

A Decent Home

The revised definition
and guidance for
implementation

housing

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 3000
Website: www.dtlr.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2002.

Copyright in the typographical arrangement and design rests with the Crown.

This publication excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

*For any other use of this material, please write to HMSO, The Copyright Unit, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ.
Fax: 01603 723000 or email: copyright@hmso.gov.uk*

Further copies of this report are available from:

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1226 236
Fax: 0870 1226 237
E-mail: dtlr@twoten.press.net

Published by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Printed in the UK, March 2002
on material containing 75% post-consumer waste and 25% ECF pulp.

Product code 01HC1235

CONTENTS

SECTION 1

Introduction 3

SECTION 2

What is a “Decent Home”? – a summary of the definition 4

SECTION 3

What is a decent home? – the detailed definition 6

SECTION 4

Implementing the decent home standard 10

SECTION 5

Measuring the baseline position and monitoring progress 12

ANNEX A

The Fitness Standard 15

ANNEX B

Component lifetimes and definition of ‘in poor condition’
used in the disrepair criterion 17

SECTION 1

Introduction

1. In July 2000, following its Spending Review, the Government announced a significant increase in resources for housing, especially social housing. This was on top of substantial increases announced in 1998. As part of its desire to link increased spending to better outcomes, the Government established a target to:

“ensure that all social housing meets set standards of decency by 2010, by reducing the number of households living in social housing that does not meet these standards by a third between 2001 and 2004, with most of the improvement taking place in the most deprived local authority areas¹”

2. The target relates to social housing i.e. that owned by Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords (generally known as Housing Associations – referred to as HAs here). The decent home standard can be applied to dwellings which are owner occupied or rented privately. As part of their strategic function, local authorities should be assessing the relative condition problems in each tenure, particularly where vulnerable occupiers are in need of support. The decent home standard could be used in this context.
3. In measuring progress against the target local authorities and housing associations are advised to use homes as this is easier. We will check the progress in terms of households in national monitoring.
4. To ensure all social tenants have decent homes, the Government is dependent on social landlords. To deliver, social landlords need to quantify the level of non-decent housing in their stock, develop an investment strategy to tackle this and measure progress towards its elimination. The criteria included in the decent home standard reflect the types of work social landlords undertake to their housing stock. All local housing authorities develop Business Plans which are discussed with Government Officers. Housing Associations also develop Business Plans regarding investment in and management of their housing stock. It is important to ensure these plans deliver outcomes on the ground in terms of quality social housing. Delivery of decent homes is a key part of this.
5. The first version of the guidance was issued in July 2001. This revised guidance covers the same ground but clarifies queries from the first draft. It includes a new section on implementing the standard in the context of the investment plans. It also provides the detailed description of the amended thermal comfort criterion. This was changed following consultation with social landlords who had said it would be difficult to measure thermal comfort under the original definition. The change to the definition was announced on 5 February 2002.
6. This revised guidance is supported by a new Annex to *Collecting, managing and using stock condition information² – Decent Homes: Capturing the Standard at the Local Level* (circulated with this document). This provides guidance on using stock condition survey and other information in estimating, predicting and monitoring the level of non-decent homes.
7. Section 2 provides a summary of the decent home definition, plus some general principles about its usage. This section may be of interest to tenants and members who do not need to know about the detail of the definition and its interpretation, which are covered in sections 3 to 5.

¹ The most deprived local authority areas are those LAs which have been identified as such by the Indices of Deprivation 2000. This aspect of the target does not require social landlords to focus investment on the most deprived neighbourhoods or individual cases of vulnerability, although this may be appropriate as part of an effective investment strategy.

² Collecting, managing and using housing stock information: A Good Practice Guide (2000).

SECTION 2

Summary

8. A decent home is one which is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities. It reflects what social landlords spend their money on. To set a national target a common definition of decent is needed so all social landlords can work towards the same goal.
9. A decent home meets the following four criteria:
 - a – It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing**
10. Dwellings below this standard are those defined as unfit under section 604 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act).
 - b – It is in a reasonable state of repair**
11. Dwellings which fail to meet this criterion 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.
 - c – It has reasonably modern facilities and services**
12. 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);
 - adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.
 - d – It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort**
13. This criterion requires dwellings to have both effective insulation *and* efficient heating.

