

A Decent Home:
Definition and
guidance for
implementation

June 2006 – Update

housing

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SECTION 1

Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance replaces *A Decent Home: The definition and guidance for implementation* published in February 2004. It has been issued to accompany the launch of the final Decent Homes bidding round for the Round 6 Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and the 2006 Housing Transfer Programme. The guidance explains a number of Decent Homes policy amendments and seeks to clarify issues that have arisen in the implementation of the programme.
- 1.2 Tremendous progress has been made in delivering the Decent Homes programme, with over half the task being completed and with the last few local authorities putting in place their programmes for delivery. The Decent Homes programme has already made a real difference to the lives of tenants by not only making improvements to social housing but also through improved services. By the time we get to 2010 we expect that, around 3.6 million homes will have had work carried out to them, many more than the 2.2 million non-decent homes we started with in 1997. This additional work will have prevented many homes becoming non-decent, and will have dealt with those that fell below decent between 1997 and 2010.
- 1.3 In revising this guidance, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG – formerly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or ODPM) is setting out how it sees social landlords building on the success of the programme working more flexibly to go beyond the Decent Homes programme to undertake more radical solutions to transform some of the poorest neighbourhoods into mixed, sustainable communities.
- 1.4 A number of local authorities and RSLs have already adopted a mixed communities approach. New homes are being built alongside those that are refurbished and landlords are expanding housing opportunities within communities to enable people to move home without moving out of their community. All engaged in this transformation know it takes time to get it right; major change cannot be achieved in a few years. We believe local delivery agencies need to ensure they are pursuing a mixed communities approach alongside decent homes.
- 1.5 We also want to encourage local authorities ALMOs and RSLs to ensure they are considering the need for new build in their area alongside decent homes, including the use of section 106 and local authority land as well as social housing grants.
- 1.6 Delivery agencies need to continue to ensure they are getting value for money and meeting the high performance standards expected of the programme. Crucial to this is the continued involvement and empowerment of local tenants.

SECTION 2

Key points

- 2.1 This section sets out some of the key amendments to Decent Homes policy that all those involved in the delivery chain should be aware of. Where relevant, reference is made to other sections of the guidance for more detail.

Community-based and tenant-led ownership and management

- 2.2 Involving tenants in the options appraisal process and the implementation of the chosen option has seen real benefits. Tenants are now offered the opportunity to become much more involved in making decisions about the management and ownership of their homes.
- 2.3 The Government wishes to build on this and encourage local authority tenants to explore future options for the ownership and management of their homes. Tenants' groups may apply for funding to explore the feasibility and implementation of future options from the Tenant Empowerment Programme (TEP), administered for the Department by the Housing Corporation. To be eligible to apply for the funding, the options to be explored and implemented must be community-based and the outcome must be tenant-led.
- 2.4 Housing Stock Transfer encourages as wide a range of transfers as possible, including to small/and or community-based landlords who offer new and innovative approaches such as using the Community Gateway Model. Government attaches great importance to empowerment and ownership at a local level. Where a tenant's group, including those in management co-operatives, TMOs and tenant's associations put forward any proposal we would expect an authority to consider it seriously.
- 2.5 We particularly want to encourage community owned options in the final bidding round. Therefore we are promoting consideration of options such as Community Gateway, community mutual approach and community land trusts as additional ways to meet the Decent Homes target and go beyond the Decent Homes target in the future.
- 2.6 We will also consider extensions to the July 31 bidding deadline for areas wishing to develop a community owned model and who need more time to complete their bid.

Delivering Decent Homes Beyond 2010

- 2.7 The Decent Homes programme has made, and is continuing to make, excellent progress. The vast majority of social landlords will be expected to ensure all homes are decent by 2010.

- 2.8 The Department expects 95 per cent of all social housing to be decent by 2010 and the remainder to be improved as fast as possible after that date. The majority of local authorities and RSLs should not expect to change their timetables for delivery. However, for a small minority of homes, it may make sense to continue beyond 2010 in order to deliver value for money or achieve wider objectives. Therefore, we will be prepared to negotiate individual delivery timescales for a minority of areas where there are strong reasons to extend the work.

Delivering mixed communities

- 2.9 In many areas the Decent Homes programme has already made a real difference to the lives of tenants by improvements to essentially good quality housing alongside improved services, helping to create sustainable mixed communities. We recognise that the Decent Homes programme needs to support the creation of decent communities. But more radical solutions are required to transform some of the poorest neighbourhoods. A number of local authorities and RSLs have already embarked on transforming such areas into mixed communities, harnessing the impetus of the Decent Homes programme and the better use of their assets alongside other funding streams.
- 2.10 We do not want the Decent Homes deadline to prevent local authorities and RSLs delivering more transformational progress on major estates where there are wider options to increase regeneration and deliver more mixed communities. Therefore in these areas we will consider whether work needs to be extended beyond 2010.

Procurement value for money

- 2.11 We will also consider sympathetically extensions to the 2010 deadline for those areas where accelerated delivery may reduce value for money. In some areas, a shortage of supply might otherwise combine with a spike in demand to push up prices or reduce quality. By ‘smoothing’ demand over a longer period, often in co-ordination with other social landlords in the area, it may be possible to secure better deals and to increase supply side efficiencies.
- 2.12 Landlords seeking to extend the deadline in order to get better value for money should have a procurement strategy in place which includes relevant market information and which sets out the benefits of a longer timescale. We would expect all such strategies to include consideration of opportunities to procure works collectively with others, using consortia arrangements.

Late start or delivery issues

- 2.13 Those ALMOs which are late starting the programme and also those where there have been performance difficulties will have individual timetables negotiated on the basis of their local circumstances.
- 2.14 The National Federation of ALMOs has put in place a framework to provide for coaching and mentoring of new ALMOs. Existing high performing ALMOs are working on a voluntary basis with new ALMOs to help them put in place a robust system to deliver quality services to tenants.

- 2.15 For PFI programmes and stock transfers which are commencing late in the programme we will consider the individual circumstances in order to agree realistic timetables.

Process and time frame for renegotiating

- 2.16 The Department will be approaching authorities where it considers individual timetables may be necessary. If a local authority or RSL believes it has a valid case for renegotiating their deadline for delivery, they will need to be able to demonstrate this. The chosen delivery route and at what point they are in the delivery process will determine with whom they negotiate.
- 2.17 All local authorities intending to apply for a place in the 2006 bidding round will negotiate directly with the relevant Decent Homes programme team at DCLG, as will all those already on a programme. Established RSLs will negotiate directly with the Housing Corporation, and local authorities that have opted for retention will negotiate with their local Government Office.
- 2.18 Ninety five per cent of all social housing should be decent by 2010. And we expect delivery agencies overall to have refurbished over 3.6 million homes and delivered a 90 per cent reduction in the number of non-decent homes by 2010. We expect to be clear which local authorities and RSLs will complete decent homes beyond 2010 by April 2007. Any who wish to make a case to extend their deadlines must also do so by this date.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

- 2.19 The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) came into effect on 6 April 2006 and replaces the fitness standard as the statutory element of the Decent Home Standard. However, HHSRS is a risk assessment procedure and does not set a standard.
- 2.20 To be decent, a dwelling should be free of category 1 hazards, and the existence of such hazards should be a trigger for remedial action unless practical steps cannot be taken without disproportionate expense or disruption. Landlords should consider the circumstances very carefully in the interests of the occupiers of the dwelling before concluding that a hazard cannot be dealt with effectively, and in such cases should ensure that the occupiers are fully aware of the position.
- 2.21 HHSRS must be incorporated in housing stock condition surveys and information on the components of the HHSRS and how they can be measured have been in the public domain since August 2000. More details about the HHSRS may be found in Sections 4 and 5 below.

