



Information Note

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard
and Standard Delivery Plans

Produced by the Tenants Information Service
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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Why do you need to know about the Scottish Housing Quality Standard?

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) is a minimum standard set by Government for the houses in Scotland rented by councils and housing associations. Your landlord will have plans or be preparing plans to ensure this standard is met no later than 2015. This will affect your landlord's priorities for major investment in your homes. It could also have a significant effect on rent levels in the future. The SHQS is a minimum standard. Some tenants and landlords are aiming for a higher standard in some aspects of their housing conditions. For example, additional electrical sockets and showers over baths may be in a local standard.

Background

There are two important strands of the Scottish Executive's policy to modernise Scotland's rented housing. The first is to have a national minimum standard for rented houses. The second is to promote stock transfers of council housing to housing associations. Some councils find that they cannot afford the investment needed to meet the SHQS by 2015. Others can. Where they cannot, a stock transfer is usually considered. Only with a stock transfer, is the Government willing to write off some or all of a council's past housing debts to create a fresh start to financing tenants' homes in the future.

Councils and housing associations have to know the condition of their housing stocks in detail to work out longer term plans for investment. The investment is not just to meet the SHQS (at least) by 2015, but to ensure that the standard is maintained thereafter.

The SHQS mainly concerns basic repair, energy efficiency, modern amenities, health, safety and security. For example, good insulation standards and controlled entry doors to common closes feature in the SHQS. The SHQS does not include standards for adapted houses for particular needs or the environment around tenants' homes.

Landlords have to demonstrate through "Standard Delivery Plans" and reports of progress on them that they are on target to meet the SHQS by 2015. Many tenants' representatives and landlords have agreed standards a little higher in some respects than the SHQS, where they have agreed the rent levels needed to achieve the higher standard. Standard delivery Plans need to be reviewed periodically to see if the predicted costs and income available to pay for the standards have varied.

The SHQS defined

This table shows what is included in the SHQS.

IN SHQS	Summary	Details
Repair Standards	<p>This concerns the condition of the main elements or components making up tenants' homes.</p> <p>Small items of disrepair, easily fixed do not mean a house fails the SHQS.</p>	<p>Walls, floors, foundations, roofs, roof coverings, rainwater goods, access decks, stairs, landings, damp proofing, windows, doors, drainage.</p> <p>To distinguish failure under the SHQS from minor disrepair, replacement of more than 20% (a fifth) has to be needed to fail the SHQS.</p>
Energy Efficiency	<p>This includes insulation and the efficiency of heating appliances.</p> <p>The two measurement standards are NHER rating at least 5, or SAP rating at least 50.</p>	<p>At least 100 mm loft insulation.</p> <p>Wall cavities filled with insulation where technically feasible.</p> <p>Insulated hot water tanks and pipes.</p> <p>Efficient heating systems which heat the whole house.</p> <p>Any heating appliance over 20 years old is assumed to be inefficient.</p>
Bathrooms	Basic amenities in good condition.	Bath <u>or</u> shower, wash hand basin, WC.
Kitchens	Kitchen fittings to a good standard.	<p>At least 1 cubic metre of storage capacity, where practical.</p> <p>Space for cooker and its safe use.</p> <p>For safe working at a cooker, there must be a worktop next to at least one side of the cooker.</p> <p>A minimum of 6 electrical sockets.</p>
Health	<p>Water.</p> <p>Air quality.</p> <p>Freedom from dampness.</p> <p>Noise.</p>	<p>Lead free pipes for water supply.</p> <p>Mechanical ventilation in kitchens and bathrooms where required to deal with persistent problems of condensation and mould growth.</p> <p>Noise insulation, where there are noise problems from traffic or factories.</p>
Safety	<p>Fire prevention.</p> <p>Electrical and gas safety.</p> <p>Condition of stairs, landings, etc</p> <p>Lighting.</p>	<p>Smoke detectors.</p> <p>Safe electrical wiring.</p> <p>Safe gas systems and appliances.</p> <p>Safe common areas such as stairs, lifts, lobbies, drying areas, refuse chutes, bin stores (where provided).</p> <p>Adequate lighting in communal internal and external areas within the curtilage of the houses.</p>

The SHQS Defined

Security	External house doors. Close doors.	Secure front and rear access doors. Front close door controlled entry system. Secure rear access to enclosed common areas.
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The next table gives examples of what is not included in the SHQS. Tenants and landlords should consider whether or not items in this table could or should be in a local standard, higher than the SHQS Minimum. Note that there may be an effect on the level of rent increases in future, if some of them are included.

NOT IN SHQS	Summary	Comment
Window Standard	Double glazing is not required.	In practice, almost all council and housing association housing in Scotland has double glazed windows.
Sound Insulation	No standard for protecting against noise through walls, floors, roofs and from neighbours.	Sound insulation problems of this type are quite commonly complained of by tenants. It has probably been omitted from the standard because of the cost of meeting a good standard.
Second WC	May be considered desirable for larger families.	Left out of standard because it may be impractical to fit second toilets, due to limited space in houses.
Access for disabled people	No standard for all homes.	Although not in the SHQS, it is recognised as necessary for a large number of households.
The Environment	The immediate surroundings of houses.	Environments around housing were thought to vary so much, it would be difficult to define a suitable standard for all dwellings. This does not mean that landlords should not invest to achieve good environmental standards.
Extractor Fans	Not compulsory in all homes.	If no persistent problems of condensation and mould growth are present in a house, the SHQS does not require extractor fans to be fitted.
Bathrooms	Baths or showers.	The SHQS does not require bathrooms to have showers as well as baths, only one or the other. Some landlords specify both in their bathroom replacement programmes.

