

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Research Programme 2021/22

Statutory Research		
Project	Client	Lead Researcher
2016 House Condition Survey modelling (interim outputs pending 2022 fieldwork)	Land & Regeneration	BRE
2022 House Condition Survey Prep: (training and software)	Land & Regeneration	BRE

Contractual Commitments carried forward		
Project	Client	Lead Researcher
House Prices, Rents and Affordability	Land & Regeneration	Ulster University
Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey	Housing Services	Perceptive Insight
Tenant Segmentation	Communications	Savanta
Experiences of Youth Homelessness	Homelessness/Regional	Fiona Boyle Associates
Universal Credit: The Customer Journey (Quant)	Housing Services/HB Project Team	Perceptive Insight
Universal Credit: Rural Perspective	Housing Services/HB Project Team	RF Associates
Move-on accommodation for PBNi clients	Homelessness/Regional	IpsosMORI
Review of the Sanctuary Scheme	Homelessness/Regional	IpsosMORI

New projects 2021/22		
Project	Client	Contractor
New Social Housing: Satisfaction Survey	DfC	TBC
Understanding Tenancy Terminations and Issues for Sustainment	Housing Services	Perceptive Insight
Strategic Housing Market Analysis: Phase 2	Land & Regeneration	Economic Research & Evaluation
Understanding Tenant Participation	Housing Services	Perceptive Insight
Evaluation of the Community Cohesion Strategy	Housing Services	Sector 3 Solutions
Private Sector Leasing Scheme	DfC	TBC
Intermediate Rent Model Research	DfC	TBC
Alternative Supported Housing Models	DfC	TBC
Homelessness Funding: Comparative Review	Finance, Audit & Assurance	TBC
Housing Benefit Customer Survey	Finance (HB Project Team)	TBC
Housing Stock Profile Pilot	DfC	TBC
Irish Traveller Accommodation Need Assessment Methodology	Regional (Land & Regeneration)	TBC
Research into the PRS	DfC	TBC
Affordable Warmth Customer Survey	Regional (PSIS)	TBC
Mid-term Evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy	Homelessness Strategy	Fiona Boyle Associates
Moisture Control in Insulated Walls	Asset Management	TBC

It is intended that, staff and budgetary resources allowing, the projects listed above will commence in 2020/21. From time to time, however, projects may be postponed or withdrawn from the programme due to wider policy developments, changing client needs or resourcing pressures.

Statutory Research

16/1.1 2016 House Condition Survey (Modelling)

Key Client: Regional Services (Land & Regeneration)
Contractor: BRE

The Housing (NI) Order 1981 stipulates that the Housing Executive shall regularly examine housing conditions and need. In line with this statutory duty, the Housing Executive has conducted cross-tenure House Condition Surveys in Northern Ireland every five years since 1974, as well as interim surveys in 2004 and 2009. The surveys provide key information that underpins the development of housing policy, informs housing strategies and plans and guides the effective use of resources. The time series data allow an insight into the dynamics of the housing market and an assessment of the impact of government policies and strategies.

The fieldwork stage of the 2016 House Condition Survey (HCS) was completed during 2016/17 and headline figures on the dwelling stock and tenure, dwelling age and location and unfitness (at Northern Ireland level) were published in March 2017. In addition to the fieldwork and in order to produce a full report that included update indicators of key measures comparable with the English Housing Survey and Scottish model, and consistent with previous Northern Ireland Housing Condition Surveys, further data modelling work was carried out to produce statistics on:

- Repair costs;
- SAP and thermal comfort;
- Decent Homes;
- Fuel poverty; and
- Performance against the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

In light of the increasing emphasis on climate change, carbon emissions and the environmental impact of energy generation and consumption, modelled HCS data are critical in informing the work undertaken by the Housing Executive in its role as the Home Energy Conservation Authority (HECA) as well as a wide range of other policies and strategies. In this context, other modelled outputs that have been published include a report on carbon dioxide emissions, a SAP time series (recalibrating previous SAP calculations to match the updated methodology for comparability over time), findings on the cost of poor housing in Northern Ireland, and reports on the cost to make fit, cost to make safe (in line with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System), and cost of carbon savings in the region's housing stock through retrofitting. There is also an increased demand for inter-survey monitoring of key statistics such as fuel poverty, to provide up-to-date indicators on an ongoing basis.

In February 2021, following consultation with HCS data users and taking account of the ongoing pandemic-related restrictions, the HCS Steering Group put forward a recommendation that the full survey originally planned for 2021 should be postponed until 2022, with a commitment that the Housing Executive would consult with users to establish requirements for key statistics, which would be modelled using data from the 2016 survey. This recommendation was approved, and a budget has therefore been allocated to enable further modelling work to be carried out during 2021/22, in advance of the planned 2022-based modelled outputs, which will not become available until 2023.

Expected impact/outcome

In the absence of the up-to-date survey data, the modelled outputs will continue to inform the work of the Housing Executive in its HECA role, and will also contribute to wider analysis and decision-making by other stakeholders including the Department for Communities.

