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

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

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

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 methodology[5].

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.

5.29 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 website[6].

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 site[8].

- 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 site[9].

- Transco's Affordable Warmth Programme: This programme has introduced Affordable Warmth leases targeted at RSLs and LAs. These leases make the installation of highefficiency gas central heating and energy efficiency measures more financially attractive for both landlords and tenants.

www.bre.co.uk/sap2005
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

APPENDIX 2

IPSWICH STANDARD

1. **Inside your home**

   - **Kitchens 20 year cycle:** Modern fitted Kitchen units with space for appliances, food preparation, safe flooring, tiling and extractor fan
   - **Bathrooms 30 year cycle:** Modern Bathroom with shower, tiling and extractor fan
   - **Electrical Systems 30 year cycle with 10 year testing**: Modern wiring including adequate supply of sockets, outside light by front door and consumer unit
   - **Central Heating**; Full controllable central heating

2. **Your Health, Safety and Security**

   - **Health:** Disabled Adaptations, safe steps, paths and handrails
   - **Safety:** Hardwired smoke alarms, removal of asbestos, fire prevention works,
   - **Security:** Window and door locks, front or side gates

3. **Energy Efficiency**

   - **Double Glazing:** high quality PVCu windows with secure locking handles
   - **Energy Efficiency:** All homes to have energy efficient boilers, draught and sound proofing and roof/cavity/wall insulation

4. **Improving Communal Areas**

   - Package to include: Secure Door Entry to communal flats, C.C.T.V. and modern lifts for sheltered housing, communal aerial upgrades, safe flooring and security in communal areas and compliance with the Disabled Discrimination Act

5. **Improving Your Neighbourhoods**

   - Package to include: Improved car parking, Improved lighting, fences and walls, improved maintenance and communal facilities

6. **Your Housing Services**

   - Improved repairs service including appointments
   - Increased resources to tackle anti-social behaviour
   - Improved levels of grounds maintenance and estate management services

7. **Other Maintenance**

   - Roofs/Chimneys 57 year cycle: Safe and watertight including rainwater goods
   - Doors 40 year cycle: Secure and modern GRP type entrance doors to ‘secure by design’ standard

Other Works: Better use of the stock including conversion of sheltered bed-sits, regular maintenance of the home every 7 years, upgrading drains, water supplies and key building components