General principles of application

14. In applying the decent home standard, social landlords should bear in mind the following (covered in more detail in section 4):
 - It is a **minimum** standard that all social housing should meet by 2010 and which can be measured consistently across all social housing stock;
 - It is a standard that **triggers action**, not one to which work is necessarily carried out;
 - Landlords are not expected to make a home decent if this is against a tenant's wishes as work can be undertaken when the dwelling is next empty; and
 - Landlords are not expected to carry out **only** that work which contributes to making homes decent. For example:
 - building components may fail "early" – these should be dealt with, typically on a responsive basis;
 - environmental and security works, which are not included in the decent home standard, may be considered high priority in some areas.

SECTION 3

What is a decent home? – the detailed definition

15. This section gives detailed definitions of each of the four criteria that make up the decent home standard. Landlords may deliver housing above this standard but to achieve at least a minimum standard across all social housing a common classification is needed to set and monitor the national target.
16. The definitions used are not new concepts. The detailed technical descriptions used within the standard have been included in the English Housing Condition Survey (EHCS) for many years and, in the case of the Fitness Standard (see below), the necessary information is reported annually by local authorities as part of the Housing Investment Programme. The disrepair criterion builds on those component lifetimes regarded appropriate for planning newly arising renewal works. The component expected lifetimes were developed for the calculation and allocation of the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA). This is given to local authorities to finance newly arising programme renewals to their stock over the long term.
17. 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 assess individual dwellings against the standard. 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*³.

Criterion a: It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing

18. The current minimum standard for housing is the Fitness Standard (s604 of the Housing Act 1985 amended by Schedule 9 of 1989 Local Government and Housing Act). Dwellings unfit under this legislation fail this criterion. Under the Fitness Standard, a dwelling is fit for human habitation unless, in the opinion of the local housing authority, it fails to meet one or more of various requirements. These are listed in *Annex A*.
19. The Government intends to replace the Fitness Standard with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which will assess health and safety hazards in the home. This system is unlikely to come into force before 2004. A hazard score triggering a duty on an authority to take enforcement action will also trigger action in the context of decent homes. Guidance will be issued on the use of HHSRS in the field and the powers and duties arising from hazard scores. *Collecting, managing and using housing stock information* sets out a number of options by which social landlords could collect information that will help them assess how their stock measures against the HHSRS.

Criterion b: It is in a reasonable state of repair

20. 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

³ DTLR, *Decent Homes: Capturing the standard at a local level* (March 2002) published as an Annex to *Collecting Managing and Using Housing Stock information*. It is also attached to this guidance.

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

BUILDING COMPONENTS

21. Building components are the structural parts of a dwelling (eg wall structure, roof structure), other external elements (eg roof covering, chimneys) and internal services and amenities (eg kitchens, heating systems). 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
 - Electrics
22. 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.
23. *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 2 or more are old and need replacing or require immediate major repair.

'OLD' AND IN 'POOR CONDITION'

24. A component is defined as 'old' if it is older than its expected or standard lifetime. The component lifetimes used are those used to calculate the MRA and are listed in *Annex B*.
25. 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 B*.
26. 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.
27. 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.
28. 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. *Annex B* provides further guidance regarding the expected lifetimes.
29. 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

30. 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 noise insulation
 - Adequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats
31. 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.
32. 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 double glazing.
 - 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.
33. Landlords may work to different detailed standards than those set out above. In some cases there may be limiting factors such as physical or planning restrictions that make improvements necessary to meet this criterion impossible. In these instances the dwelling should be assessed, so as to determine what ought to be done and then any limiting factors will need to be considered. Some improvements may be possible even if not all are. A dwelling would not fail this criterion where it is impossible to make the required improvements to components for planning reasons.

