

Public Health Wales – Written Evidence

Local Government and Housing Committee Inquiry: Social Landlords' Response to Hazardous Disrepair

Summary

- Housing is a fundamental building block of health. Damp, mould and cold¹, are strongly linked to respiratory disease (including asthma), cardiovascular illness, and poor mental health.
- These harms fall disproportionately on children and families living in poverty, contributing directly to health inequalities².
- Public Health Wales (PHW) are supportive of proposed changes to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) to ensure social landlords take proactive action on health hazards in the home.
- Extending WHQS principles to the private sector, would ensure consistent protection across tenures and reduce inequities in housing-related health risks.
- PHW also supports joint working between housing and health services, and greater use of lived experience and strengthened data sharing to inform policy and practice.

Introduction

PHW welcomes the opportunity to contribute written evidence to the Local Government and Housing Committee's inquiry into hazardous disrepair in social housing and the Welsh Government's actions to strengthen the WHQS by requiring social landlords to investigate hazards with significant risk of imminent harm within 24 hours and remediate them within a further 24 hours.

PHW has previously responded to Welsh Government consultations on housing quality, and we continue to support the principle that healthy housing is fundamental to protecting and improving population health. Our previous responses have emphasised the need for joined up working, monitoring, and a preventative focus, in relation to damp and mould and other environmental hazards.

Housing Quality and health risks

Housing conditions are a wider determinant of health and health inequalities in Wales. An assessment in 2024 found nearly 1 in 5 homes in Wales have a Category 1 Hazard present, meaning that the home is in a condition that is hazardous to health³ and all 29 of these hazard types have the potential to impact the health and well-being of tenants. These hazards can be particularly harmful to children. For example, children who live in mouldy or damp conditions have a higher risk of developing asthma, allergies, and other respiratory conditions⁴.

Wales has some of the oldest housing stock in Europe⁵ and older dwellings are more likely to contain Category 1 hazards⁶. For example, older housing is more likely to contain lead paint and lead plumbing. PHW data show higher levels of elevated blood lead in more deprived communities, and it is likely that many affected

households are in social housing⁷. Even low-level lead exposure can cause lifelong harm to children's health, learning, and life chances.

Poor quality housing contributes significantly to respiratory disease, cardiovascular illness, injuries, poor mental health, and avoidable pressure on health and health services⁸. PHW lived experience research (to be published on 10th March 2026) shows that people in Wales face damp that has affected their children's health:

"When we moved in, this house was riddled with mould and damp... it was on my children's bedding, and I had to move my two older girls out of their bedroom." One child "had to have an inhaler... in the winter she had to take an inhaler for the cold." (P9) Trying to manage the mould also impacts their wellbeing: "I don't think it's good for their mental health having to shift furniture and rooms around all of the time."

From a public health perspective, the WHQS provide an opportunity to move towards a preventative approach to addressing hazards in the home. By identifying and responding to risks early, rather than waiting for complaints or serious harm, housing and health systems can work together to protect residents before conditions worsen.

Strengthening environmental health monitoring and embedding clear and accessible reporting pathways can ensure issues are raised and resolved quickly and safely. This approach reduces pressure on health services by preventing avoidable GP visits, hospital admissions, and long-term illness, while also promoting healthier, safer homes. It also reflects the preferences PHW heard from those with lived experience of unhealthy housing, who want to be able to share their information once and have services work together, so their story is remembered, respected, and used to provide smoother, more joined-up support.

The economic benefit to society of removing these hazards is also important. PHW has [estimated](#) that if the most severe hazards were removed from housing in Wales, there would be benefits to the NHS of £95m a year in saved treatment costs. The full cost to society of leaving people living in poor housing in Wales is estimated to be around £1 billion per annum.⁹

Looking towards the future, climate change will increase risks from heat, cold and flooding, further damaging housing quality and increasing health harms unless homes are proactively adapted.

Welsh Housing Quality Standard and timescales

PHW supports changes to the WHQS to improve living conditions and therefore improve health and reduce health inequalities. These proposals and new timescales represent a significant step toward embedding health into housing policy.

The WHQS should continue to address environmental hazards such as lead, damp and mould, and climate-related risks such as overheating, cold and flooding, particularly in older housing.

While this inquiry focuses on social housing, PHW would support exploring opportunities to extend the WHQS to the private rented sector (PRS). The most recent Welsh Housing Conditions Survey found that the PRS generally has the oldest housing stock and a higher proportion of poor-quality housing (e.g. containing damp or other hazards)¹⁰.

Furthermore, findings from a PHW housing and health [survey](#), showed that private renters were twice as likely to live in colder homes compared to homeowners and were also more likely to experience thermal discomfort and to cut or skip meals due to heating costs¹¹.

PRS tenants would benefit from increased protections and power for environmental health to enforce standards.

