

REPORT

Councillor J. Cole-Morgan, Portfolio Holder for Community & Housing

Decent Homes Standard – Priority for Planned Maintenance Programme

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to present the initial findings of a database commissioned to provide information of the condition of the stock against the Decent Homes Standard and to use this information to set priorities for future planned maintenance programmes to be presented in detail at a future meeting.

2. Background

- 2.1** Members will recall that in February, 2002 only a one year planned maintenance programme was agreed due to uncertainties about the resources available and that priority was to be given to renewing the oldest kitchen, bathrooms and external doors in line with tenant preferences, after resources for essential works to the stock had been allocated.
- 2.2** Members will also recall from the 2002 Business Plan that further work was required in matching the condition of the stock against the Decent Homes Standard (see appendix A) and that in the Action Plan it was stated that Cyromany Consulting Limited would be employed to provide a database.
- 2.3** The database being produced by Cyromany will provide us with data not only on the condition of the stock against the Decent Homes Standard, including the current number of non decent homes, potentially non decent homes each year and the costs of making them decent but also information on other repairs and improvements which may be deemed necessary to bring the stock up to and maintain a modern standard throughout the 30 year period of the Business Plan.

3. Context

- 3.1** Before looking at the figures provided from the database it is necessary to put into context how they were derived and to be aware of the assumptions made within them.
- 3.2** The source data for much of the database was a stock condition survey undertaken in 1998 by Hunters as part of the work commissioned for the proposed stock transfer at that time. That condition survey looked at a sample of 15% of the whole stock and cloned the rest of the stock into that 15%.
- 3.3** This source data has been updated by local knowledge of the condition of the stock by officers and in particular work we know has been undertaken via planned maintenance contracts.
- 3.4** The database has continued to use cloned properties but we intend to provide more accurate figures in years to come by undertaking an annual 20% survey of the stock.
- 3.5** A schedule of rates has been used to provide costings for the works required
- 3.6** In interpreting the Decent Homes Standard, a view has been taken by officers that all our homes, when looking at the test of modernity (section C) have adequate space and layout in the kitchens, an appropriately located bathroom and w.c., adequate external noise insulation and adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats although we have had no external validation of this view. This means that our properties pass this particular part of the Decent Homes Standard as you only have to meet 4 out of the 6 criteria even though many of our properties kitchens are more than 20 years old and bathrooms more than 30 years old. Works to modernise kitchens and bathrooms have been included in the other repairs.
- 3.7** In calculating the number of properties falling potentially non decent each year it has been assumed that resources will be set aside each year to address the works necessary to bring those properties up to the decency standard.
- 3.8** When looking at repairs required whilst account has been taken of improving the properties themselves and works we know are required for estate roads, sewage sites, garages etc., no account has been taken of other works to improve the environment of a particular area, improvements in the communal areas of sheltered homes as has been mentioned in the Best Value Review of Elderly and Vulnerable People or improvements to particular estates e.g. the Friary where the Residents Association has from time to time requested additional improvements to the estate.
- 3.9** Furthermore no account has been taken of any potential changes in the Building Regulations or the Decent Homes Standard.
- 3.10** A Building Price Index inflationary factor has not been included in the figures.

- 3.11 Right to Buy sales have not been included in the figures.
- 3.12 Finally it should be borne in mind that the database is still at Beta testing level i.e. it has not gone live at this stage and is still undergoing rigorous testing by officers.

4. **The Figures**

- 4.1 Appendix B outlines the number of homes non decent in this year and thereafter projects the number of homes which will become non decent each year thereafter assuming that works to rectify the non decent homes are undertaken each year. The costs of rectifying the non decent homes is provided as is the costs of other repairs required to bring the stock up to a modern standard. The figures for 2002 include the backlog of repairs we are aware of.
- 4.2 Appendix C provides the same information over the 30-year period of the Business Plan.
- 4.3 The main reason for a large number of properties falling non decent in 2002 is that the Decent Homes Standard for the level of insulation required for electric and solid fuel heated homes is greater than the Building Regulations standard at the time we were providing central heating to all our homes. However works agreed in this years planned maintenance programme will bring all those properties up to the Decent Homes Standard.
- 4.4 It can be seen that the number and cost of keeping our stock within the decency standard is not too onerous and can easily be met with the Major Repairs Allowance received each year in the region of £3m.
- 4.5 As part of the works being undertaken as part of the Stock Option Appraisal we hope to establish a 'Salisbury Standard' i.e. a minimum standard that all our homes should reach and be maintained at.

5. **Future Priorities for the Planned Maintenance Programme**

- 5.1 Reaching the Decent Homes Standard is a major priority for the Government. The figures show that we will be able to reach this quite comfortably. It would make sense to bring forward by a year works to potentially non decent homes so that at no time will we have homes that do not become non decent.
- 5.2 The current planned maintenance programme is based on tenant preferences for renewing kitchens, bathrooms and external doors. This fits in nicely with Decent Homes and if we continue to modernise the oldest first will mean that we will eventually meet all the tests of modernity covered in the Decent Homes Standard.

5.3 It is essential that officers are given some discretion as to the amount of resources that are required on essential repairs for health and safety reasons or to prevent the stock deteriorating into a worse state.

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the figures from the decent home standard database be noted taking into account the factors outlined in 3.2 – 3.12 .

6.2 That the priority for future planned maintenance programmes be as follows:-

- 1) Decent Homes Works.
- 2) Essential repairs to maintain health and safety and to prevent the stock deteriorating.
- 3) Renewing the oldest kitchens, bathrooms and external doors in line with tenant preferences.

6.3 That these priorities be re-examined if new factors emerge in the ‘Salisbury Standard’.

6.4 That following the budget setting, Officers provide a further report on the detail of future planned maintenance programmes based on the factors in 6.2 and the resources available.

Summary of Decent Homes Standard definition

A decent home is one which is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities. It reflects what social landlords spend their money on. To set a national target a common definition of decent is needed so all social landlords can work towards the same goal.

A decent home meets the following four criteria:

a. It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing

Dwellings below this standard are those defined as unfit under section 604 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act).

b. It is in a reasonable state of repair

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those where either:

- One or more of the key building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair; or
- Two or more of the other building components are old, and because of their condition, need replacing or major repair.

c. It has reasonably modern facilities and services

Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack three or more of the following:

- A reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less);
- A kitchen with adequate space and layout;
- A reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less);
- An appropriately located bathroom and wc;
- Adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem);
- Adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

d. It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating.

- It is a **minimum** standard that all social housing should meet by 2010 and which can be measured consistently across all social housing stock;
- It is a standard that **triggers action**, not one to which work is necessarily carried out;
- Landlords are not expected to make a home decent if this is against a tenants wishes as work can be undertaken when the dwelling is next empty; and
- Landlords are not expected to carry out only that work which contributes to making homes decent. For example:

Building components may fail early these should be dealt with, typically on a responsive basis;

- Environmental and security works, which are not included in the decent home standard, may be considered high priority in some areas.