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1. Proposed Research Title

Does the impact of WHQS have a positive effect on tenants?

2. Abstract

This research will seek to further understand the views of residents following the Welsh housing quality standards programme being undertaken in their homes.

3. Introduction and background

The researcher has been heavily involved in the WHQS programme since 2011, and seeks to understand the impact of the work undertaken has had on the tenants.

The research findings will be beneficial to the Housing associations who have undertaken the works.

Although the housing association in question has undertaken tenant satisfaction feedback, this has always been undertaken immediately following the works. This research will understand the views of the residents following 2 years of the residents living with the upgrades.

4. Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the effect the upgrades in line with the Welsh Housing Quality Standards has had on the residents. We will seek to understand the effect on repairs levels, and the overall feeling of the scheme from the point of view of the residents.

5. Literature Review

5.1. The Decline in Social Housing

Social housing in the UK has been around since the end of World War 1. The Prime minister at the time Lloyd George described the need for 'Homes fit for heroes' for the returning soldiers of the trenches. During this time Housing was built in large quantities, and rented out by the local authorities, this became the birth of 'Council Housing'. (BBC News, 2015)

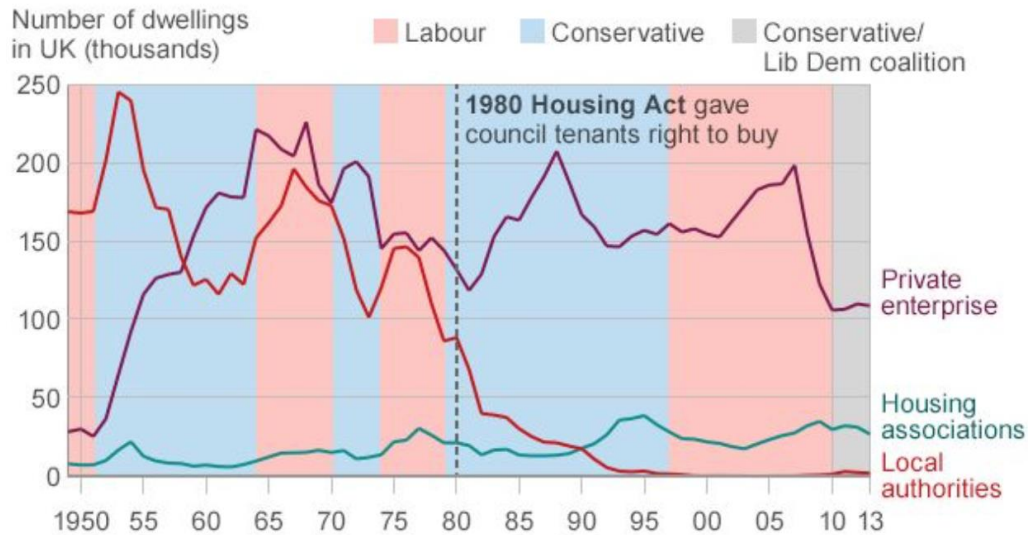
During the inter war years social housing continued to be built, but the biggest boom came post World War 2, where over a million homes were built under the government of Clement Atlee. Of the 1million houses built, over 80% of which were council housing. (BBC News, 2015)

Construction continued throughout the 1950's with more and more high-rise blocks being created, but by the 70's these high-rise blocks had become run down and a hive of crime. The government realised that the amount of housing owned under the local authority was at a level where maintenance and repairs had become costly.

Following this period, the right to buy was introduced under the 1980 housing Act, it was at this point that the researcher believes that Social Housing changed dramatically. The graph below shows the decline of construction of council housing, and at 1980 hit a point from which it has yet to recover.

Fig 1:

New homes built by private and social sectors, 1949-2013



Source: Dept for Communities and Local Government

BBC

With the decline in construction of housing and introduction of the 'Right to Buy', council housing stock was being depleted, the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher convinced people that to own their own home was the dream they could now achieve.

