



Decent Homes Standard

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to state how Highstone Housing Association will work within the Decent Home framework compiled by Government in June 2006. The primary reference paper is entitled 'A Decent Home: Definition and guidance for implementation June 2006 – Update.

The Decent Homes Standard was developed to bring all social and local authority housing up to an agreed decent standard by 2010, and to then encourage social and private landlords and local authorities to manage their stock to ensure rented housing continues to meet at least the minimum standard or better.

Highstone Housing Association's stock already meets the minimum and better criteria across all its schemes. This policy is primarily concerned with maintaining standards into the future.

2. Definition of Decent

A decent home should meet the following four criteria: -

2.1 Meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing:

As defined by the guide, a home is considered to be decent if it is free of category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and the existence of such hazards triggers remedial action unless practical steps cannot be taken without disproportionate expense or disruption. Landlords should very carefully consider the interests of the occupiers of the dwelling before concluding that a hazard cannot be dealt with effectively, and in such cases should ensure the occupiers are fully aware of the position.

Further information can be found in the *HHSRS – Guidance for Landlords and Property Related Professionals May 2006*.

2.2 It is in a reasonable state of repair:

Dwellings failing 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.

A building component can only fail to satisfy the criterion by being old and requiring replacing or repair. A component cannot fail this criterion based on age alone.

- Building components are:
 - the structural part of a dwelling e.g. wall, roof
 - other external elements e.g. roof covering chimneys
 - internal services and amenities e.g. kitchens, heating systems
- Key building components are those which, if in poor condition, could have an immediate impact on the integrity of the building and cause further deterioration of other components. They are the external components plus internal components that that

have potential safety implications and include: external walls; roof structure and covering; windows/doors; chimneys; central heating boilers; gas fires; storage heaters; plumbing; electrics.

- Lifts are not considered to be a key component unless the lift or shafts have a direct effect on the integrity of the building.
- If any of these components are old and need replacing, or require immediate major repair, then the dwelling is not in a reasonable state of repair and remedial action is required.
- A building component which requires replacing before it reaches its expected lifetime has failed early. Under the terms of the definition, this does not render the dwelling non-decent, but should be dealt with on a responsive basis.

See appendix A for list of all key building components.

2.3 It has reasonably modern facilities:

The standard says that dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those which lack three or more of the following:

- reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less)
- kitchen with adequate space and layout i.e. can accommodate a sink, cupboards, cooker space, worktops appropriate to the size of the dwelling
- reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less)
- appropriately located bathroom and WC i.e. not located in a bedroom or accessed through a bedroom (unless the bedroom is not used, or occupancy is for a single person). A dwelling would also fail if main WC is external or located on a different floor to the nearest wash hand basin, or if a WC is without a wash hand basin opens on to a kitchen where, for example, is next to the food preparation area
- adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem) in line with current building regulations
- adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats

A home lacking two or fewer of the above is still classed as decent, therefore it is not necessary to modernise kitchens and bathrooms if a home meets the remaining criteria.

A dwelling would not fail where it is impossible to make the required improvements to components for physical or planning reasons.

2.4 It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

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

- Efficient heating is defined as any gas or oil programmable central heating; electric storage heaters; warm air systems; underfloor systems; programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating or similarly efficient heating systems which are developed in the future.
- The primary heating system must have a distribution system sufficient to provide heat to two or more rooms. Even if the central heating covers two or more rooms make a dwelling decent, under HHSRS the home must be warm enough for the occupant.

- Insulation levels will differ according the differences in efficiency between gas/oil heating systems and other systems:
 - For dwellings with gas/oil programmable heating, cavity wall insulation (if practicable) or 50mm minimum loft insulation (if there is loft space)
 - For dwellings heated by electric storage heaters/LPG/programmable solid fuel central heating, a higher specification of insulation is required: at least 200mm of loft insulation and cavity wall insulation, if practicable for both.
 - SAP rate of below 35 has been established by proxy for the likely presence of a category 1 hazard from excess cold.
 - Where heating systems are being replaced, or newly installed, landlords should take the opportunity to increase energy efficiency if possible. Energy efficient boilers are those with a SEDBUK A-C rating.

NB it is still possible for dwellings to meet criteria b to d and still have a Category 1 hazard such as damp or cold.