SECTION 3

Delivering decent homes – Part of a wider strategy for regeneration

3.1 Delivering decent homes is a commitment in the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal and has a key role to play in narrowing the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. Delivery needs to be part of a holistic approach to regeneration which is about more than just ‘bricks and mortar’ and which makes the right linkages to wider regeneration objectives such as improving health and education outcomes, renewing failing housing markets, tackling poverty and delivering mixed sustainable communities.

3.2 The following issues should be considered in delivering decent homes:

- investment in decent homes should take place in neighbourhoods with sustainable demand in the long-term;
- expenditure on decent homes needs to be informed by a good understanding of the housing market – particularly in areas suffering from low housing demand. Where demand for housing is not sustainable in the long-term, demolition of the existing stock may represent a better option than refurbishment; and
- where wider regeneration is an issue, the delivery of decent homes should form part of a wider strategy for neighbourhood renewal and the creation of mixed sustainable communities.

3.3 Investment in decent homes can help to maximise the impact of regeneration spending funded from other sources – and regeneration spending can help to satisfy tenant priorities and ensure that decent homes are located within sustainable neighbourhoods. The delivery of decent homes should work towards regeneration priorities identified in community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies and should be co-ordinated with other regeneration initiatives such as low demand pathfinders and New Deal for Communities schemes. Housing providers should engage in efforts to deliver local regeneration priorities, provided that lenders are satisfied that this does not create inappropriate risks to the social housing assets.

3.4 Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are expected to be a major tool in delivering neighbourhood renewal. Any LAA area in receipt of NRF must include six mandatory neighbourhood renewal outcomes, including the following housing outcome:

As part of an overall housing strategy for the district, improve housing conditions within the most deprived neighbourhoods/wards, with a particular focus on ensuring that all social housing is made decent by 2010 or other renegotiated deadline.

- 3.5 Delivery of decent homes should be seen as part of a wider goal to improve public service delivery and the standard of living for vulnerable people and disadvantaged groups. It makes a major contribution to wider objectives by tackling fuel poverty, reducing health inequalities and addressing child poverty. Decent Homes' implementation should be linked to delivery of these wider objectives. Local Strategic Partnerships have a key role to play in bringing together local stakeholders to facilitate joined-up delivery.

Decent homes and mixed communities

What is a mixed community?

- 3.6 A mixed communities' approach aims to create better outcomes for the most vulnerable in society and sustainable communities for all. There is no 'one size fits all' approach and how mixed communities are developed will depend on the local context. However, **mixed communities** are areas that:

- attract and retain households with a wide range of incomes;
- have good quality housing in attractive environments with access to good local schools and retail/leisure facilities and other services such as health;
- have a mix of housing size, type and tenure;
- attract and retain households with choice;
- have strong local economies and contribute to strong regional economies;
- are well connected to employment opportunities through neighbourhood design, transport and job access services;
- provide access to other economic and social opportunities for all residents, enhancing their life chances;
- have high quality housing and neighbourhood management;
- have low levels of crime and provide support services for vulnerable people and families at risk;
- have a strong housing market that matches the wider economic area; and
- attract and utilise private sector investment.

Outcomes of a mixed community approach

- 3.7 A successful mixed community would bring together the economic, social and physical aspects of renewal and development in a holistic manner to result in:
- high quality homes, services and opportunities for all;

- narrowing of the gap between the most disadvantaged areas and the rest [floor target outcomes as key indicators]; and
- de-concentration of deprivation, and prevention of social and economic segregation in new areas of development.

Decent homes, neighbourhood renewal and sustainable communities, through a mixed communities approach

3.8 The Decent Homes programme has already made a real difference to the lives of tenants by not only making improvements to social housing but also through improved services. The Decent Homes programme now also offers an opportunity for local authorities to undertake more radical solutions to transform some of the poorest neighbourhoods into mixed, sustainable communities. Those local authorities currently engaged in, or wishing to pursue, major transformation via a mixed communities approach will be able to renegotiate with the Department's individual deadlines for completion beyond the 2010 deadline.

3.9 Solutions could:

- be an integral component of its area's broader Sustainable Communities Strategy;
- have identified sources of funding;
- build on the work that local authorities with tenants have already done in deciding the most appropriate delivery route for meeting decent homes;
- engage residents and establish representative, accountable governance systems to ensure inclusive, active and effective participation by individuals, organisations and service delivery agents;
- challenge developers and other organisations to deliver high quality, tenure-blind designs that will attract residents with choice;
- ensure physical regeneration leads to attractive well-planned and good quality environments by understanding the local context (using tools such as design coding etc.); and
- ensure local plans highlight the links between physical, social and economic regeneration so local housing needs are understood within the wider community context.

SECTION 4

A decent home – summary of the definition

Introduction

- 4.1 The definition of what is a decent home has been updated to reflect the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which replaced the Housing Fitness Standard on 6 April 2006. Landlords will find it helpful to refer to the two volumes of statutory guidance on HHSRS¹. The general principles of application have been expanded as set out in paragraph 4.4 below and paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 clarify what properties are covered by the Decent Home standard. A decent home meets the following four criteria:
- a) It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- 4.2 Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion are those containing one or more hazards assessed as serious ('Category 1') under the HHSRS.
- b) It is in a reasonable state of repair
- 4.3 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
- 4.4 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); and
 - adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

¹ *Housing Act 2004, Part 1*. Statutory Guidance has been given to local authorities under section 9 – the *HHSRS Operating Guidance and Enforcement Guidance* – and is available from DCLG and at www.communities.gov.uk/hhsrs

- 4.5 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.
- d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort
- 4.6 This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating. It should be noted that, whilst dwellings meeting criteria b, c and d are likely also to meet criterion a, some Category 1 hazards may remain to be addressed. For example, a dwelling meeting criterion d may still contain a Category 1 damp or cold hazard.