PHW supports a housing model that includes:

A collaborative approach

In our upcoming publication, to be released in March 2026, PHW shows that stakeholders strongly support closer collaboration across housing, health, social care, and community services. Clear communication and a skilled workforce are seen as essential for effective delivery.

Bringing together housing services, environmental health, primary care, and public health teams can dramatically improve the identification and resolution of hazardous living conditions. This is already evident in successful initiatives across Wales, such as the [Warm Wales – Healthy Homes, Healthy People](#) project highlighted in our 2025 report [Shaping the future of healthy housing in Wales](#).

Looking forward, the Welsh Housing and Regeneration Strategy¹² offers a real opportunity to embed this joined-up approach, turning collaboration into tangible improvements in people's homes, health, and wellbeing.

Lived experience engagement

As noted in our response to the previous consultation, lived experience and tenant feedback is crucial and should inform service improvement. Embedding lived experience through early and meaningful engagement is needed to ensure policies reflect the challenges people are experiencing and are feasible to deliver.

To achieve this, lived experience should be embedded across policy design and delivery through employing people with lived experience in strategic roles, co-production panels, and long-term engagement with families. This needs to be a core practice with minimal barriers to participation. Lived experience should also be integrated into monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of housing interventions on health and wellbeing.

Integration of health and housing data

Stakeholders have also told us that more joined-up, consistent data on housing conditions enables a clearer understanding of the links between housing and health,

with information brought together across local authorities, housing providers, health services and the third sector through improved interoperability and data quality.

One way in which this could be addressed is through frequent and detailed Welsh Housing Surveys, with a strong focus on health-related indicators. Improved survey data would enable better understanding of:

- the prevalence and distribution of hazards,
- regional and socio-economic and health inequalities, and
- the relationship between housing conditions and health outcomes.

Updating the Welsh Housing Conditions Survey more regularly would strengthen evidence-based policy making, ensuring decisions are informed by the most current data.

Conclusion

PHW views hazardous disrepair as a preventable public health issue. The new WHQS represents a positive step forward, and its implementation can be further strengthened through a focus on prevention, joined up working, meaningful tenant engagement and stronger sharing of data between housing and health.

Ensuring safe, healthy homes is one of the most powerful interventions available to reduce health inequalities and improve long-term outcomes for people in Wales.

¹ Health Equals. (2025). New data shows more than 1 in 4 of us live in homes that could harm our health. Health Equals. https://healthequals.org.uk/data_insights/homes-that-harm-health/

² Holden, K. A., Lee, A. R., Hawcutt, D. B., & Sinha, I. P. (2023). The impact of poor housing and indoor air quality on respiratory health in children. *Breathe* (Sheffield, England), 19(2), 230058. <https://doi.org/10.1183/20734735.0058-2023>

³ [Care and Repair Cymru \(2024\). Policy and Research: Housing Conditions.](#)

⁴ Gehrt, Daniel & Hafner, Marco & Christoffersen, Jens. (2021). Impacts of the indoor environment in our homes and schools on child health: A novel analysis using the EU-SILC Database. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354793221_Impacts_of_the_indoor_environment_in_our_homes_and_schools_on_child_health_A_novel_analysis_using_the_EU-SILC_Database

⁵ Decarbonisation of Homes in Wales Advisory Group. (2019). *Independent review on decarbonising Welsh homes: Report to Welsh Ministers* (Crown copyright). Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/independent-review-on-decarbonising-welsh-homes-report.pdf>

⁶ Welsh Government. (2020). *Welsh Housing Conditions Survey 2017-18: Headline results (updated) April 2017 to March 2018* (Statistical First Release SFR 10/2020). Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-02/welsh-housing-conditions-survey-headline-results-april-2017-march-2018-update-570.pdf>

⁷ Public Health Wales. (n.d.). *Lead exposure*. Public Health Wales. <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/environmental-public-health/lead-exposure/>

⁸ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Department of Health and Social Care, & UK Health Security Agency. (2024). *Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/damp-and-mould-understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-for-rented-housing-providers/understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-of-damp-and-mould-in-the-home--2>

⁹ Nicol S, Garrett H, Woodfine L, Watkins G, Woodham A. (2019). *The full cost of poor housing in Wales*. Building Research Establishment Ltd, Public Health Wales, Welsh Government.

¹⁰ Welsh Government. (2018). Welsh Housing Conditions Survey (headline results): April 2017 to March 2018. <https://www.gov.wales/welsh-housing-conditions-survey-headline-results-april-2017-march-2018>

¹¹ Hill R, Griffiths D, Janssen H, Ford K, Carella N, Gascoyne B, Azam S. (2024) *Cold homes in Wales: Is the satisfactory heating regime appropriate for health and well-being?* Cardiff: Public Health Wales NHS Trust. Available from: [Cold homes in Wales](#)

¹² Welsh Government. (2025). Consultation Analysis for the White Paper on securing a path towards Adequate Housing, including Fair Rents and Affordability. <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2025-07/securing-path-towards-adequate-housing-summary-responses.pdf>