Additional survey questions

- 73 We asked the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed additional questions in relation to their home to provide further insight for the Council.

### Exhibit 8: summary of tenants' and leaseholders' views about other aspects of their homes



#### HEATING

**34%** of residents find it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter.



#### DAMP

**34%** of residents have damp in some parts of their homes



#### SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL HOUSING SERVICE

**78%** of residents are satisfied with the Council's housing service



#### SATISFACTION WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD

**76%** of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

## Heating

- 74 We asked all tenants and leaseholders we surveyed if they find it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter. Thirty-four per cent told us that they find it difficult and 66% do not find it difficult to heat their home to a comfortable level in winter. Responses differed according to the compliance status of homes with 36% of tenants and leaseholders in non-compliant properties reporting it difficult to heat their home to a comfortable level compared to 23% of those tenants and leaseholders in acceptable fail properties and 16% of tenants and leaseholders in WHQS compliant properties.
- 75 We asked the 175 tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who said they have difficulty in heating their home to a comfortable level why. Twenty-eight per cent said it was due to a lack of draught proofing, for 19% it was a lack of insulation,



for 16% the cause was an old or poor heating system, and for 15% the reason was the affordability of fuel.

- 76 Forty-two per cent of those 65 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents who said they have difficulty in heating their home to a comfortable level identified draught proofing as the cause but just 10% of the 51 Eastern Valley respondents identified this as the cause. Twenty-four per cent of the 51 Eastern Valley respondents attributed old/poor heating systems as a cause compared to just 12% of the 65 respondents in the Upper Rhymney Valley
- 77 Thirty-eight per cent of those who told us that they find it difficult to heat their home to a comfortable level gave another reason. Almost all of these people identified issues relating to their windows as the cause for their difficulty in heating their homes. A number stated that their windows are not well fitted leading to drafts. Some said that their windows are currently non-double glazed. A small number of people noted that their radiators are insufficient to heat their rooms and the location of homes was a contributory factor for a very small number of people.

## Damp

- 78 We asked tenants and leaseholders we surveyed if there is any damp in their home. Thirty-two per cent told us that they have damp in their home and this tends to be only slightly more evident with non-compliant properties (34%). We found no difference between the three geographical areas in tenants' and leaseholders' responses to this question.
- 79 Most of the 162 respondents who reported that they have damp in their home generally said they saw evidence of damp in their house from visible mould (62%) and to a lesser extent visible wet patches (26%) and condensation on windows (14%).
- 80 Sixty-seven per cent of the 63 Upper Rhymney Valley respondents who reported damp identified visible mould compared to 56% of the 54 Eastern Valley and 62% of the 45 Lower Rhymney Valley respondents.
- 81 Seventy-five per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed who reported that they have damp said that they had reported this to their landlord. Reporting varied across the housing areas with 31% of the Lower Rhymney Valley respondents not reporting the damp to their landlord compared to 27% of Upper Rhymney Valley and 19% of Eastern Valley respondents. Cracks in the walls and missing roof tiles were common causes of damp identified by respondents but a small number of respondents attributed their damp to the cavity insulation.

## Satisfaction with the Housing Service

- 82 Overall, 78% of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed were satisfied with the Council's housing service, with 10% dissatisfied and 11% not sure either way.

- 83 Satisfaction varies across the three housing areas with 40% of the 177 Eastern Valleys tenants and leaseholders, 32% of the 191 Upper Rhymney Valley, and 24% of the 146 Lower Rhymney Valley tenants and leaseholders being satisfied.
- 84 Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with the housing service also varied across the age groups with those aged below 54 less satisfied and those aged 45 to 54 the least positive.
- 85 Seventy-seven per cent of those aged 25 to 34 were satisfied, this decreased to 72% for those aged 35 to 44 and 66% for those aged 45 to 54. Higher satisfaction levels were recorded by those aged 55 or above: 78% of those aged 55 to 65 were satisfied, 84% of those aged 65 to 74 and 86% of those aged over 75 satisfied.

### Satisfaction with the neighbourhood

- 86 Eighty-six per cent of the tenants and leaseholders we surveyed are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live, with 98% of sheltered housing tenants expressing satisfaction. Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction increased with age with the lowest levels of satisfaction being those aged less than 34 and the highest levels being for those aged over 55. We found no difference in the responses of tenants and leaseholders living in the three geographical housing areas to this question.

# Appendix 1

## Overview of survey participants

The survey sample of 514 people consisted of 451 who live in non-compliant homes (88%), 26 who live in fully compliant homes (5%) and 37 who live in homes with acceptable fails (7%).

Seventy-three per cent of the tenants and leaseholders told us that the Council has undertaken improvement works to their home to meet the WHQS in the past five years. Twenty-six per cent said that they had had not any improvements and one per cent did not know. Seventy-one per cent of those tenants and leaseholders living in non-compliant households and 78% of those living in acceptable fails reported that the Council has done some improvement works to their homes to meet WHQS.