General principles of application

- 4.7 When applying the Decent Home standard, social landlords should consider the wider mixed communities schemes and regeneration programmes, and follow environmental sustainability objectives and the Buildings Regulations. Social landlords should bear in mind the following. More detailed advice on implementing the standard is given in Section 6:
- Decent homes must be sustainable in the long-term. Decisions on which homes to invest in must be made in the context of the long term demand for the stock. Decent Homes work should not be undertaken in isolation from wider mixed-communities schemes and regeneration programmes;
 - It is a **minimum** standard that all social housing should meet by 2010 or other renegotiated deadline 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 tenant's wishes as work can be undertaken when the dwelling is next void (see paragraph 6.11). For reporting purposes, these properties are not counted as non-decent until they are void;
 - Landlords should have regard to Government environmental sustainability objectives in specifying and designing works and components in maintenance programmes;
 - Landlords must comply with the current Building Regulations, guidance for which is available on the DCLG website², when carrying out works to which they apply, and in general should use the Regulations as a guide as far as possible;
 - Landlords are not expected to carry out only that work which contributes to making homes decent. Other factors may be considered:
 - Building components may fail early, typically these should be dealt with on a responsive basis;

² Building Regulations Explanatory Booklet is available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/buildingregs>

- Environmental and security works, which are not included in the decent home standard but which contribute to creating and sustaining the quality of local environments, may be considered high priority in some areas; and
- Landlords may also wish to consider which relevant Lifetime Home Standards³ are appropriate when carrying out work to properties, and whether the work to be undertaken can be modified to help meet the needs of people with disabilities.

What types of property are covered by the standard?

- 4.8 The standard applies to all social housing – *except leasehold and shared ownership properties*. *Social housing* includes sheltered housing and non-self contained or supported housing. The Standard does not apply to Care Homes providing nursing care and regulated by the Commission for Social Care. Social housing in the RSL sector is defined in the guidance notes to the Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR).
- 4.9 Although leasehold and shared ownership properties are excluded from the social sector side of the target, they can be included as part of the private sector if the properties are occupied by vulnerable people. Landlords may also choose to include certain properties in the work programme due to special circumstances.

Property managed or owned by community-based and tenant-led groups

- 4.10 The Government wishes to encourage local authority tenants to explore future options for the ownership and management of their homes.
- 4.11 As the standard applies to all social housing, it will apply to property managed by another social landlord such as a tenant-led RSL, a Community Gateway Association (CGA) or a Community Land Trust. A CGA is a type of not-for-profit organisation that can be used to manage the stock or take ownership of it as an RSL. A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a model for the mutual ownership of land. The local authority could pass land or housing to a CLT that could in turn use the asset to generate income and would need to enter into an arrangement with a RSL. ALMOs and PFI schemes do not involve a change of landlord.

³ Lifetime Home Standards, produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, available at: www.jrf.org.uk/housingandcare/lifetimehomes

SECTION 5

A decent home – Detailed definition

- 5.1 This section gives detailed definitions of each of the four criteria that make up the Decent Home standard. Social landlords and local housing authorities may deliver housing above this standard but to ensure at least a minimum standard across all housing a common classification is needed to set and monitor the national target.
- 5.2 The HHSRS replaces the fitness standard as the statutory element of the Decent Home Standard. It must be incorporated in housing stock condition surveys. Information on the components of the HHSRS and how they can be measured have been in the public domain since August 2000.
- 5.3 If social landlords follow the guidance set out in the Department's *Collecting, Managing and Using Housing Stock Information*, they should have the information required to help identify dwellings in their stock which are likely to contain category 1 hazards. Further guidance on local measurement against each criterion, primarily through a stock condition survey, is available in *Decent Homes: Capturing the Standard at the Local Level*.⁴

Criterion a: It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing

- 5.4 With the implementation of Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 on 6 April 2006, HHSRS replaces the Housing Fitness Standard as the first criterion of the Decent Homes standard. HHSRS is a risk assessment procedure and does not set a standard.
- 5.5 To be decent, a dwelling should be free of category 1 hazards, and the existence of such hazards should be a trigger for remedial action unless practical steps cannot be taken without disproportionate expense or disruption. Landlords should consider the circumstances very carefully in the interests of the occupiers of the dwelling before concluding that a hazard cannot be dealt with effectively, and in such cases should ensure that the occupiers are fully aware of the position.

Criterion b: It is in a reasonable state of repair

- 5.6 A dwelling satisfies this criterion unless:
 - one or more key building components are old and, because of their condition need replacing or major repair; or

⁴ *Decent Homes: Capturing the standard at a local level*, DTLR (ODPM) (March 2002) published as an annex to *Collecting, Managing and Using Housing Stock information* is available on the DCLG web site: www.communities.gov.uk/decenthomes

- two or more other building components are old and, because of their condition need replacing or major repair.

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

Building components

5.8 Building components are the structural parts of a dwelling (e.g. wall structure, roof structure), other external elements (e.g. roof covering, chimneys) and internal services and amenities (e.g. kitchens, heating systems). A full list of building components is given in Annex A of this guidance. 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 in other components. They are the external components plus internal components that have potential safety implications and include:

- external walls;
- roof structure and covering;
- windows/doors;
- chimneys;
- central heating boilers;
- gas fires;
- storage heaters;
- plumbing; and
- electrics.

5.9 Lifts are not considered to be a key component unless the lift or the lift shafts have a direct effect upon the integrity of the building.

5.10 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.

5.11 Other building components are those that have a less immediate impact on the integrity of the dwelling. Their combined effect is therefore considered, with a dwelling not in a reasonable state of repair if two or more are old and need replacing or require immediate major repair.

Old and in poor condition

5.12 A component is defined as 'old' if it is older than its standard lifetime. Components are in poor condition if they need major work, either full replacement or major repair. The definitions used for different components are at Annex A.

- 5.13 One or more key components, or two or more other components, must be both old and in poor condition to render the dwelling non-decent on grounds of disrepair. Components that are old but in good condition or in poor condition but not old would not, in themselves, cause the dwelling to fail the standard.
- 5.14 A building component which requires replacing before it reaches its expected lifetime has failed early. Under the terms of the definition, this early failure does not render the dwelling non-decent but should be dealt with by the landlord, typically on a responsive basis.
- 5.15 The disrepair criterion is set in such a way that it helps plan future investment needs. Landlords are more likely to be able to predict component failure after the component has reached a certain age than predicting early failures.
- 5.16 Where the disrepair is of a component affecting a block of flats the flats that are classed as non-decent are those directly affected by the disrepair.