Criteria d: It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

34. The revised definition requires a dwelling to have both:
 - efficient heating; and
 - effective insulation.
35. **Efficient heating is defined as any gas or oil programmable central heating or electric storage heaters or programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating or similarly efficient heating systems** which are developed in the future⁴. Heating sources which provide less energy efficient options fail the decent home standard.
36. 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;
 - **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).
37. 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.
38. The Government is investigating the most effective means of improving the energy efficiency of “hard to heat” homes where the construction may preclude the installation of traditional cost-effective insulation measures eg in some houses with porous “overcoat” bricks. The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, published in November 2001, announced a pilot project using micro Combined Heat and Power to test suitability of the technology for fuel poor households.
39. 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.
40. If new heating or insulation is being installed, it is important that steps are taken to ensure the dwelling is adequately ventilated.
41. Specific programmes are now in place that provide social landlords with additional resources for carrying out energy efficiency programmes⁵. These are:
 - **Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC)** – This is an obligation on licensed gas and electricity supplies to encourage or assist domestic consumers to take up energy efficiency measures.
 - **Transco’s Affordable Warmth Programme** – This programme has introduced Affordable Warmth leases targeted at RSLs and LAs. These leases make the installation of high-efficiency gas central heating and energy efficiency measures more financially attractive for both landlord and tenant.

⁴ for example efficient heating based on renewable sources

⁵ More information is available from <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/energy/index.htm>

SECTION 4

Implementing the Decent Home Standard

42. This section explains how the decent home standard should be implemented in the context of planning investment in the stock. Investment needs to be considered in the context of the future demand for the housing stock. In some areas of low demand, it may not be appropriate to invest in dwellings because there is unlikely to be sufficient demand for these in the longer term. Landlords should consider whether clearance of the dwellings and regeneration is the most effective long term strategy.

Standard of work to be carried out

43. The decent home standard is a **minimum** standard that all social housing should achieve by 2010, not that to which work should be carried out. Some landlords and tenants will want to work to a higher specification, for example:
- The decent home standard does not include double glazing, but on replacing windows landlords may want to install double glazing;
 - A dwelling is non-decent if it has less than 50mm of loft insulation (if there is a loft and there is no cavity wall insulation) but when insulating a dwelling, a greater depth of insulation should be installed.
44. When considering refurbishment packages, landlords should consult with current Building Regulations.

Work outside the decent home standard

45. Delivery of decent homes is a key priority, but this should not stop landlords from carrying out other work that falls outside the decent homes standard such as environmental work to the estates, security improvements or provision of disabled persons' adaptations.

Working in accordance with tenants' wishes

46. The decent homes standard ensures that all social tenants have access to a minimum standard of housing. However tenants may have other priorities and these need to be taken into account:
- Investment plans should be able to take into account work that falls outside the decent homes standard (see above).
 - The standard is sufficiently flexible for homes to be without two of the components in the modernisation list and still be classed as decent.
 - Where an individual tenant does not want work carried out on their home to bring it up to the decent homes standard, then the home can remain below the standard until the property is vacated, at which point the necessary work can be undertaken. The exception to this is where works are required to maintain the structural integrity of the dwelling or prevent other components within the dwelling from deteriorating.

47. Delivery of the Decent Home target will be important in bringing health benefits to tenants and reducing health inequalities. Authorities will be expected to set out in their business plans the investment strategy they consider the most effective, how they are taking tenants' wishes into account and how their effort is to be targeted. Although the Guidance does not require landlords to focus investment on the most deprived neighbourhoods or on vulnerable tenants, it may make strategic sense to do so in some circumstances, for example by prioritising measures such as heating and insulation for elderly tenants.
48. Social landlords may also retain some repair responsibilities for leasehold stock or stock held under shared ownership. Such stock is not classified as social housing and therefore the target is not applicable.