Two hundred and twenty-five (62%) of those tenants and leaseholders who had had works completed in the past five years have received only internal works, 30% had received both internal and external works with 12% only receiving external works and 2% only communal areas. These data reflect the Council's approach of delivering internal/external works concurrently in different communities. Thirty-nine per cent of those tenants and leaseholders who had had works in the Eastern Valleys had received both internal and external works with this figure being 24% in the Upper Rhymney Valley and 29% in the Lower Rhymney Valley.

**Exhibit 9: overview of the tenancy type, age and length of tenancy for people who completed the survey**

### Tenancy type

	Number	Percentage
Tenant	489	95%
Leaseholder	25	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Age of respondents

	Number	Percentage
16-34	60	11%
35-44	47	9%
45-54	74	14%
55-64	93	18%
65-74	110	21%
75+	130	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Length of tenancy

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than one year	31	6%
One to two years	34	7%
Two to three years	38	7%
Three to five years	55	11%
More than five years	356	69%
Can't remember	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Appendix 2

## Survey questions

### Exhibit 10: Caerphilly County Borough Council: Welsh Housing Quality Standard Survey:

**Q1** Are you a council tenant or leaseholder?  
*Read out - Tick one box only*

- Council tenant .....  1
- Leaseholder .....  2
- Tenant of a leaseholder .....  3

**Q2** All respondents  
**How long have you lived in your home? (or if a leaseholder: How long have you been a leaseholder?)**  
*Read out - Tick one box only*

- Less than 1 year .....  1
- 1 to 2 years .....  2
- 2 to 3 years .....  3
- 3 to 5 years .....  4
- More than 5 years .....  5
- Can't remember .....  6

#### Views on council housing services and improvements

**Q3a** Council tenants & Leaseholders (Q1 = Codes 1 & 2 only)  
**Has the council told you about the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)?** *Read out if no/ don't know: The Welsh Housing Quality Standard requires all social landlords to improve their housing stock to an acceptable level by December 2020.*

- Yes .....  1
- No .....  2
- Don't know/ can't remember .....  3

**Q3b** If yes, how did the Council tell you?  
*Tick all that apply*

- Newsletter .....  1
- Letter .....  2
- Website .....  3
- In person .....  4
- Other .....  5

**Other (please specify)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4** Leaseholders only (Q1 = Code 2)  
**Has the council informed you about your maintenance responsibilities as a leaseholder?**

- Yes .....  1
- No .....  2
- Don't know/ can't remember .....  3

**Q5a** All respondents

**In the past five years has the council done any improvement works to your home to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard?**

- Yes ..... <sup>1</sup> Go to Q5b  
 No ..... <sup>2</sup> Skip to Q8  
 Don't know/ can't remember ..... <sup>3</sup> Go to Q5b

**Q5b** Council tenants only (Q1 = Code 1)

**If yes, to what parts of your home has the council done the improvement works?**  
*Read out - Tick all that apply*

- Internal only (for example, kitchen, bathroom, central heating) ..... <sup>1</sup>  
 External only (for example windows or roofs) ..... <sup>2</sup>  
 Communal areas (for example staircases, stairwells) ..... <sup>3</sup>  
 Both internal and external ..... <sup>4</sup>

**Q5c** Leaseholders & tenants of leaseholders only (Q1 = Codes 2 & 3)

**If yes, to what parts of your home has the council done the improvement works?**  
*Read out - Tick all that apply*

- External only (for example windows or roofs) ..... <sup>1</sup>  
 Communal areas (for example staircases, stairwells) ..... <sup>2</sup>  
 Structure of the building ..... <sup>3</sup>

**Q6** Council tenants & Leaseholders (Q1 = Codes 1 & 2 only): Those who recall improvement works (Q5b = Code 1)

**Did the council:** *Read out - Tick one box on each row*

	Yes	No	Don't know/ can't remember
Explain to you why the improvement works were needed to achieve WHQS?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Complete the improvement works when you were told they would be?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include you in the design or specification of any improvement works for example, to your kitchen or bathroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q7a** *Those who recall improvement works (Q5a = Code 1)*  
**Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the improvement works that the council has carried out to your home?**  
*Read out - Tick one box only*

- Very satisfied .....  1
- Satisfied .....  2
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.....  3
- Dissatisfied.....  4
- Very dissatisfied.....  5

**Q7b** *All respondents*  
**Why do you say that?**

---

**Q8** *All respondents*  
**Do you know if the Council is going to make any improvements to your home in the next 2 years such as a new kitchen, bathroom, roof, windows, central heating, electrics, external doors, mains powered smoke detectors, gardens and external storage? (all respondents – although only state external works with leaseholders)**