Criterion c: It has reasonably modern facilities and services

- 5.17 A dwelling is considered not to meet this criterion if it lacks three or more of the following facilities:
- a kitchen which is 20 years old or less;
 - a kitchen with adequate space and layout;
 - a bathroom which is 30 years old or less;
 - an appropriately located bathroom and WC;
 - adequate external noise insulation; and
 - adequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats.
- 5.18 The ages used to define the ‘modern’ kitchen and bathroom are less than those for the disrepair criterion. This is to take account of the modernity of kitchens and bathrooms, as well as their functionality and condition. This principle was agreed with local authority representatives during the consultation on the formulation of the MRA allocations. This allows for dwellings to be improved to a more modern standard than would simply be achieved by applying the disrepair criterion.
- 5.19 These standards are used to calculate the national standard and have been measured in the English House Condition Survey (EHCS) for many years. For example, in the EHCS:
- A kitchen failing on adequate space and layout would be one that was too small to contain all the required items (sink, cupboards cooker space, worktops etc) appropriate to the size of the dwelling;

- An inappropriately located bathroom and WC is one where the main bathroom or WC is located in a bedroom or accessed through a bedroom (unless the bedroom is not used or the dwelling is for a single person). A dwelling would also fail if the main WC is external or located on a different floor to the nearest wash hand basin, or if a WC without a wash hand basin opens on to a kitchen in an inappropriate area, for example next to the food preparation area;
- Inadequate insulation from external airborne noise would be where there are problems with, for example, traffic (rail, road and aeroplanes) or factory noise. Landlords should ensure reasonable insulation from these problems through installation of appropriate acoustic glazing in line with the current Building Regulations; and
- Inadequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats would be one with insufficient room to manoeuvre easily for example where there are narrow access ways with awkward corners and turnings, steep staircases, inadequate landings, absence of handrails, low headroom etc.

5.20 Landlords may work to different detailed standards than those set out above. In some instances there may be factors which may make the improvements required to meet the Decent Homes standards' challenging, or impossible, factors such as physical or planning restrictions. Where such limiting factors occur the property should be assessed to determine the most satisfactory course of action in consultation with the relevant body or agency so as to determine the best solution. The outcome may determine that some improvements may be possible even if all are not. **A dwelling would not fail this criterion, where it is impossible to make the required improvements to components for physical or planning reasons.**

5.21 Local authorities must consider how Decent Homes feeds into wider regeneration strategies such as Market Renewal Pathfinder schemes; it may not be necessary to make homes decent when demolition and new build may be more appropriate. At national level, planning policy guidance makes clear that when undertaking such schemes, a range of factors must be considered including Decent Homes. National planning policy guidance for housing are set out in:

- Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 3: Housing [published in 2000]; and
- Draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 3: Housing [published in December 2005 and public consultation closed on 27 February 2006. Once finalised, it will replace PPG3]

5.22 Good practice indicates that a clear logical process, which involves all the parties, is the best way of taking a development forward. Important factors in this are early involvement of other departments within the local authority e.g. planners, legal etc; adherence to planning procedures; partnership working with tenants and other stakeholders; and ensuring awareness of other issues that may impact on delivery e.g. conservation areas.

Criterion d: It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

- 5.23 The revised definition requires a dwelling to have both efficient heating; and effective insulation. Efficient heating is defined as any gas or oil programmable central heating; or
- electric storage heaters; or
 - warm air systems; or
 - underfloor systems; or
 - programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating; or
 - similarly efficient heating systems which are developed in the future.
- 5.24 The primary heating system must have a distribution system sufficient to provide heat to two or more rooms of the home. There may be storage heaters in two or more rooms, or other heaters that use the same fuel in two or more rooms. Even if the central heating system covers most of the house making a dwelling decent, under the HHSRS a landlord must be sure that the home is warm enough for the occupant.
- 5.25 Heating sources which provide less energy efficient options fail the Decent Homes standard. Programmable heating is where the timing and the temperature of the heating can be controlled by the occupants. However this is not a requirement in supported housing or housing for older persons where it is necessary for health and safety reasons for landlords to ensure adequate levels of heating are maintained.
- 5.26 Because of the differences in efficiency between gas/oil heating systems and the other heating systems listed, the level of insulation that is appropriate also differs:
- For dwellings with gas/oil programmable heating, cavity wall insulation (if there are cavity walls that can be insulated effectively) or at least 50mm loft insulation (if there is loft space) is an effective package of insulation; and
 - 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 (if there is a loft) and cavity wall insulation (if there are cavity walls that can be insulated effectively).
- 5.27 A SAP rating of less than 35 (using the 2001 SAP methodology) has been established as a proxy for the likely presence of a Category 1 hazard from excess cold. From April 2007, local authorities will report energy efficiency using the new 2005 methodology⁵.
- 5.28 Loft insulation thickness of 50mm is a minimum designed to trigger action on the worst housing. Where insulation is being fitted, landlords should take the opportunity to improve the energy efficiency and install insulation to a much greater depth.

5 www.bre.co.uk/sap2005

- 5.29 The Government is considering the most effective means of improving the energy efficiency of 'hard to treat' homes where the construction may preclude the installation of traditional cost-effective insulation measures. This is being considered in the wider context of progress against the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy. More information on dealing with hard to treat properties and best practice guidance is available from the Energy Savings Trust website⁶.
- 5.30 Where new heating systems are being installed or existing system replaced, landlords should take the opportunity to increase the energy efficiency of the dwelling if possible. This would be achieved through installing energy efficient boilers where possible. Energy efficient boilers are those with a SEDBUK A-C rating. Where this is not possible, cavity walls should be insulated where feasible.
- 5.31 If new heating or insulation is being installed, it is important that steps are taken to ensure the dwelling is adequately ventilated.
- 5.32 Specific programmes are now in place which provide additional resources to carry out energy efficiency programmes.⁷ These are:
- The Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC): This requires electricity and gas suppliers to meet targets for the promotion of improvements in domestic energy efficiency. They do this by encouraging and assisting domestic consumers (in both private and public sectors) to take up energy efficiency measures. Further information can be found on the DEFRA web site⁸.
 - Warm Front: This scheme tackles fuel poverty among vulnerable households in the private rented and owner occupied sectors. The scheme provides grants for packages of insulation and heating improvements, including central heating systems, for eligible households. Further information can be found on the DEFRA web site⁹.
 - Transco's Affordable Warmth Programme: This programme has introduced Affordable Warmth leases targeted at RSLs and LAs. These leases make the installation of high-efficiency gas central heating and energy efficiency measures more financially attractive for both landlords and tenants.

6 <http://www.est.org.uk/housingbuildings/>

7 More information is available via the DEFRA web site: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/energy/index.htm

8 www.defra.gov.uk/environment/energy/eec/index.htm

9 www.defra.gov.uk/environment/energy/hees/index.htm

SECTION 6

Implementing the Decent Homes standard – Social sector

6.1 This section explains how the Decent Homes standard should be implemented in the context of planning investment in the housing stock. Investment needs to be considered in the context of the future demand for the housing stock. In some areas of low demand, it may not be appropriate to invest in dwellings because there is unlikely to be sufficient demand for these in the longer term. Landlords should consider whether clearance of the dwellings and regeneration is the most effective long-term strategy.

Standard of work to be carried out

6.2 The Decent Homes standard is a minimum standard that triggers action below which no social housing should fall below by 2010 or other renegotiated deadline, but it does not represent the standard to which all work should be carried out. The work that is done to bring homes above this level will vary with the policies of social landlords.

6.3 As the standard is a minimum standard that will need to be maintained, landlords will want to take this into account when planning for the future of their stock. In the case of flats and maisonettes it is sensible to ensure the standard is maintained by carrying out works to a sustainable level rather than a minimum standard. This will apply particularly where the nature of construction creates particularly high costs in carrying out works or where the materials used in construction present particular problems.

