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LESSONS FROM LAST TIME:

A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON THE FIRST DECENT HOMES PROGRAMME IN THE SOCIAL AND PRIVATE RENTED SECTORS.





The Decent Homes Standard is currently under review, and Government has proposed applying the new standard to the private rented sector. This evidence review seeks to inform this initiative by providing an evidence review focused on the implementation of the first decent homes programme. It provides insights for policy-makers and practitioners.

KEY THEMES

- The benefits of a holistic approach to decency in the dwelling, combined with long-term programmes and funding. This will avoid false economies associated with piecemeal interventions.
- Resident engagement is key to building momentum around Decent Homes 2, and building trust, especially for works that may not have obvious immediate benefits to residents.
- Localised coordination and collaboration is needed to achieve economies of scale, coordinate skills and training strategies, and to bring the private rented sector up to the new standard.
- There are merits to a tiered standard looking beyond the front door to the wider neighbourhood, and a staggered approach to implementation.
- There is a need to plan for the legacy of any Decent Homes 2 programme, safeguarding the investment made and maintain compliance with the new standard.

LESSONS FROM LAST TIME:

A review of evidence on the first Decent Homes Programme in the social and private rented sectors.

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1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Decent Homes Standard (DHS), initiated by the then Labour government in 2000, established a minimum standard for social housing in England.

DHS represented a significant increase in investment in the nation's housing stock. The current standard has been in use since 2006 (and can be found here). The Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) is reviewing DHS as part of its agenda to improve standards for renters, expand opportunities for resident engagement, and create a sense of pride in communities. The government has proposed applying the renewed DHS across the social sector, and is consulting on the principle of applying it in the private rented sector (PRS).



This report seeks to inform this initiative by providing an evidence review focused on implementation of DHS1 and contemporary housing issues relevant to the development of DHS2.[1]

This evidence review has two primary objectives. The first is to act as a source of evidence to inform government strategy and policy on improving housing decency. The second is to offer insights for housing practitioners and professionals in responding to the renewed interest in Decent Homes, including lessons for implementation of a possible DHS2.



2 KEY THEMES IN THE EVIDENCE REVIEW

The benefits of a holistic approach to decency in the dwelling, combined with long-term programmes and funding.

Long-term partnerships were common in DHS1, and they were supported by the scale of the programme and relative security of funding. Long-term funding and programmes helped scale up the supply chain by providing a clear signal of demand. However, there was ambiguity in how decency should be assessed in DHS1 and standards varied between landlords. The evidence suggests that adopting a comprehensive approach to decency avoided the false economies associated with piecemeal intervention.

Resident engagement is key to building momentum around DHS2 and building trust. DHS2 is likely to be less focused on works such as kitchen and bathroom renewals, which were popular with residents in DHS1. Instead DHS2 may be more concerned with undertaking improvements that can be invasive and have the perception of offering less benefit to residents, such as electrical rewires. Building trust and momentum for DHS2 through effective resident engagement will be crucial. At the same time, the evidence suggests there are potential benefits to integrating DHS2 with net zero, using modernisation of the home as the sell for retrofit.

[1] Throughout the report we refer to the initial DHS as DHS1, and the hypothetical Standard currently under government consultation as DHS2.

However, current funding and administration is driving some landlords to deliver retrofit and planned maintenance via two separate programmes, this is overly restrictive where landlords would otherwise adopt a whole-house approach to renovation.

The need for localised coordination and collaboration to scale up. Local coordination and collaboration across organisations is beneficial in a number of areas, namely establishing procurement consortia to achieve economies of scale, coordinating skills and training strategies, and onboarding the PRS into DHS2.



The merits of a tiered standard beyond the front door, and a staggered approach. Although a holistic approach to decency within the dwelling has benefits, there is scope for a tiered 'Decent' Homes Plus that includes improvements to the wider neighbourhood and communal areas where this is practical and feasible. Successful estate regeneration often combines improvements to dwellings with resident-led investment in the wider environment. But not all landlords have significant leverage over conditions in the wider neighbourhood, notably small social landlords and much of the disparate PRS.