- Yes.....  1
- No .....  2
- Don't know/ can't remember .....  3

**Q9a** *All respondents*  
**Have you refused to have improvements made to your home by the council, for example, windows, doors, roof, kitchen, bathroom, rewiring or access?**

- Yes - all .....  1
- Yes - some.....  2
- No .....  3
- Don't know/ can't remember.....  4

**Q9b** Which works did you refuse?  
*Tick all that apply - Unprompted*

- Windows.....  1
- Doors .....  2
- Roof .....  3
- Kitchen.....  4
- Bathroom.....  5
- Rewiring or access .....  6
- Don't know/ can't remember.....  7

**Q9c** Why did you refuse?  
*Tick all that apply - Unprompted*

- Health issues (do not specify) .....  1
- Concerns about the disruption .....  2
- Proposed plan for the work to be done was not convenient .....  3
- Uncertain about the nature of the work .....  4
- Happy with the existing state of my home .....  5
- Prefer not to say .....  6
- Other reasons.....  7

**Other reasons (please specify)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Views on general housing services and the condition of your home/ neighbourhood**

**Q10a** All respondents  
**Do you find it difficult to heat your home to a comfortable level in the winter?**

- Yes.....  1
- No .....  2



**Q10b** If yes, why is that?

*Tick all that apply - Unprompted*

- Affordability of fuel .....  1
- Lack of adequate insulation .....  2
- Lack of lagged pipes/ tank.....  3
- Draught proofing .....  4
- Old/ inefficient boiler .....  5
- Old/ poor heating system.....  6
- Size of property .....  7
- Other .....  8

**Other reasons (please specify)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q11a** All respondents

**Is there any damp in any part of your home?**

- Yes.....  1
- No .....  2

**Q11b** If yes, how do you see the damp in your house?

*Tick all that apply - Unprompted*

- Visible wet patches.....  1
- Water leak .....  2
- Condensation on windows for example during cooking or on cold mornings .....  3
- Visible mould.....  4
- Don't know .....  5
- Other .....  6

**Other reasons (please specify)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q11d** Have you reported the damp to your landlord?

- Yes.....  1
- No .....  2

**Q12** How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following:  
*Read out - Tick one box on each row*

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
a) <i>Tenants only (Q1 = Code 1)</i> The overall condition of the kitchen in your home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) <i>Tenants only (Q1 = Code 1)</i> The overall condition of the bathroom in your home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) The outside of your home such as external walls, doors, windows and boundary fences/ walls?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q12d** *All respondents*  
**Why do you say that?**

---

**Q13** *Council tenants & Leaseholders (Q1 = Code 1 & 2 only)*  
**Can you easily and quickly contact the housing service at times that are convenient for you?**

Yes.....  1

No .....  2

Don't know/ haven't tried .....  3

**Q14** All respondents

**Thinking about your home and neighbourhood, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you:**  
*Read out - Tick one box on each row*

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
a) That your council listens to your views and acts upon them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) With your neighbourhood as a place to live?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q14c** All respondents  
**Why do you say that?**

---

**Q15** All respondents

**Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the housing service you receive from the Council?**

Very satisfied .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Satisfied .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Neither nor .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Dissatisfied.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Very dissatisfied.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

**Q16** All respondents

**Is there anything else you would like to say about Council housing services that you have not already mentioned?**

**Q17** All respondents

**Which of the following of age groups do you fall in?**  
*Read out - Tick one box only*

16-24.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
25-34.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
35-44.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
45-54.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
55-64.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
65-74.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
75+.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	7

# Appendix 3

## Infographic summarising survey results

Exhibit 11: infographic summarising survey results



Around a third of residents have problems heating their homes or experience damp



HEATING

**34%** of residents find it difficult to heat their homes to a comfortable level in the winter.



DAMP

**34%** of residents have damp in some parts of their homes

Residents do not always get the information that they need about WHQS



INFORMATION

**62%** of residents told us that the Council has told them about WHQS



EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR THE WORKS

**55%** of residents who have had works told us that the Council explained why the improvement works were needed



NEXT TWO YEARS

**51%** of residents know if the Council will be making any improvements to their home in the next 2 years



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

The telephone interviews for **Caerphilly County Borough Council** ran from **23rd April** until **1st May** 2018.

The Wales Audit Office requested from the Council the full list of its residents. The Wales Audit Office then spoke to a sample of around **5%** of all of the Council's tenants and leaseholders. The sample of **514** respondents was divided between tenants and leaseholders based on the WHQS compliance status of the **10,477** homes that the Council provided. Homes can be fully compliant, non-compliant or acceptable fails. The sample also reflects the WHQS status of homes across the area based on the data provided by the Council. **489** tenants and **25** leaseholders responded to the survey.

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