

Decent Homes Standard

Scrutiny 19th October 2021

What is a 'Decent Home'?

- A Decent Home is one which is warm, weatherproof and has reasonably modern facilities
- The Decent Homes standard was established in 2004 and amended in 2006 to include the implementation of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- The standard was set up to guide long term investment decisions to improve the quality of housing stock – a non-decent home doesn't always need urgent investment – the standard should be used strategically
- The aims of the Decent Homes programme included an ambition of improving and investing in neighbourhoods – regeneration, mixed communities and sustainability – not just the bricks and mortar
- The Decent Homes Standard is complex and technical, but there are four primary considerations as to whether a home is classified as 'decent' or 'non decent' against this standard...

1) Does it meet the statutory minimum standard for housing from a health and safety perspective?

A dwelling which fails this standard will have one or more Category 1 hazard under the HHRS – Category 1 hazards are:

- **Hydrothermal Conditions** - Damp and mould growth, excess cold, excess heat
- **Pollutants (Non-Microbial)** – Asbestos, biocides, CO, lead, radiation
- **Space, Security, Light and Noise** - Crowding, entry by intruders, lighting, noise
- **Hygiene, Sanitation and Water Supply**- Domestic hygiene, pests and refuse
- **Falls** - falls from baths, levels, stairs and steps
- **Electric Shocks, Fires, Burns and Scalds** - Electric Hazards, fire, and hot surfaces
- **Collisions, Cuts and Strains**
- **Collision and entrapment**
- **Explosions**
- **Ergonomics**
- **Structural collapse and failing elements**

2) Is the home in a reasonable state of repair?

Dwellings which fail to meet this criteria 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.

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. Key components are: external walls, roof structure, windows/doors, chimneys, central heating boilers, gas fires, storage heaters, plumbing, and electrics.

3) Are the facilities reasonably modern?

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

4) Does the home provide a reasonable level of thermal comfort?

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

Heating systems need to be efficient and be capable of transferring heat around the home.

There are insulation requirements (loft and cavity) depending on the type of heating systems installed.

Note – due to the age of this document this section is outdated and doesn't fully reflect current thinking about insulation and heating technology. More on this later...

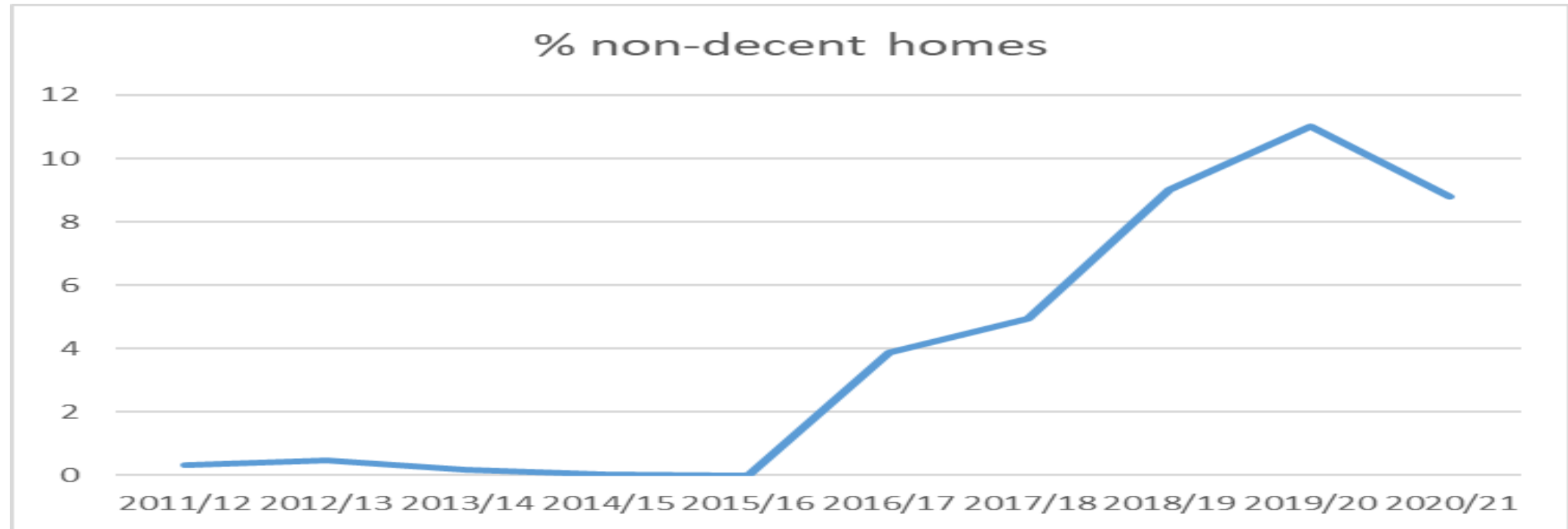
The Decent Homes guidance provide advice on how to use this information...

- Decent Homes work should not be undertaken in isolation from wider mixed-communities schemes and regeneration programmes, programmes should be joined up and strategically planned
- It is a standard that triggers the planning of actions, not a standard that should always trigger immediate work
- Investment needs to be considered in the context of both bringing non-decent homes up to standard and stopping decent homes becoming non-decent – all focus should not be on ‘non-decent’ homes

How we have measured decent homes standards in York

- Previously an approach was taken that a home was 'decent' unless data was available proving otherwise.
- In recent years, a more robust and cautious approach has been taken that a lack of information is treated as a potential fail
- Recently we have put significant work into understanding the condition of our council housing stock – including a stock condition survey
- This approach has led to a significant rise in the number of homes registered as 'non decent' which has informed our long term investment plans

Percentage of 'non decent' council homes in York



Key drivers of change:

Pre 2016 – an approach of decent unless data available to prove otherwise

2017 – analysis found no record of documents to confirm electrical tests had been carried out in the last 10 years at 546 homes – these Homes therefore moved from 'decent' to 'non-decent' classification

2019 – extensive stock condition survey undertaken – identified additional homes where the age or condition of kitchens, roofs, and electrical wiring, led to them being re-classed as 'non-decent'.

20/21 – Improvement from 11% to 8.8% non-decent.

Knowledge is power...

- This information has prompted:
 - The establishment of a system and budget to undertake electric checks at every council home at least every 5 years, meaning 20% of our homes will be tested every year - additional external and internal resource has been created to support this work.
 - A major review of our capital programme, including;
 - The re-profiling of our Tenants' Choice programme meaning funding has been put in place for 645 additional homes over the next 5 years. The work has been strategically planned in areas with high concentrations of homes with kitchens over 20 years old or poor condition, and where wiring installations are older than anticipated lifetimes, or recommended for replacement via our testing programme. Additional contractor capacity was introduced in 2019, with 4 contractors now delivering Tenants' Choice and Standing Water remedial works, where previously this was undertaken by one contractor.
 - Re-profiling our re-roofing programme based on both age, and condition, where previously programmes had been based solely on age. This means better targeting of non-decent, or at risk of becoming non-decent, homes and blocks.
 - The establishment of our first retrofit programme (strategic planning and direct investment) to improve the thermal comfort of the worst performing council homes, based on the findings of the Stock Condition Survey in 2019.

Future considerations

The government have initiated a review of the Decent Homes Standard and are consulting on proposed changes which may impact future thinking and investment planning.

The review will be conducted in two parts.

- Part 1 will seek to understand the case for change to criteria within the Decent Homes Standard.
- If the case for change is made, part 2 will consider how decency should be defined.

In addition, the Housing White Paper outlined a number of planned changes around the health and safety requirements of homes and an increase in transparency and accountability.