Naturally, the people who were in a position to purchase their home did so, and unfortunately, the majority of the good quality stock would be the first to go, with the stock left being poor quality and in less affluent areas. Between 1971 and 2001 over two million units had been sold. (Monk, 2008)

It has long been proven that the quality of housing and homes directly impacts the residents living there, for example planning controls and building regulations were introduced to ensure the safety and health of the people living there.

The decline in council housing has led to a stigma of residents of social housing, and a residualisation of stock, contained in areas of perceived poverty. (Johnson, 2011)

5.2. Welsh Assembly Government

On September 18th 1997, the UK government held a referendum in Wales on whether certain powers should be devolved to a new Welsh Assembly in Cardiff. And although the votes were very close there was a slim majority yes Vote (50.2%). (National Assembly for Wales, 2018)

The powers granted initially were secondary powers, meaning to enable a law to be passed, it would need to be agreed by UK Government in London. (National Assembly for Wales, 2018) In May 1999 the first elections were held in Wales, to form the first Welsh Assembly.

5.3. Better homes for people in Wales- 2001

In July 2001, the National Assembly for Wales released a report titled, 'Better homes for people in Wales'. This report sets out the objective of the Welsh Assembly that:

The Welsh Assembly wants everyone in Wales to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable, housing; to be able to choose where they live and decide whether buying or renting is best for them and their families.

- (National Assembly for Wales, 2001)

This report stated that the quality of lives of people in Wales is directly related to the homes and environments in which they live, environments which should feel safe and comfortable, and homes which are wind and weather tight, well insulated, energy efficient and with good amenities. (National Assembly for Wales, 2001).

The Assembly noted that there was a direct correlation between the health and mental wellbeing of residents in good areas, and equally in poorer areas where health was shown to decline. It also concluded that poor housing, with failing insulation, can burden the poorest households with increased heating bills, and increase the levels of fuel poverty.

The Report states that there has been a steady increase in quality of housing, there is still a great way to go, and that they wish to eradicate poor quality housing across all tenures. In order to undertake this objective, they stated a promise to work with local authorities to tackle the backlog of repairs and improvements, and set out their aim to achieve their promises by 2011. (National Assembly for Wales, 2001).

Within these promises set out by the Welsh Assembly, the Welsh Housing Quality standard was introduced, as a method of measuring the quality of housing, it stated the minimum standards acceptable, and how the standard would be measured.

5.4. Overview of Welsh Housing Quality Standard-

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) was developed by the Assembly to set a common target for all housing providers in Wales, the Assembly was aware that this standard would create a massive challenge for many housing providers, but believed that anything less than the standard was second best, and not acceptable for the people of Wales. (Housemark Cymru, 2008)

WHQS elements are split into primary and secondary elements, (Housemark Cymru, 2018) describes a primary element as an element that directly impacts on the safety of the residents, and a secondary element is one that focusses primarily on the comfort and convenience of residents.

5.5. Detail on WHQS sections 1-7

The WHQS is split into 7 promises to bring the housing standard up in the following 7 areas:

1. in a good state of repair

2. safe and secure
3. adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated
4. contain up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms
5. well managed (for rented housing)
6. located in attractive and safe environments
7. as far as possible suit the specific requirements of the household (e.g. specific disabilities)”

5.6. Financial Burden and Stock transfer

The initial target set by the Welsh Assembly was to reach WHQS by 2012, this target then became increasingly unachievable, as many of the housing providers in Wales, faced huge financial challenges arising from the standard, this included the need to borrow money or to undertake a transfer of all housing stock and become newly set up Registered Social Landlords (RSL).

For the smaller authorities in Wales, the financial security required to undertake the works was not available, the Welsh Assembly had predicted this might be the case, and instead of lending money to authorities, decided that a full stock transfer would be the better option, allowing private companies to be set up to manage the stock and to achieve WHQS. (National Assembly for Wales, 2001).

In order for Local authorities to undertake a stock transfer, a ballot had to be held of its tenants, to vote for or against stock transfer. Due to the length of time taken to undertake such a ballot and to form a new RSL, the deadline for WHQS was increased to 2020.