Timing of work

49. Effective planning of renovation programmes is vital for the delivery of the decent homes for all social sector tenants by 2010. Landlords need to identify and evaluate the options for improving the condition of their housing over the period. Programmes of work should be planned to enable an effective use of resources in tackling non-decent housing and preventing decent housing from deteriorating into non-decency, as well as taking into account the views of tenants and future demand for the homes.
50. Timing of the work will need to take account of the following:
 - Premature failure of building components. Where there is early failure, this will need to be accommodated in the investment strategy.
 - Components lasting longer than expected. Under the disrepair criterion components should not be replaced just because they have reached the end of their life. If they are still functioning, an option is to retain them and replace them only when they begin to fail.
 - Landlords should determine the most effective balance between making homes decent and preventing homes falling below the standard.

Packages of work

51. If a dwelling fails to meet one criterion, landlords should consider whether it is appropriate to only carry out the work to make the homes decent or whether it is more effective to carry out additional works at the same time. For example:
 - Dwellings are non-decent because they have windows that need replacing. Their replacement would make the dwelling decent, but it may be more cost effective to replace both windows and doors, the latter being likely to require replacements in the next few years.
 - Providing additional loft insulation at the same time as carrying out re-roofing work in circumstances where provision of further insulation is not required to meet the decent homes standard.
 - When undertaking any work to improve the thermal efficiency of a dwelling, consideration should be given to improving other energy efficiency aspects such as additional insulation and ventilation, even if the dwelling already meets the minimum insulation requirements.

SECTION 5

Measuring the baseline position and monitoring progress

National monitoring

52. The estimate of the national baseline – that 1.7m social sector dwellings were non-decent at 1 April 2001 – is based on data from the 1996 English House Condition Survey (EHCS), rolled forward to take account of investment and deterioration since that date. It will be revised once the results of the 2001 EHCS are available later in 2002.
53. Progress towards the 2010 target will be monitored nationally through the same survey, which, from 2002, has been put on a continuous basis.

Social landlords' assessment of the local baseline position

54. The Department has not cascaded specific targets for individual social landlords other than that all social housing should be decent by 2010. However, all social landlords should be setting targets for tackling their non-decent housing and monitoring their progress. This will be a Best Value Performance Indicator⁶ from 2002/03.
55. Government Offices are working with local authorities and the Housing Corporation is working with HAs to establish their plans and mechanisms for monitoring progress towards making their stock decent. Local authorities will be required to set targets and report on their progress as part of their HRA Business Plan and Government Officers will be monitoring this. The Housing Corporation will monitor progress made by HAs which will be reported through the Regulatory Statistical Return. At the time of print, the formal process for in-year monitoring of progress is being developed.”
56. Local monitoring requires the establishment of local baselines and setting realistic plans for delivery against targets, as well as establishing suitable mechanisms for on-going monitoring and reporting progress. Many landlords have already done this but may wish to refine initial estimates. Each criterion should be measurable through the data captured through a standard stock condition survey.

⁶ Best Value Performance Indicators 2002/03 – product code 99LG0110

Predicting Future Progress

57. The following paragraphs explain how to predict the future changes in levels of non-decent housing. *Decent Homes: Capturing the standard at the local level (attached)* provides further details on how to collect the necessary information.
58. To address the problem of non-decent housing locally, social landlords need to understand the effect of different investment strategies on the level of non-decent homes. This requires an understanding of flows of stock into and out from non-decency and is part of investment appraisal. Key factors are:
- whether dwellings that are currently decent will deteriorate sufficiently to become non-decent in the planning period if no investment is made.
 - whether the type and extent of investment planned will make non-decent dwellings decent and prevent decent dwellings from becoming non-decent in the planning period.
59. The change in the number of non-decent homes from one year to the next is the net effect of these two flows. The year on year position would be simple to measure if a stock condition survey was repeated each year but this would not help in predicting how different investment plans would change the number of non-decent homes over the short and medium term. Nor is an annual stock condition survey necessary to estimate year on year change, provided there is good information about the dwellings on which investment is taking place together with a good property data base that includes data about the age of building components and their life expectancy.