3 Stock Survey – Maintaining the Decent Homes Standard

The Decent Homes Standard encourages landlords to devise an investment programme to prevent housing stock becoming non-decent in the future. Appendix A can be used as a start point against which each property can be assessed, along with inputs from rolling maintenance programmes, responsive repair activity, the risk management plan and the asset register.

Highstone Housing Association Board has approved a rolling maintenance expenditure programme which exceeds the minimum set by the Decent Homes Standard. Each property will be individually assessed using the timeframe below. Typically, each property will have a maintenance plan which aims to deliver to the following, subject to need:

- Communal areas decorated every 3 years
- Communal area carpets replaced every 5 years
- Bathrooms, kitchens, windows and curtains refreshed or replaced every 10 years

Component lifetimes and definition of 'in poor condition' used in the national measurement of the disrepair criterion.

- Table 1 shows the component lifetimes within the disrepair criterion to assess whether the building components are 'old'. These are used to construct the national estimates of the number of dwellings that are decent and those that fail. These lifetimes are those considered appropriate for use in planning for newly arising renewal works for social landlords. They are the same as those used to calculate the MRA which were agreed following consultation in November 1999. Landlords will wish to consider whether these lifetimes are appropriate within their own stock for predicting the age at which the component ceases to function effectively.

Table 1

Building components (key components marked*)	Houses and bungalows	All flats in blocks of below 6 storeys	All flats in blocks of 6 or more storeys
Wall structure*	80	80	80
Lintels*	60	60	60
Brickwork (spalling)*	30	30	30
Wall finish*	60	60	30
Roof structure*	50	30	30
Roof finish*	50	30	30
Chimney*	50	50	N/A
Windows*	40	30	30
External doors*	40	30	30
Kitchen ¹⁹	30	30	30
Bathrooms ¹⁹	40	40	40
Heating central heating gas boiler*	15	15	15
Heating central heating distribution system	40	40	40
Heating other*	30	30	30
Electrical Systems*	30	30	30

¹⁹ Kitchens are assumed to require replacing on grounds of repair every 30 years, bathrooms every 40 years. Therefore, the age aspects in the disrepair criterion are set at 30 and 40 years respectively. These lifetimes were agreed following consultation on the MRA. However, it is clear that social landlords and tenants prefer these amenities to be replaced more frequently, to enable them to be maintained at a reasonably modern standard. Thus, different ages are required for kitchens and bathrooms under the reasonably modern facilities and services criterion.

In Poor Condition

- Table 2 sets out the definitions used within the disrepair criterion to identify whether building components are 'in poor condition'. These are consistent with EHCS definitions and will be the standard used to monitor progress nationally through the EHCS. Social landlords should consider appropriate minimum standards to use for their own local assessment and measurement of progress. For example, some will decide it appropriate to replace the whole roof covering if more than one third needs to be replaced (compared with one half used for national estimates).
- During a stock condition survey, the surveyors should assess the extent to which individual building components require immediate work. Their judgement should be used to assess whether the components should be classified as in poor condition at the time of inspection or

not. The general line used in the EHCS is that, where a component requires some work, repair should be prescribed rather than replacement unless:

- the component is sufficiently damaged that it is impossible to repair;
- the component is unsuitable, and would be even if it were repaired, either because the material has deteriorated or because the component was never suitable;
- external components: even if the component were repaired now, it would still need to be replaced within 5 years.

Table 2

Definition of 'poor condition' used in EHCS	
Wall structure	Replace 10% or more or repair 30% or more
Wall finish	Replace/repoint/renew 50% or more
Chimneys	1 chimney need partial rebuilding or more
Roof structure	Replace 10% or more or strengthen 30% or more
Roof covering	Replace or isolated repairs to 50% or more
Windows	Replace at least one window or repair/replace sash or member to least two (excluding easing sashes, reglazing painting)
External doors	Replace at least one
Kitchen	Major repair or replace 3 or more items out of the 6 (cold water drinking supply, hot water, sink, cooking provision, cupboards, worktop)
Bathroom	Major repairs or replace 2 or more items (bath, wash hand basin, WC)
Electrical system	Replace or major repair to system
Central heating boiler	Replace or major repair
Central heating distribution	Replace or major repair
Storage heaters	Replace or major repair