Planning for the legacy of DHS. It was widely assumed in DHS1 that a large programme dealing with the legacy of council housing disrepair would reduce the need for a similar programme in the future. That we are now considering DHS2 suggests the legacy of DHS1 did not receive sufficient attention. Adopting a holistic approach to assessing decency could help safeguard the societal investment in DHS2, alongside making maintenance of the Standard a central component of the strengthened Consumer Standards in social housing regulation, and integrating it into an overhauled PRS regulatory framework.

3 SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

In each section of the review we identified lessons learned for practice and policymakers with some notable lessons outlined below.

Delivering at Scale: Procurement and Skills and the supply chain

Procurement

- A holistic approach to assessing decency that addresses all necessary works - in contrast to one that measures decency as one or two component renewals - may be more cost-effective in the long-run
- Long-term partnerships can support planning, supply chain development and joint learning, but they are not guaranteed success and need to be combined with proactive contract management and benchmarking
- Procurement consortia can provide economies of scale for value for money (VFM) and supply chain development

Either a whole-house or component-led approach to delivery can succeed provided it is effectively planned, managed and communicated



Skills and the supply chain

- Supply chain development may be accelerated by partnering with contractors, local colleges and devolved institutions to inform skills and training strategies
- Frontline staff will need training in the details of the programme, and surveyors will need training in the details of DHS2 legislation to provide consistent estimates
- Short-term and siloed funding streams may inhibit the construction supply chain, make procuring at scale more challenging, hindering a whole-house approach
- Local authorities could help coordinate local procurement and implementation in the PRS; but they need clarity on their role, and sufficient resourcing and capacity building, especially where authorities do not hold housing stock
- Combined authorities could also support local procurement e.g. supporting strategy development, bringing stakeholders together and expediting local skill development
- An awareness campaign for retrofit skills accreditation schemes could support building the supply chain

Maximising the benefits for residents: Resident engagement and social value

Resident engagement

- Successful resident involvement requires authorisation from organisational leadership and the adoption of multiple modes of engagement.
- Aligning resident participation structures to a programme's key performance indicators can support service improvement, and joint resident-staff training exercises can embed a 'one-team' ethos
- Education in the use of new technologies is critical to maximising the long-term benefits of installations

Social value

- Using DHS2 to increase the employment of residents will require targeted outreach to match residents with opportunities, and interventions to reduce barriers to employment (e.g. skills development, pastoral support)
- The government should provide clarity on a framework for defining and measuring social value in DHS2, although any framework should be flexible enough to evaluate the wide range of social value activities overseen by landlords
- Commissioning research and evaluation into 'what works' in producing social value could fill existing gaps in the evidence base



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DHS and complementary government priorities: Net zero, health and social care and levelling up