When the SHQS is used

Landlords have to know the condition of their housing stock in detail. This does not mean that absolutely every house must be surveyed to examine its condition. It is usually enough to survey a sample of each type of house in each locality. A one in ten sample is usually enough.

Surveys are carried out

- ◆ When landlords are preparing Standard Delivery Plans;
- ◆ When Options Appraisals are being carried out; or
- ◆ When previous surveys are out of date and have not been systematically updated.

Many landlords who have carried out stock condition surveys have also developed a computer database to keep the information up to date. For example, some houses may have failed the SHQS because their heating systems were not efficient. When new heating systems are installed, the data base is altered to reflect the change.

Age can have a lot to do with the performance of elements or components of a house. How long they last varies a great deal. When stock condition surveys are done, estimates are made of the remaining life left of the various components. Surveyors usually consider the age of components when making the judgement. They compare this to the average life expectancy of components. For example, central heating boilers are considered to last typically about 15 years. Modern windows may be expected to last between 30 and 40 years. Surveying firms often use a 20 year life cycle for kitchens, although some landlords find they have to replace kitchens on a 15 year cycle.

New stock condition surveys will be needed occasionally, perhaps at 5-yearly intervals. This could depend on how good a landlord is at keeping up to date records of repairs and planned maintenance.

Making plans

When the condition of the houses is clear, judgements can be made about what to invest in first, and how long it will take to do all that is necessary. These judgements go into the financial plans, sometimes called Standard Delivery Plans or Business Plans. They will be for at least the next ten years, but could show thirty years ahead.

The plans should also incorporate any features of tenants' homes which exceed the SHQS minimum.

Here is a much simplified extract to illustrate how Standard Delivery Plans and Business Plans are made up. The numbers are numbers of houses to be done in the years shown.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009
Kitchen replacements	350	400	450	100
Heating system renewal	400	400	200	200
Electrical wiring	150	300	450	150
Roof coverings	0	0	500	500
Rain water goods	250	250	250	250

The typical cost of each item is known from experience, and this enables the approximate total cost each year to be worked out.

Impact on rent levels

When deciding standards and how long to take to do things, the impact on rents has also to be considered. In general, the higher the standards, the higher the rents. Also, the faster progress is wanted, the higher the rents, at least to start with. A balance has usually to be struck between what is desired and what can be afforded.

A full financial plan will show all sources of income and all spending. This table shows the main income and spending in a financial plan.

Income	Spending
Rents	Investment to meet/exceed SHQS
Right to buy sales	Day to day repairs and cyclical repairs
New borrowing	Housing management
	Loan charges (the cost of borrowing)

Other owners in tenement blocks

In its plans, your landlord will only cost work to be done to tenants' homes. However, many houses form part of tenement blocks with some flats owned by others. These are usually people who have purchased their homes under the right to buy. Some are now also privately rented.

Some work, like recovering roofs for example, require the co-operation and a contribution to costs from those other owners. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2005 gives landlords a better chance to involve other owners in common works. It could still remain difficult for tenants to get all they work done to their homes that they want, because some owners do not co-operate.

What's at stake for tenants

The decisions taken by your landlord affect the rents you will pay in the future, the housing conditions you will get, when worn out or badly functioning parts of your home are dealt with, and more.

The Scottish Executive expects landlords to have consulted tenants on what should go into their plans, so that they reflect tenants' priorities and preferences as far as possible.

The SHQS and stock transfer

Decisions taken about how best to achieve the SHQS could also affect who your landlord might be in the future. Some councils do not have enough money coming in from rents, right to buy sales and new borrowing to pay for the SHQS. No financial help for this is available from the Government. One solution in such cases, is to propose higher rent increases. Even that might not produce enough money for the SHQS. An alternative is for a council to carry out an options appraisal.

An options appraisal would consider tenants' future prospects for housing standards and rent levels. It would do calculations showing those prospects if the Council remained owner of tenants' homes. And it would do similar calculations to show tenants' prospects for standards and rents if the ownership of the houses was transferred to another landlord.

The Government (at Westminster) is willing to write off some or all of the debts from past borrowing, if (**and only if**) councils transfer their housing stock to another landlord. This can mean that a new landlord is able achieve the SHQS, because much less of the rent money coming in would go on servicing past debts.

Even in a stock transfer, there may be difficult compromises to make between the standards tenants want and the rents charged. See the TIS information Note "Options Appraisals and Stock Transfer" for more details.

Tenants checklist

Have tenants' representatives been consulted on the standards your landlord is planning for the future?

Have all tenants had a chance to comment on your landlord's proposed standards and rents for the future?

Have you and other tenants been made aware of different options for standards and the rents related to each option?

Have arrangements been made for tenants representatives to take part in reviews of progress in meeting the targets once they are set?

Does your landlord do all it can to involve other owners when common works to blocks/tenements are required?

Tenants Information Service

This Information Note is produced by TIS. We are a national organisation providing independent advice, support and training to tenants throughout Scotland. We welcome membership from tenants & residents associations, landlords and individual members.

This Information Note is only one of many guides produced by TIS on topics of interest to tenants.

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