6.4 When considering refurbishment packages, landlords should consult with current Building Regulations and other relevant technical publications.¹⁰ And the current Building Regulations should be used as a guide as far as possible where they exceed the Decent Homes standard.

6.5 Landlords may also want to consider other factors when carrying out work to make homes decent. For example ensuring that works undertaken do not make the home more difficult to use for a person with disabilities, considering lifetime homes and carrying out works in an environmentally sustainable way. On the last of these, Sustainable Homes, in conjunction with the Housing Corporation, has developed Green Street¹¹, a web-based tool for sustainable refurbishment. Green Street is based around a virtual street containing houses, flats and bungalows from pre-1900s to 1970s. For each house type solutions for sustainable refurbishment are available, covering issues such as insulation, boiler replacement, water efficient appliances and material use.

¹⁰ www.communities.gov.uk/buildingregs

¹¹ www.greenstreet.org.uk

Work outside the Decent Homes standard

- 6.6 Delivery of decent homes is a key priority, but this should not be an obstacle to landlords carrying out other work that falls outside the Decent Homes standard but achieves other local priorities such as improving the quality of the local area through environmental work to the estates, physical improvements to help design out crime or provision of disabled persons' adaptations.
- 6.7 The quality of people's homes is influenced by the spaces around them. It is recognised that well-designed, well-managed green spaces by and in between housing are important in making neighbourhoods liveable and contribute to people's quality of life. *The Neighbourhoods Green*¹² project aims to highlight this and is a three-year partnership project which will provide guidance, support and tools for housing associations, local authority housing departments, ALMOs, tenants associations and their partners.
- 6.8 When carrying out work to remove hazards, landlords should always consider remedial action to ensure that the hazard does not recur within at least 5 years.

Working in accordance with tenants' wishes

- 6.9 The Decent Homes standard ensures that all social tenants have access to a minimum standard of housing. However tenants may have other priorities and these need to be taken into account.
- 6.10 Landlords have reported that some tenants do not want their kitchens and or bathrooms modernised. This work need not be done as the standard is sufficiently flexible for homes to be without two of the components in the modernisation list and still be classed as decent.
- 6.11 Where an individual tenant does not want work carried out on their home to bring it up to the Decent Homes standard, then the home can remain below the standard until the property is vacated, at which point the necessary work can be undertaken. Exceptions to this are where works are required to maintain the structural integrity of the dwelling or to prevent other components within the dwelling from deteriorating, or where a category 1 hazard must receive early attention.
- 6.12 Delivery of the Decent Homes standard will be important in bringing health benefits to tenants and reducing health inequalities. Authorities will be expected to set out in their business plans the investment strategy they consider the most effective, how they are taking tenants' wishes into account and how their effort is to be targeted. Although the Guidance does not require landlords to focus investment on the most deprived neighbourhoods or on vulnerable tenants, it may be necessary, or make strategic sense, to do so in some circumstances, for example by prioritising measures such as heating and insulation for elderly or other vulnerable tenants.

12 www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk

Timing of work

6.13 Effective planning of renovation programmes is vital for the delivery of the decent homes for all social sector tenants by 2010 or other renegotiated deadline. Landlords need to identify and evaluate the options for improving the condition of their housing over the period. Programmes of work should be planned to enable an effective use of resources in tackling non-decent housing and preventing decent housing from deteriorating into non-decency, as well as taking into account the views of tenants and future demand for the homes. Timing of the work will need to take account of the following:

- Premature failure of building components. Where there are signs of early failure, this will need to be accommodated in the investment strategy.
- Components lasting longer than expected. Under the disrepair criterion components should not be replaced just because they have reached the end of their predicted life. They should show signs of failure before a replacement programme is put in place.

6.14 Landlords should determine the most effective balance between making homes decent and preventing homes falling below the standard.

Packages of work

6.15 If a dwelling fails to meet one criterion, landlords should consider whether it is appropriate to only carry out the work to make the homes decent or whether it is more effective to carry out additional works at the same time. Examples are given below:

- Dwellings are non-decent because they have windows that need replacing. Their replacement would make the dwelling decent, but it may be more cost effective to replace both windows and doors, the latter being likely to require replacement in the next few years.
- Providing additional loft insulation at the same time as carrying out re-roofing work in circumstances where provision of further insulation is not required to meet the Decent Homes standard.
- When undertaking any work to improve the thermal efficiency of a dwelling, consideration should be given to improving overall energy efficiency aspects, such as by installing additional insulation and ventilation, even if the dwelling already meets the minimum insulation requirements.

Implementing the Decent Homes standard – Private sector

- 6.16 In 2002 the Decent Homes standard was extended to include the private sector with the focus on reducing the proportion of vulnerable households living in non-decent homes. This section of the guidance should be read in conjunction with ODPM circular 05/2003¹³. This circular sets out how a local authority should develop a private sector renewal strategy as part of its overall housing strategy and how it should publish a policy setting out its use of powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (the RRO) to support private sector renewal. Meeting the private sector element of the Decent Homes standard should be an important element of this process. Set out below is further guidance on how this integration should be achieved.
- 6.17 The approach to making private sector homes decent will be different from that adopted for homes in the social sector, reflecting the different ownership responsibilities and the powers and duties of local authorities to take enforcement action under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 on the basis of HHSRS assessments. Achieving the Decent Homes standard will only be achieved by adopting a combination of policies which will involve a range of assistance, advice and encouragement to homeowners and using enforcement powers only as a last resort. It will also involve developing a close relationship with other partnerships and policies and this is covered in detail in circular 05/2003.
- 6.18 In particular Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) are seen by the Government as having a particularly important role to play in taking forward the Decent Homes agenda. HIAs provide a valuable service to help elderly, disabled and vulnerable people to remain living independently in their own home for as long as they wish. There are currently around 200 HIAs covering over 300 local authority areas. They assess the clients' needs for improvements and adaptations, arrange the best funding option and provide support during the stress and disruption that work in the home can cause. This enables the client to remain in a safe, warm and secure environment. Funding for HIAs has, since 1 April 2003, been part of the Supporting People programme. DCLG is investing another £2m in HIAs from 1 April 2004 to encourage restructuring of the existing sector and expanding into areas where there is currently little or no coverage. Foundations operate as the National Co-ordinating Body for Home Improvement Agencies under contract to DCLG to promote and develop the HIA sector. They can be contacted on **01457 891909** and can advise on all aspects of HIAs work and whether an agency operates in a particular area.
- 6.19 The Warm Front grant programme, administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, makes an important contribution to meeting the thermal comfort criterion of the Decent Homes standard. Local authorities need to work closely with the scheme managers to maximise take up of resources by homeowners and tenants, share information about vulnerable occupiers and, where necessary, supplement the programme to ensure that the decency standard is achieved.