Estimating deterioration

60. It is usually possible to predict which dwellings are likely to deteriorate and become non-decent. To do this, it may be helpful to classify dwellings into one of three categories:
- **Non-decent** – a dwelling that fails now on one or more of the criteria;
 - **Potentially non-decent** – a dwelling that currently meets the standard but is likely to deteriorate and become non-decent if no investment is made in the short term;
 - **Decent** – a dwelling which does not require investment even in the short term to prevent it becoming non-decent.
61. One task in devising an investment programme is to determine what will happen to dwellings which are initially decent in the absence of any investment during the period in question. The following should be borne in mind:
- Some criteria within the decent home standard are related solely to the design of the dwelling, e.g. layout of the kitchen, presence of insulation and heating system. These should not change over the period; no additional information is required to describe these features.
 - Some dwellings will fall below the defined standard over time (e.g. in modernity of facilities) simply because components are now a number of years older.
 - Many building elements will deteriorate in condition; they will show signs of increasing disrepair, and dampness or structural instability may appear.

Predicting impact of investment

62. Having predicted the number of dwellings likely to deteriorate and become non-decent in the event of no works being carried out, the impact of different investment strategies on the future condition of the stock also needs to be estimated. The following considerations will need to be made:
 - It may help to classify dwellings receiving investment as non-decent, potentially non-decent or decent before that investment is made.
 - Where work is carried out, does it result in changes to the age of major building components and/or increases their remaining life? e.g. Replacing a building component sets its age to zero and maximises its remaining life.
 - Where a dwelling is non-decent because it has some inherent design defect has it been remedied? In the case of thermal comfort, has the efficiency of the heating system been increased or insulation been improved?
63. Exogenous factors that will affect the level of non-decent housing need to be considered, eg the level of stock losses and gains, such as demolition, RTB sales, transfers and acquisitions.
64. The relative impacts of investing in non-decent, potentially non-decent and decent stock should be considered as part of the optional appraisal. One thing to consider will be the extent to which the number of non-decent dwellings is reduced. This will influence decisions on the level of investment on the decent, potentially non-decent and currently non-decent stock. As part of the Business Planning process, it will be necessary to estimate future levels of resources available and explore options for maximising these.
65. It will be necessary to carry out a stock condition survey periodically to re-quantify the number of non-decent homes.

ANNEX A

The Fitness Standard

1. The current fitness standard was introduced by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 which inserted a new s.604 in the Housing Act 1985. A dwelling is unfit if, in the opinion of the authority, it fails to meet one of the requirements set out in paragraphs (a) to (i) of s.604 (1) and, by reason of that failure, is not reasonably suitable for occupation. The requirements constitute the minimum deemed necessary for a dwelling house (including a house in multiple occupation) to be fit for human habitation. They are that a dwelling house should:
 - be free from serious disrepair
 - be structurally stable
 - be free from dampness prejudicial to the health of the occupants
 - have adequate provision for lighting, heating and ventilation
 - have an adequate piped supply of wholesome water
 - have an effective system for the drainage of foul, waste and surface water
 - have a suitably located WC for exclusive use of the occupants
 - have a bath or shower and wash-hand basin, with hot and cold water
 - have satisfactory facilities for the preparation and cooking of food including a sink with hot and cold water.

2. The fitness standard applies to both houses and flats. Flats (including flats in multiple occupation) are assessed under the requirements set out in paragraph 1 above, but the legislation also explicitly states that flats can be assessed as unfit if the building or part of the building outside the flat fails to meet any of the following requirements and by reason of that failure the flat is not suitable for occupation:
 - the building or part is structurally stable
 - it is free from serious disrepair
 - it is free from dampness
 - it has adequate provision for ventilation
 - it has an effective system for the drainage of foul, surface and waste water.

3. The 1989 Act introduced changes to the standard: the addition of new requirements for heating and basic amenities; the extension of lighting to cover artificial lighting; the omission of the previous requirement concerning internal arrangement; and a change to the means by which fitness is judged.
4. Under the current standard a dwelling house is unfit if, in an authority's view, it fails any one of the requirements and because of that failure is not reasonably suitable for occupation. Previously authorities were required to look at the range of requirements and decide whether a property was unfit in respect of any one, or a combination, of the requirements. The rationale for the 1989 Act changes was that of improving the objectivity of the standard and, by covering provision for heating and amenities such as personal washing facilities, known to be important to health, to better reflect modern expectations.
5. Advisory guidance is provided on interpreting each of the fitness standard requirements. This has been reproduced with minor updating references in Annex A of DOE circular 17/96 which consolidates extant guidance to local authorities on private sector renewal and covers the provisions in Part 1 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Annex B of circular 17/96 provides a revised code of statutory guidance for dealing with unfit premises to which local authorities are required to have regard in reaching decisions on fitness enforcement action.