To date 11 local authorities have undertaken stock transfers to achieve WHQS. (Housemark Cymru, 2018).

5.7. Acceptable fails

Within WHQS, it was accepted that there may be some instances where the improvement of an element was not possible, in these instances there would be an acceptable fail placed on the element, the reasons for the acceptable fail would fall into one or more of the following categories:

Cost of remedy,

Timing of remedy

Residents choice

Physical constraint

(Housemark Cymru, 2008)

5.8. HHSRS

Introduced in the housing act of 2004, the Housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) is the benchmark for safety in the home, it was a new way of judging and identifying hazards, using a risk assessment approach, this new approach affects both RSL's and private landlords. It also gives new powers to the local authority to act on HHSRS fails, to enable them to prioritise the greatest risks to health and safety.

The HHSRS rating system rates potential hazards on a scale of A-J, with A being the most likely to cause harm and J being the least, Grades A, B and C are considered as Category 1 hazards, Local authorities have a duty to enforce improvements on Category 1 hazards.

(Dept. for Communities and local Govt. , 2006)

6 Methodology

This research will explore the feelings of residents in relation to the WHQS standard, to achieve this we will undertake exploratory research through inductive reasoning.

Exploratory research seeks to explore a research question to gain a greater understanding, it does not seek to offer a final conclusion or answer to question but is more suited to understanding the need for future research. (Research Methodology, , 2018)

The advantages of exploratory research include flexibility and adaptability, the research methods can be adjusted to suit the research question, for example, by undertaking a trial sample of questionnaires, you can understand if the questions you are asking will give you the understanding required from the overall research.

The results of the questionnaires and data collected from the samples will be analysed using inductive reasoning, the research will seek to understand the wider feelings of residents through the collection of a sample of residents views.

The research will seek to understand the effect of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) on the lives of the residents who live in the homes of a registered social landlord, based in South Wales.

The researcher will contact a random sample of Residents, who have lived in their current property for more than 2 years, and have had elements of WHQS completed in their property whilst they have lived there.

The research will question:

- Are the residents happy with the improvement(s)?
- Levels of repairs to WHQS element (kitchen / bathroom / Heating system etc.) since installation.
- Do the Residents feel that the improvements were necessary?
- Have the improvements impacted on the lives of the tenants. Either positively or negatively.

The research will be undertaken using a sequential mixed methods approach. Mixed methods utilise both Quantitative and Qualitative data collection, in the interests of understanding the research topic.

The researcher will firstly gather Quantitative data using questionnaires sent to a list of residents, following this, the researcher will undertake a series of interviews, to gain further understanding of how WHQS has affected the lives of tenants. The results of the questionnaire and the interviews will be compared to triangulate the data and ensure its validity.

In order to understand fully the effect that WHQS has had on the lives of tenants, it is important that the data subjects have experience of the WHQS programme and has lived in a property owned by the Housing association for at least two years. To achieve this the researcher will complete a data collection exercise from the records of the housing association, to find a list of eligible residents. The list will use the tenancy reference number as a unique data code to ensure the subjects will be chosen at random.

From the list of eligible residents, a questionnaire will be sent out to 100 residents, chosen at random using Microsoft excel 'Random' formula to generate the list.

The same list will be used to identify a list of potential candidates for interviews.

The data collected from questionnaires returned will be inputted into an excel spreadsheet and studied to seek to understand any trends or correlation. In the interest of achieving analysable data, the questionnaire will limit each answer to a rating of 1-5 with 1 being the most positive and 5 being the most negative.

From the data collected, it will be possible to understand gaps in the research, or where more clarity is needed, it is this clarity that will drive the questions asked at interview stage.

The interview answers will be coded to allow them to be compared and contrasted. These results will then be compared to the data collected in the first stage, against each other to attempt to achieve triangulation.

7 Data Analysis

Data analysis will be undertaken using Excel, including the use of Pivot tables to understand the overall feelings within each question.

The data collected in interviews will be analysed following a coding exercise. The coding will seek to break down the answers given, and to understand trends. For instance if someone was happy with something would be the 1st level code, and then what they were happy with would be the second level, by understanding this we can compare the results of each interview.