13 Housing Renewal: ODPM Circular 05/2003
www.communities.gov.uk/pub/789/HousingrenewalODPMcircular052003pdf192kb_id1152789.pdf

a. Private sector renewal policies to support delivery of the target

- 6.20 The powers given to local authorities under the RRO are designed to provide maximum flexibility to develop new policies for private sector renewal which are consistent with local priorities and reflect the availability of resources. Therefore, while local authorities should aim to achieve or in some respects exceed the Decent Homes standard in every applicable case where they provide advice or assistance, they will want to offer a tailored package of financial incentives depending on the precise circumstances of each case. Some authorities will only wish to offer grants to those owners who are seen either as most vulnerable or in cases where no significant equity is available in the property. In other cases, loans, equity release or other forms of assistance and advice may be more appropriate. In area regeneration schemes the form of assistance will be determined in the context of the wider regeneration objectives. For example, group repair schemes often only provide grants to deal with structural and other external problems. It is unlikely that many authorities would want to provide grant assistance for the modernisation of internal facilities.
- 6.21 Financial assistance may in certain circumstances be made available to landlords in the private rented sector in line with the authorities overall policy for that sector reflecting local priorities. But local authorities should bear in mind the importance of the decency standard and in all cases provide advice and support to owners to encourage them to achieve it.

b. Enforcement powers

- 6.22 Local authorities have statutory duties and powers to take enforcement action to deal with properties containing hazards assessed under HHSRS. Under the Housing Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to take appropriate enforcement action in relation to category 1 hazards and discretion to act in relation to category 2 hazards. Enforcement is an important part of the strategy in dealing with non-decent homes, particularly those in the private rented sector. In using their enforcement powers, local authorities should have regard to the PSA target and its focus on vulnerable households
- 6.23 It should be noted that, as well as being subject to the requirements of the Decent Home standard, RSLs can be subject to local authorities' enforcement powers. Authorities are advised to take account of RSLs' decent homes implementation programmes when considering the use of their powers. RSLs for their part are reminded that the homes of vulnerable tenants in particular may need attention beyond that required by the Decent Homes standard, and that they should establish the likely approach of their local authorities to such cases.

c. Limitations in securing the target

- 6.24 Landlords are not expected to attempt remedial works to remove category 1 hazards if this is impracticable – replacement of stairs for example. It is relevant to note that, in the enforcement context, the Housing Act 2004 gives local authorities discretion in the appropriate use of their powers and they may decide that immediate enforcement action is unnecessary or impracticable. They may decide to suspend action, or issue a hazard awareness notice (which requires no action) where the occupants are at minimal risk from the hazard in question or the hazard is an integral feature of a building which cannot be dealt with. It should also be remembered that, although local authorities have powers of entry in relation to HHSRS, they have no power to enter premises against the wishes of the owner to make a home decent in other respects.

6.25 Relying on enforcement action alone is unlikely to ensure that the private sector stock meets the Decent Homes standard. Local authorities will need to work with partner agencies to make all applicable private sector homes meet the standard wherever possible. If an owner elects not to modernise their home and to decline assistance or advice from the local authority there is little more that can be done until there is a change of owner (unless the conditions are so poor that the authority feels that it must intervene under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 in the interests of the occupiers).

Definition of vulnerable

6.26 Vulnerable households have been defined for the purposes of the Decent Homes standard as a whole as those in receipt of at least one of the principal means tested or disability related benefits. For the purpose of establishing the national 2001 baseline from the English House Condition Survey the benefits taken into account were:

- income support;
- housing benefit;
- council tax benefit;
- disabled persons tax credit;
- income based job seekers allowance;
- working families tax credit;
- attendance allowance;
- disability living allowance;
- industrial injuries disablement benefit;
- war disablement pension;
- child tax credit;
- working tax credit;
- pension credit.

6.27 The detailed definition of qualifying benefits used to define vulnerable will be subject to change. The last three qualifying benefits have been introduced since 2001 and they have different qualifying thresholds.

6.28 This is the definition of vulnerable which all local authorities should use to establish a baseline and monitor progress towards the Decent Homes standard. It should be noted that this definition is used for national monitoring purposes. Local authorities have flexibility in providing discretionary assistance for repairs under the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) (Housing Assistance) Order 2002. It is for the local authority to decide the circumstances in which to give assistance and the form that assistance may take.

SECTION 7

Measuring the baseline position and monitoring progress – Social sector

National monitoring

- 7.1 The national baseline was set at 1 April 2001 using data from the 2001 English House Condition Survey (EHCS). There were 1.6 million non-decent homes in the social sector at that time. The national baseline figures quoted are for the number of dwellings currently failing on that date, and do not take account of projecting forward deterioration or the impact of HHSRS on the original baseline. The number of unfit properties was 1 million in 2003, whereas those containing category 1 hazards is closer to 4 million (2004). More detailed information about the impact of HHSRS on decent home targets will be available from the 2006 EHCS towards the end of 2007. The current data suggests that in the social sector there might be around 680,000 homes containing category 1 hazards. Many of these will be eliminated under current work programmes. But it is possible that around 100,000 homes will still contain cold hazards, which minimum work to improve thermal comfort cannot deal with.¹⁴
- 7.2 Progress up to 2010 will be monitored nationally through the same survey, which, from 2002, has been put on a continuous basis.

Social landlords' assessment of the local baseline position

- 7.3 The Department has not cascaded specific targets for individual social landlords other than that all social housing should be decent by 2010. The same will apply where deadlines beyond are renegotiated. However, all social landlords should be setting targets for tackling their non-decent housing and monitoring their progress. This has been a Best Value Performance Indicator¹⁵ from 2002/03.
- 7.4 Government Offices are working with local authorities and the Housing Corporation is working with RSLs to establish their plans and mechanisms for monitoring progress towards making their stock decent. Local authorities will be required to set targets and report on their progress as part of their Statistical Appendices to their HRA Business Plan. The Housing Corporation will monitor progress made by RSLs, which will be reported through the Regulatory and Statistical Return.

¹⁴ Estimates of cold hazards assume that SAP 35 is a simple proxy for a category 1 hazard

¹⁵ Best Value Performance Indicators 2002/03 product code 99LG0110, available from the DCLG Publications Centre, see the imprint page of this document. Our indicator can also be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1136106>

7.5 Local monitoring requires the establishment of local baselines and setting realistic plans for delivery against targets, as well as establishing suitable mechanisms for on-going monitoring and reporting progress. Many landlords have already done this but may wish to refine initial estimates. Each criterion should be measurable through the data captured through a standard stock condition survey. In both the local authority and RSL sectors it is essential that all landlords are working to the same definition of a decent home so that they meet the 2010 or other renegotiated deadline.

Predicting future progress

7.6 The following paragraphs explain how to predict the future changes in levels of non-decent housing. *Decent Homes: Capturing the standard at the local level*¹⁶ provides further details on how to collect the necessary information.