Net zero

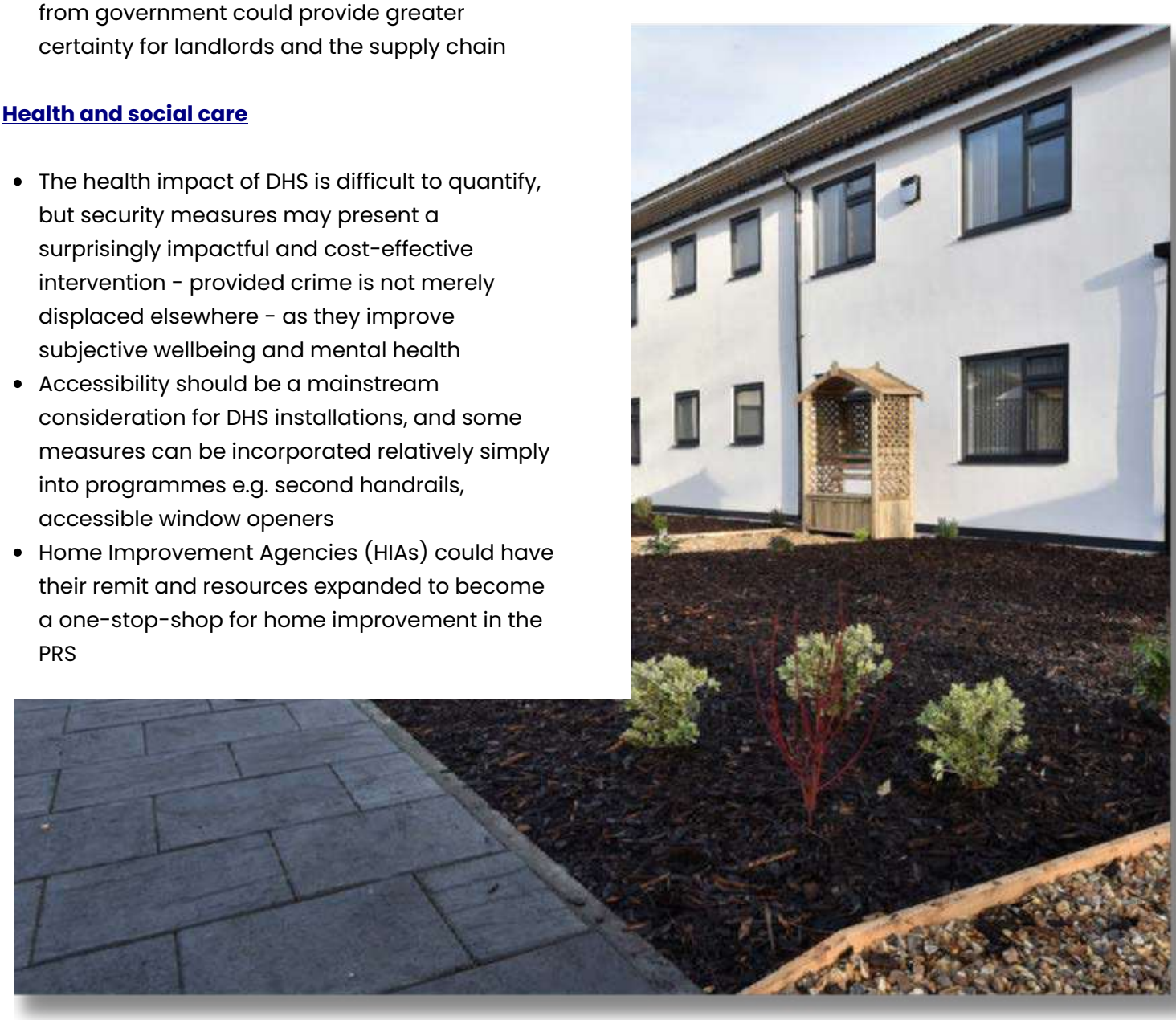
- Residents may be more willing to accept energy efficiency works where they are combined with a wider programme of modernisation
- Failure to integrate DHS2 with net zero legislation and funding will make a whole-house approach to retrofit more difficult
- A clear technology pathway for net zero heating from government could provide greater certainty for landlords and the supply chain

Health and social care

- The health impact of DHS is difficult to quantify, but security measures may present a surprisingly impactful and cost-effective intervention - provided crime is not merely displaced elsewhere - as they improve subjective wellbeing and mental health
- Accessibility should be a mainstream consideration for DHS installations, and some measures can be incorporated relatively simply into programmes e.g. second handrails, accessible window openers
- Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) could have their remit and resources expanded to become a one-stop-shop for home improvement in the PRS

Levelling Up

- Neighbourhood improvements can support pride in communities, and may best be implemented via a tiered Decent Homes Plus, with the specific improvements determined locally
- Improvements to the estate and communal areas are often as valuable to residents as those within the dwelling, and may help increase demand for hard to let properties
- Resident consultation can help determine priorities for neighbourhood improvements





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