8 Consent / Access / Ethical considerations

This research proposal will be undertaken, taken into account with the privacy of the data subjects taken into account, all data held will be held in a secure password protected file, in line with the requirements of the data protection act.

In order for the information gathered to be kept secure, no names / business names will be used, to ensure that the information kept cannot be traced to a particular organisation.

Prior to undertaken this research proposal, consent was given by the Chief executive of the housing association in South Wales, of which the information and data lists will be based.

All results and findings will be provided to the Chief executive of the Housing Association.

9 Timetable

This research will take place post April 2019. This will ensure a full two years since the Housing association became fully compliant, and maximise the amount of potential participants.

Questionnaire

- An initial test sample of 5 surveys will be sent out. With a 14-day request for return.
 - Following return, the information will be verified.
 - The Questionnaire will be altered if necessary.
- The questionnaires will be issued to 100 people, with a requested 14-day return period. Including a stamped addressed envelope.
- Data returned will be collected and entered onto a spreadsheet.

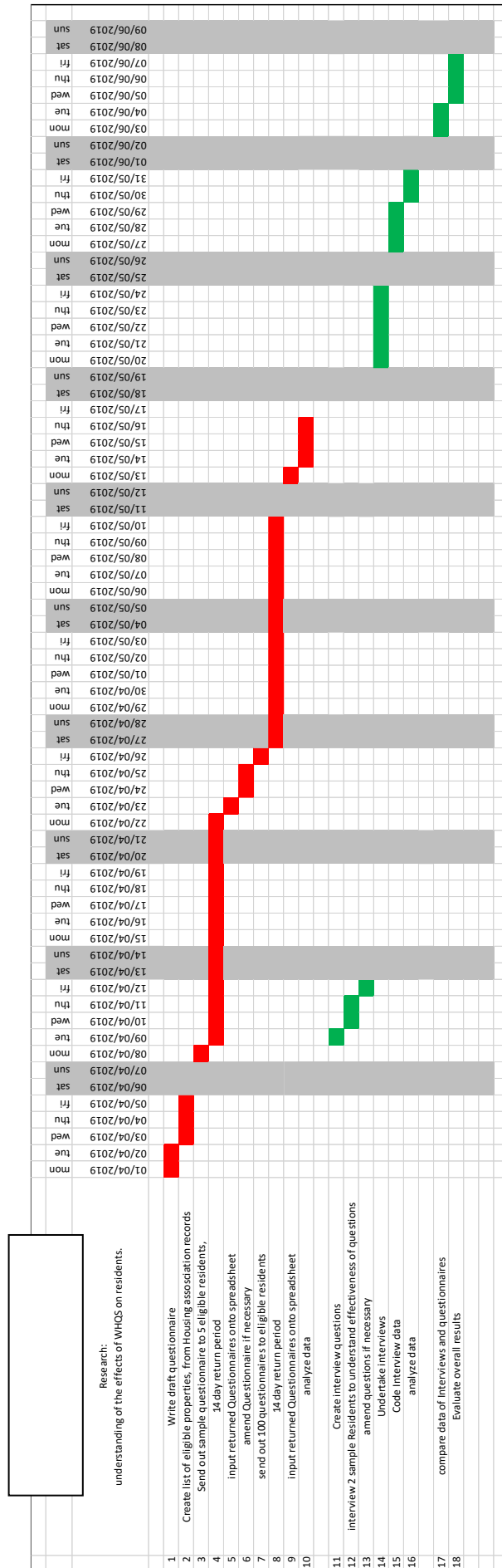
Interview

- Initial interview questions will be written and asked to a sample of 2 individual residents.
- The interview answers will be coded, and the questions changed if necessary, to make the answers broader or more specific.
- Full interviews will be undertaken following review of the questions being asked.
- The results will be hand coded and analysed.

The results of both of the methods of data collection will be compared, in an attempt to achieve an overall understanding of the feelings of WHQS from the residents sampled.

Please see chart below for estimated timescales and dates.

Research Proposal- April 2018



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