7.7 To address the problem of non-decent housing locally, social landlords need to understand the effect of different investment strategies on the level of non-decent homes. This requires an understanding of flows of stock into and out from non-decency and is part of investment appraisal. Key factors are:

- Whether dwellings that are currently decent will deteriorate sufficiently to become non-decent in the planning period if no investment is made; and
- Whether the type and extent of investment planned will make non-decent dwellings decent and prevent decent dwellings from becoming non-decent in the planning period.

7.8 The change in the number of non-decent homes from one year to the next is the net effect of these two flows. The year on year position would be simple to measure if a stock condition survey was repeated each year but this would not help in predicting how different investment plans would change the number of non-decent homes over the short and medium term. Nor is an annual stock condition survey necessary to estimate year on year change, provided there is good information about the dwellings on which investment is taking place together with a good property data base that includes data about the age of building components and their life expectancy.

7.9 Where non-decent properties are to be demolished, these can be counted as reducing the number of non-decent homes when reporting progress. The sale of properties through the Right to Buy or sold for any other reason also contributes to the reduction of non-decent homes in the social sector.

7.10 As decent homes moves toward a mixed communities' agenda, those local authorities and RSLs undertaking major transformational works may be eligible to renegotiate deadlines beyond 2010. In such cases, the timeframe for earmarking demolitions would be aligned to the new deadline. Similarly, this would apply to ALMOs going beyond 2010, and in those situations where there are value for money in procurement issues, or a late start.

¹⁶ *Decent Homes: Capturing the standard at the local level*, DTLR (ODPM) (March 2002) published as an Annex to Collecting, Managing and Using Housing Stock information. is available on the DCLG web site: www.communities.gov.uk/decenthomes

7.11 In these cases, it will need to be negotiated on a case by case basis as to what work should be done to these properties in the intervening period. Where demolition is scheduled in the relative short term, it is likely that only routine maintenance work will be required. However, where demolition is not scheduled for some years, some minimal investment may be required depending on the condition of the properties. This will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Estimating deterioration

7.12 It is usually possible to predict which dwellings are likely to deteriorate and become non-decent. To do this, it may be helpful to classify dwellings into one of three categories:

- **Non-decent** a dwelling that fails now on one or more of the criteria;
- **Potentially non-decent** a dwelling that currently meets the standard but is likely to deteriorate and become non-decent if no work is done in the short term; and
- **Decent** a dwelling which does not require capital investment even in the short term to prevent it becoming non-decent.

7.13 One task in devising an investment programme is to determine what will happen to dwellings which are initially decent in the absence of any investment during the period in question. The following are factors that will influence whether or not there is deterioration:

- **age** – dwellings will fall below the defined standard over time (e.g. in modernity of facilities) simply because components are now a number of years older;
- **lack of preventative work** – many building elements will deteriorate in condition; they will show signs of increasing disrepair, and dampness or structural instability may appear; and
- **design** – e.g. layout of the kitchen, presence of insulation and heating system. These should not change over the period; no additional information is required to describe these features.

Predicting impact of investment

7.14 The impact of different investment strategies on the future condition of the stock also needs to be estimated. The following considerations will need to be made:

- It may help to classify dwellings receiving investment as non-decent, potentially non-decent or decent before that investment is made.
- Where work is carried out, does it result in changes to the age of major building components and/or increases their remaining life? e.g. Replacing a building component sets its age to zero and maximises its remaining life.

- Where a dwelling is non-decent because it has some inherent design defect has it been remedied? In the case of thermal comfort, has the efficiency of the heating system been increased or insulation been improved?

- 7.15 External factors that will affect the level of non-decent housing need to be considered, e.g. the level of stock losses and gains, such as demolition, RTB sales, the return of stock from New Deal for Communities (NDC) management, transfers and acquisitions.
- 7.16 It will be necessary to carry out a stock condition survey periodically to re-quantify the number of non-decent homes.

Impact on landlords of the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

- 7.17 To be decent, a dwelling should be free of category 1 hazards. The components of the HHSRS and how they can be measured in a stock survey have been in the public domain for 5 years and stock survey completed since then could have covered freedom from category 1 hazards. Any future survey must incorporate the HHSRS. However, landlords who do not have any information on the extent to which their stock complies with HHSRS do not have to carry out an unplanned stock survey but should ensure that they collect this information as part of their next planned survey.
- 7.18 Before embarking on any programme of work, landlords should assess whether the dwellings in the programme have any category 1 hazards that would not be remedied by the planned work. If such hazards are identified, appropriate remediation should be carried out as part of the proposed work programme.
- 7.19 It is difficult to say how social landlords might be affected by HHSRS, but given the work already anticipated in relation to Decent Homes, most landlords should not find a significant increase in non-decency. The most common hazard is excess cold and many of these hazards should be tackled in meeting the thermal comfort criterion or through existing programmes to tackle fuel poverty and energy efficiency. However, landlords will need to consider if there are dwellings which will still have a low level of energy efficiency and may need further work to meet the Decent Homes standard. There may be some landlords who have other problems in their stock. These problems should already be known to them – for example the extent to which radon affects housing in affected areas, or the presence of asbestos. Landlords should ensure that future surveys help them assess the extent of hazards typical in their stock.
- 7.20 Landlords are not expected to remove a category 1 hazard where there are serious practical difficulties. For example, the risk of falls in relation to stairs may be difficult to eliminate completely in certain properties. In such cases, landlords should do what they can to lower the risk, and ensure that the occupier is aware that some risk remains. Where a category 1 hazard remains after refurbishment, the landlord should consider whether the occupier is in an age group identified as particularly vulnerable to that hazard. If so, the landlord may need to consider whether the accommodation is more suitable for a tenant not in the vulnerable age group.

Future stock surveys – identifying new non-decent homes

- 7.21 Landlords who have already carried out a stock survey excluding HHSRS and who have already carried out work to their stock without taking account of hazards, will need to build HHSRS into their next stock survey.
- 7.22 When a new survey has been completed landlords may find that a proportion of their stock has become non-decent. Future refurbishment will need to deal with these hazards. We would not expect this to present major difficulties but if specific issues arise landlords should seek advice from DCLG on how to report on non-decency if new surveys highlight the likelihood of significant hazards in the stock.

