

The introduction to the Oxford Standard

As part of Oxford City Councils asset management strategy we have developed the 'Oxford Standard' which is the standard we expect all of the Council's housing stock to meet. This recognises that the Government's 'Decent Homes Standard' is below the standard that the Council would wish to adopt for its housing stock in the future.

Working with a scrutiny panel of councillors and tenants we have developed a new standard which received approval of the CEB on 17th December 2014.

Set out below is the proposed "Oxford Standard along with the background

Introduction and Background

1. Oxford City Council owns, lets and manages about 7,800 houses. All income and expenditure related to these properties is managed within the housing revenue account business plan.
2. In order to effectively maintain this significant asset for the benefit of current and future residents a stock condition survey has been undertaken with the aim of informing the production of an asset management strategy.
3. The asset management strategy is broad ranging but will have at its heart the standard to which properties are maintained and how this standard is implemented over time. Currently works are planned to achieve and maintain the 'Decent Homes Standard' set by the Government in 2000. It is considered that this standard is not ambitious enough and tenants and councillors wished to go beyond this and consider what an "Oxford Standard" might be.
4. A Panel of Scrutiny Councillors and Tenants have considered what the Oxford Standard should be and have proposed that it should be embedded in the developing asset management strategy with clear action plans and commitment to delivery.

Methodology

1. The Panel used a mixture of desk top reviews and consultation to form their views and recommendations. Two consultation phases were undertaken.
 - Phase one – Survey asking tenants to prioritise the following five key areas of work ‘new bathrooms’, ‘new kitchens’, ‘environmental improvements’, ‘security’, ‘heating and energy efficiency’. The surveys were carried out through face to face interviews on the doorstep over a seven day period and by including the same questions in this year’s STAR survey.
 - Phase two – Two open tenant consultation sessions in the Town Hall. This used the same key areas as above but focused on the detailed specification of what should be included in the works. In addition tenants considered waste and recycling and an ‘other’ category.

The Panel also were provided with extracts from the results of the current stock condition survey organised around the same works and geographical areas as the consultation and information from other social housing provider standards.

The Agreed Oxford Standard

1. The Oxford Standard will be included in the asset management Plan and provide a clear and “action planned” commitment to delivery.
2. The following categories of work will be included within the Oxford Standard:
 - Bathrooms
 - Kitchens
 - Security
 - Efficiency and Heating
 - Environment

All these categories of works should include some degree of choice for tenants where this is possible.

3. Bathrooms The Council will
 - Offer a bath grab rail to all households.
 - When installing a new bath will always install a shower fitting over the bath.
 - Give you the choice of having either a glass panel or curtain rail fitted over your bath.

- Install height adjustable shower heads.
- Always fit an extractor fan in your bathroom?
- Tile all walls (top to bottom) which are adjacent to the bath and shower
- Give you the choice of mixer taps being fitted (where feasible)
- Plan to replace bathrooms every 25 years.

4. Kitchens The Council will

- Consult with tenants on layout of their kitchen and facility spaces to fit specific appliances as requested.
- Provide you with a choice of a 1 ½ size sink.
- Install an extractor fan in your kitchen.
- Hard wire carbon monoxide detectors.
- Hard wire smoke detectors.
- Plan to replace your kitchen every 20 years.
- Provide provision for both an electric and gas supply for your cooker (where practicable)
- Offer a charged for service at the time of planned works to connect appliances.

5. Security The Council will

- Install window locks to all accessible windows.
- Gate our side and back alleys.
- Be responsible for the installation and maintenance of the fencing to the side and rear of your homes to a standard agreed with tenants.
- Ensure that all front doors are of high quality and secure.
- Ensure that the locks to front doors are of a high standard.
- When replacing front doors ensure they have a spy hole.
- In consultation with residents look to improve the lighting in the shared areas to blocks of flats.
- In consultation with residents look to improve lighting at the front and rear entrance doors of your home.
- In consultation with residents look to improve the communal areas leading to your building.

6. Heating and Energy Efficiency

The Council will set specific targets for energy efficiency.
Measures may include:

- Installing solar panels that provide hot water or free electricity (where feasible).
- Installing wall and loft insulation to the current government standard.
- Ensuring that all properties have double glazing that meets modern standards.

- Replacing windows and doors together.

7. Environment

The Council will carry out consultation and provide solutions for estates built around a blue print for the whole area rather than responsive investment based on issues and complaints

Additional consultation will take place to provide a lasting environmental standard, to include:

- More parking provision you (where feasible).
- Improved external lighting around homes.
- Secure the bin storage area (where feasible).
- Secured storage areas for prams/buggies/strollers, bikes, mobility scooters etc.
- Improved pathways to and around homes (limited to Oxford City Council land).
- Increased numbers of dog waste bins available in neighbourhoods.
- Improved shared garden areas.
- Windows which tenants are able to clean safely.

8. The priority for delivering the Oxford Standard will be decided by a combination of significant pockets of disrepair (identified with the stock condition survey) and the views of residents.

9. The works will be packaged together so that more efficient outcomes for residents and the Council can be achieved. For example:

- If we replace windows then doors should be done at the same time (if needed) to give optimum benefits.
- If the heating is to be replaced or upgraded we should consider insulation and other connected repairs at the same time.

10. The delivery of the Oxford Standard will be on an area by area basis with good communication both within and outside of the area so that all tenants can easily access information on when, where, how and why.

11. Individual tenants will not be able to “opt out” except in very exceptional circumstances. If there are difficulties these will be recognised and support offered so that the work can take place. Properties should be maintained for both the present and the future.