ANNEX B

Component lifetimes and definition of ‘in poor condition’ used in the national measurement of the disrepair criterion

1. Table 1 shows the component lifetimes within the disrepair criterion to assess whether the building components are ‘old’. These are used to construct the national estimates of the number of dwellings that are decent and those that fail. These lifetimes are those considered appropriate for use in planning for newly arising renewal works for social landlords. They are the same as those used to calculate the MRA which were agreed following consultation in November 1999. Landlords will wish to consider whether these lifetimes are appropriate within their own stock for predicting the age at which the component ceases to function effectively.

Building component (key components marked *)	Houses and bungalows	All flats in blocks of below 6 storeys	All flats in blocks of 6 or more storeys
Wall structure *	80	80	80
Lintels *	60	60	60
Brickwork (spalling)*	30	30	30
Wall finish *	60	60	30
Roof structure *	50	30	30
Roof finish *	50	30	30
Chimney *	50	50	N/A
Windows *	40	30	30
External doors *	40	30	30
Kitchen ⁷	30	30	30
Bathrooms	40	40	40
Heating – central heating gas boiler *	15	15	15
Heating – central heating distribution system	40	40	40
Heating – other *	30	30	30
Electrical systems *	30	30	30

⁷ Kitchens are assumed to require replacing on grounds of repair every 30 years, bathrooms every 40 years. Therefore the age aspects in the disrepair criterion are set at 30 and 40 years respectively. These lifetimes were agreed following consultation on the MRA. However, it is clear that social landlords and tenants prefer these amenities to be replaced more frequently, to enable them to be maintained at a reasonably modern standard. Thus different ages are required for kitchens and bathrooms under the ‘reasonably modern facilities and services’ criterion.

In poor condition

2. Table 2 sets out the definitions used within the disrepair criterion to identify whether building components are ‘in poor condition’. These are consistent with EHCS definitions and will be the standard used to monitor progress nationally through the EHCS. Social landlords should consider appropriate minimum standards to use for their own local assessment and measurement of progress. For example, some will decide it appropriate to replace the whole roof covering if more than one third needs to be replaced (compared with one half used for national estimates).

3. During a stock condition survey, the surveyors should assess the extent to which individual building components require immediate work. Their judgement should be used to assess whether the components should be classified as in poor condition now or not. The general line used in the EHCS is that, where a component requires some work, repair should be prescribed rather than replacement unless:
 - the component is sufficiently damaged that it is impossible to repair;
 - the component is unsuitable, and would be even it were repaired, either because the material has deteriorated or because the component was never suitable;
 - (for external components) even if the component were repaired now, it would still need to be replaced within 5 years.

Table 2: Definition of ‘poor condition’ used in disrepair criterion:

Definition of “in poor condition” used in EHCS	
Wall structure	Replace 10% or more or repair 30% or more
Wall finish	Replace/repoint/renew 50% or more
Chimneys	1 chimney need partial rebuilding or more
Roof structure	Replace 10% or more or strengthen 30% or more
Roof covering	Replace or isolated repairs to 50% or more
Windows	Replace at least one window or repair/replace sash or member to at least two (excluding easing sashes, reglazing painting)
External doors	Replace at least one
Kitchen	Major repair or replace 3 or more items out of the 6 (cold water drinking supply, hot water, sink, cooking provision, cupboards, worktop)
Bathroom	Major repair or replace 2 or more items (bath, wash hand basin, WC)
Electrical system	Replace or major repair to system
Central heating boiler	Replace or major repair
Central heating distribution	Replace or major repair
Storage heaters	Replace or major repair