Measuring the baseline position and monitoring progress – private sector

- 7.23 The key points outlined above also have some application to the private sector. In particular, stock that has been made or is in the process of being made decent may be found to contain some non-decent dwellings following a survey incorporating HHSRS.
- 7.24 The estimate of the national baseline – that nearly 1.056 million vulnerable households in the private sector were living in non-decent homes is based on data from the 2001 English House Condition Survey. As explained in *The Decent Homes Target Implementation Plan* this will be monitored annually at a national level.
- 7.25 The Decent Home Target Implementation Plan also sets out a trajectory for delivery that includes targets for specific years up to 2020 expressed as the proportion of vulnerable households in the private sector living in decent homes. The relevant target percentages are 65% by 2006, 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2020. There is also a target that this proportion will increase year by year.
- 7.26 Precise targets have not been set at either a regional or local authority level. Regional housing strategies, which are being developed by the Regional Housing Boards, will include a policy to address this issue which is consistent with the overall national PSA7 target. The EHCS will be able to produce reasonably reliable estimates of vulnerable households in non-decent homes annually at the regional level from 2006 using a combination of accumulated survey results and modelling.
- 7.27 At local authority level, Circular 05/2003 emphasises the need for private sector housing renewal strategies to be evidence based and that identifying local issues, needs and expectations within localities is a vital step in establishing robust policies.
- 7.28 In reviewing their strategies, local authorities are expected to identify the level of non-decent homes occupied by vulnerable households in their authority and within the level of resources available to produce a robust and consistent policy response to the problem. This response needs to be sufficient to ensure that, at the national level, targets for private sector decent homes are being achieved. Consistency with the national target is difficult to define precisely in central guidance and is a matter for discussion with Government Offices in relation to policy priorities set out in the Regional Housing Strategies and the individual local authority Housing Strategies. The policy should, however, be robust enough to secure, at local authority level, a year on year increase in the proportion of vulnerable households living in decent homes and as a minimum to reach the same target figure of 70 per cent by 2010 as set nationally.

- 7.29 In establishing a baseline position local authorities will need to undertake a stock condition survey. DCLG guidance *Collecting, Managing and using Housing Stock Information: Good Practice guidance*¹⁷ is relevant for this exercise.
- 7.30 However, local authorities will need to go beyond a basic stock condition survey. As paragraph 2.33 of circular 05/2003 points out, housing stock condition information in isolation will be insufficient as a basis for developing policy. An understanding of the local housing market and the financial circumstances of homeowners will be essential ingredients.
- 7.31 Local authorities will therefore need to establish a baseline position that will include the following key information:
- the number of non-decent private sector dwellings in the owner-occupied and private rented sectors;
 - the reasons for these dwellings failing the decency standard in relation to the four criteria and the approximate cost of rectifying the problem;
 - the number of vulnerable households living in the private sector and the proportion of them living in non-decent homes; and
 - an analysis of the local housing market with an emphasis on the present and future levels of un-mortgaged equity in the target non-decent properties occupied by vulnerable households and the socio-economic circumstances of the occupiers. This analysis will help to determine the appropriate policy response in terms of the potential for loans and equity release policies in addition to grants.
- 7.32 As part of the strategy process local authorities will also need to be in a position to monitor and report on progress towards increasing the percentage of vulnerable households in decent homes in their area. It is recommended that this should be done by **a systematic recording of policy outputs**. This should include the number of non-decent homes occupied by vulnerable households which:
- are made decent through assistance/enforcement;
 - received assistance/enforcement action but where the full decency standard not achieved; and
 - are not made decent because assistance was rejected by the owner.
- 7.33 Every effort should also be made by authorities to collect information from partners on the number of target homes which have been made decent by other programmes such as Warm Front or as part of a low demand pathfinder programme or other regeneration project.

¹⁷ *Collecting, managing and using housing stock information: A Good Practice Guide*, ODPM (2000).
www.communities.gov.uk/decenthomes

- 7.34 The output measures described above will only be able to demonstrate on an annual basis the rate at which the baseline problem is being tackled by the local authority. This analysis will not take into account the level of stock deterioration, private renewal activity or changes in the numbers of vulnerable households. A repeat of the stock condition survey together with the related survey of socio-economic data will therefore be necessary at periodic intervals as recommended in DCLG guidance on stock surveys.
- 7.35 We have produced a set of look up tables that will assist local authorities in estimating levels of vulnerable households living in non-decent homes in their area which will help prior to a local authority establishing that information for themselves. The Ready Reckoner is based on the association between vulnerable households living in non-decent homes in any given district and the level of deprivation and age of the private sector dwelling stock in that area. It models local measures of the problem from district-level input of:
- the ‘deprivation group’ to which each district has been assigned; and
 - the age profile of the private sector stock for the district.
- 7.36 The Ready Reckoner for PSA7 private sector vulnerable households in non-decent homes is available on the DCLG web site¹⁸.

18 www.communities.gov.uk/decenthomes

ANNEX A

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: Component lifetimes used in the disrepair criterion

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	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

2. 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).

3. 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 it were repaired, either because the material has deteriorated or because the component was never suitable;
 - (for 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 disrepair criterion

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

ANNEX B

Clarifying the Roles of Key Delivery Supporters

The following sets out the roles and responsibilities for some of the key Decent Homes stakeholders.

Government Offices

- Ensuring delivery of decent homes by local authorities in its region and ensuring that the chosen option delivers decent homes, empowers tenants and the community, improves the strategic role of the local authority and stimulates neighbourhood renewal and, where appropriate, sustainable mixed communities.
- Providing specialist input to support authorities and tenants through the chosen stock option – ALMO, PFI, Transfer.
- Facilitating use by local authorities of appropriate support services, for example setting up mentoring opportunities between authorities.
- Ensuring tenants are effectively engaged in the process.
- Helping local authorities develop the right skills to enable them to deliver and facilitating and encouraging the development and dissemination of good practice and shared learning.

Audit Commission

- Assessing the capacity and capability of district councils that own their housing stock to meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010 or other renegotiated deadline under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework.
- Building on the outcomes of single tier CPA to assess the risks of local authorities not meeting the Decent Homes standard.
- Inspecting ALMOs to ensure they deliver high quality housing services and also have the capacity to bring their housing stock up to the Decent Homes standard.
- Helping the DCLG to monitor the performance of ALMOs by assessing how they have implemented improvement plans and responded to recommendations in inspection reports.
- Providing advice to ALMOs and prospective ALMOs about the inspection process and providing written guidance to ALMOs on achieving excellence in housing management and the inspection of governance arrangements.

- Inspecting the repairs and maintenance services and asset management strategies of housing associations to assess their ability to meet the Government's Decent Homes standard by 2010 or other renegotiated deadline.
- Publishing research and good practice advice on the delivery of decent homes (and related issues) by local authorities and housing associations from inspection, audit and other evidence.

Housing Corporation

- Monitoring the progress of Housing Associations towards achieving the Decent Homes standard via the Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR) and undertaking analysis of RSR data.
- Carrying out risk assessments of RSLs' Asset Management practice and performance as part of the risk based regulation process and maintaining a Risk Register of RSLs facing the biggest challenges in achieving the Decent Homes standard.
- Maintaining regulatory involvement with RSLs as necessary including review of asset management strategies to assess capacity to meet the Decent Homes standard.
- Commissioning and publishing research into RSLs' performance against the decent homes target and working with professional and representative bodies to ensure provision of good practice advice to RSLs.
- Responding to queries and providing advice and guidance to RSL on decent homes.
- Liaising with DCLG to advise of the impact of aspects of the Decent Homes standard on RSLs.
- Approving proposals for regeneration/remodelling where these incorporate amended targets for meeting the Decent Homes standard for some parts of RSLs' stock.

National Federation of ALMOs

- Acting as a trade body/lobbying organisation to represent and promote the interests of ALMOs to DCLG, local authorities and residents.
- Offering practical help to those interested in the ALMO option.