



18 October 2018

Via email: healthyhomes@mbie.govt.nz

Healthy Homes Standards
Housing and Urban Branch
Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
PO Box 1473
Wellington 6140

Dear Sir / Madam

HEALTHY HOMES STANDARDS

Thank you for the opportunity to present our submission on the Healthy Homes Standards to give effect to the Healthy Homes Guarantee Act 2017.

In general, the Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) supports the introduction of standards to ensure that people living in rented properties have warm, dry homes. The attached document sets out the QLDC's preferred options for each section.

Please note that this submission reflects the position of officers and has not been ratified by full Council.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully,



Mike Theelen
Chief Executive
Queenstown Lakes District Council

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Approximately 44 per cent of Queenstown Lakes households live in rented accommodation¹. QLDC supports proposals to make all rental properties safe, warm and dry as this will deliver good outcomes for many of our residents.
- 1.2 Whilst we fully support the initiative, we do urge consideration of monitoring and enforcement requirements. We are also mindful that costs associated with bringing rental properties up to standard may be passed onto tenants in a rental market that is already the most expensive in the country. Whilst this is not a reason to slow reform, it is a potential negative externality that may need to be addressed subsequently. We suggest that it could be considered as part of the reform of the Residential Tenancies Act 1986.
- 1.3 The QLDC's preferred options, which are set out below, take into account the Queenstown Lakes climate and other conditions specific to the local rental market.

2.0 HEATING

Preferred option 2: Landlords are required to provide heating in living areas and bedrooms:

- 2.1 We agree that the minimum temperatures recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) should provide the benchmark for the Healthy Homes Standards. Option 1 potentially disadvantages renters living in colder climates as it requires landlords to provide heating in the living area alone. For that reason we recommend Option 2 i.e. that landlords provide heating in the living room/s and bedrooms, and that the heating devices landlords provide must be capable of achieving an indoor temperature of at least 20°C.
- 2.2 We believe that landlords should be encouraged to install efficient, effective heating devices, and prevented from providing unflued gas and kerosene heaters.

3.0 INSULATION

Preferred options 3 and 2: An even higher minimum of ceiling and underfloor insulation, where the minimum level for both existing and new insulation is akin to the 2008 Building Code; and insulation can settle or degrade by up to 10% before it is in an unreasonable condition:

- 3.1 We note that the 2016 regulations exempt homes that comply with the requirements relating to thermal insulation at the time it was installed on the condition that landlords produce the relevant record showing compliance. We note that unless all insulation is brought up to the current minimum standards, it may be hard to reach and maintain a minimum temperature of 18-20°C in some homes.
- 3.2 We have some concerns that anomalies will arise if exceptions are made to buildings where the insulation was compliant at the time of installation.

4.0 VENTILATION

Preferred option 3: Openable windows in the living room, dining room, kitchen and bedrooms, and appropriately installed extractor fan(s) in rooms with a shower, bath or indoor cooktop:

¹ <http://urban-development-capacity.mbie.govt.nz/>

4.1 The Queenstown Lakes district has a high number of newly constructed buildings in which ventilation is becoming an increasingly important issue. Some houses are now built to be airtight, so that moisture dissipation is either slowed or prevented altogether. In a climate such as Queenstown's, extreme temperature differentials and lack of adequate ventilation create conditions for internal moisture build-up, which can lead to health issues for the occupants as well as premature decay of the buildings. For these reasons we recommend Option 3, which offers optimal ventilation standards.

5.0 MOISTURE INGRESS AND DRAINAGE

Preferred option 2: landlords must ensure efficient drainage and guttering, downpipes and drains, and ensure the subfloor has a ground moisture barrier, unless there is already adequate subfloor ventilation:

5.1 We recommend Option 2 as this will provide effective drainage and prevention against moisture ingress. This option will require the provision of clear guidelines.

6.0 DRAUGHT STOPPING

Preferred option 2: landlords must block any unused fireplaces and chimneys and stop any unnecessary gaps or holes that cause noticeable draughts and a colder home, and are 3mm or greater in and around windows and doors, walls, ceilings, and access hatches:

6.1 We recommend Option 2 to provide effective draught stopping. This option will require the provision of clear guidelines.

7.0 DATE TO COMPLY WITH STANDARDS

7.1 None of the options provided are ideal. The date to comply with the new standards needs to be straightforward and fair to tenants and landlords, and provide sufficient time for suppliers and installers to prepare.

8.0 IMPLEMENTATION

8.1 We suggest it would be in the interests of landlords to keep records to prove their properties meet the required standards (and as per the new tenancy agreement). If they do not have the required evidence, they will be liable for the cost of an assessment.

9.0 FURTHER ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

9.1 On reviewing the discussion document in detail, we have identified the following questions concerning process:

9.1.1 Regarding inspections, will these be triggered by tenant complaints, and/or by other means? Who will be responsible for following up and making sure the upgrades are carried out to the required standard?

9.1.2 As mentioned in our introduction, will the the proposed Residential Tenancies Act reforms be adequate to protect tenants should they raise concerns with their landlord about heating, insulation, ventilation etc.? Could this protection be included in the reforms explicitly?

- 9.1.3 What timeframes will non-complying landlords be given to bring their properties up to the new standards after a complaint has been raised, and what are the proposed penalties for non-complying landlords?
- 9.1.4 We note that due to risks to safety, under the proposed new standards landlords will be prohibited from fitting foil insulation. Does the Ministry anticipate that landlords will be required to remove existing foil insulation from rental properties further down the track?

10.0 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The QLDC is pleased to see that standards will be introduced to ensure the Healthy Homes Guarantee Act 2017 is effective, and that substandard properties will become much more liveable.
- 10.2 In addition to providing tenants and their families with a healthy home, the proposed upgrades may also extend the life of the asset. We remain concerned that some or all of the costs of upgrades will be passed onto the households, particularly those who will struggle to pay significantly more rent following work undertaken at the property.