20/1.1 2022 House Condition Survey (Preparation)

Key Client: Regional Services (Land & Regeneration)
Contractor: BRE

As noted above, the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to regularly examine housing conditions and need across all tenures in Northern Ireland. Since 1974, the Northern Ireland House Condition Survey (HCS) has provided data on the housing stock and its residents on a five-yearly basis, with the format and content of the survey reviewed and updated to ensure that the most recent approaches, methodologies and key strategic issues are taken into account. As such, the survey provides key data that underpins the development of housing policy, informs housing strategies and plans, and guides the effective use of resources. The time series data allow an insight into the dynamics of the housing market and an assessment of the impact of government policies and strategies, generating outputs that:

- Provide a comprehensive picture of the dwelling stock and its condition for Northern Ireland and, where the sample allows, each of the local government districts;
- Enable comparative analysis of housing conditions in Northern Ireland with other parts of the UK;
- Enable examination of the associations between dwelling conditions and the social and economic circumstances of the households living in them;
- Enable examination of changes in the condition of the stock over time in terms of key government measures including the Decent Homes Standard and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System; and
- Provide a reliable assessment of the energy efficiency of the stock and the level of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland on a comparable basis with the rest of the UK.

From 2016, in compliance with legislation, House Condition Survey findings have National Statistics status, which denotes that they have been assessed by the Office for Statistics Regulation (the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority) as being fully compliant with the Code of Practice for National Statistics.

The most recent Northern Ireland House Condition Survey was conducted in 2016 and, in line with the Housing Executive's statutory responsibility and the five-year intervals between previous surveys, the next survey was due to be carried out in 2021. However, as noted above, a decision was taken in February 2021 that, in view of concerns about transmission of the coronavirus and data quality issues arising from a potentially low response rate, field work should be postponed until 2022.

In 2016, budget constraints meant that the survey was limited to a sample size that only enabled reporting at regional (Northern Ireland) level. However, user feedback and consultation indicated a strong need for the next survey to generate data at sub-regional (local government district level); among a wide range of other uses, it was noted that this data would inform 15-year housing need assessments at local level, as required by the Local Development Planning process. On this basis, approval was received to carry out the survey based on a sample of 7,000 dwellings.

The House Condition Survey is led and managed by a small, experienced team within the Housing Executive's Research Unit, with bespoke technical, software and training support provided by an external contractor during the planning and survey phase. Given the scale of the survey, a significant level of lead-in work will be required to enable commencement of fieldwork in spring 2022, and much of this will take place in the latter half of the 2021/22 financial year. A portion of the proposed 2021/22 budget has been earmarked for this key enabling work.

Expected Impact/Outcome

Undertaking the House Condition Survey fulfils a statutory duty to examine housing conditions and helps fulfil another statutory duty, to determine housing need. In addition, however, the statistics generated are used in a wide range of other research and market intelligence projects including the annual Housing Market Review, House Investment Plans and one-off analyses such as recent work on the housing needs of older people. More broadly, the data informs community planning, the Housing Executive's Home Energy Conservation Authority activities, the Fuel Poverty strategy and policy analysis in relation to welfare reform. The Department for Communities will use the HCS findings in its work to monitor housing supply and the housing outcome agreed as part of the updated Programme for Government, and to inform considerations on appropriate housing condition standards for Northern Ireland. The information that becomes available from the 2021 HCS will therefore underpin and guide a considerable number of housing strategies, policies and interventions in the housing market.

Contractual Commitments

19/1.0 House Prices, Rents and Affordability

Key Client: Regional Services (Land & Regeneration)
Contractor: Ulster University

This suite of linked research projects is undertaken in partnership with Ulster University and Propertynews.com, and provides ongoing releases of data and analysis to provide key information for policy makers seeking evidence on housing market trends and addressing the issue of affordability in both the owner-occupied and private rental sectors. The overall project comprises five main component parts.

1. Northern Ireland Quarterly House Price Index

This comprehensive, mix-adjusted analysis of a large sample of open market transactions, gathered from a Northern Ireland-wide network of estates agents, provides quarterly insights on trends in the level of transactions and in average house prices by both Local Government District (LGD) and the housing market areas delineated as part of research undertaken for the Housing Executive in 2018, and by property type. The information from this analysis will continue to inform the Housing Executive's analysis of the market, its Housing Investment Plans and its affordability index.

2. Private Rental Index

Using a large dataset from a Northern Ireland-wide web-based rental listings platform, combined with data from the Housing Executive's Local Housing Allowance database, this project produces two half-yearly reports on rental transactions and average monthly rents by number of bedrooms at Northern Ireland level and disaggregated on the basis of the 11 LGDs.

3. Private Rented Sector Affordability Index

This annual index provides an insight into access to the private rented sector based on the ratio of median income (as a standard measure of central tendency) and lower end rents (quartile 1). In doing so, it provides an indication of any affordability issues by the 11 LGDs, as well as an insight into the potential for mid-market rental properties in various parts of Northern Ireland.

4. Asking Price House Price Index

This project will continue to provide an annual report on a second comprehensive House Price Index for Northern Ireland based on asking price data. This is the equivalent of the Rightmove and Hometrack prices indices that are produced for GB but do not cover Northern Ireland. Although asking prices may not accurately reflect the sales prices eventually achieved, asking price indices provide a much earlier

indication of changes in the housing market than indices based on completed sales (LPS, UU) or mortgage-based indices (e.g. Halifax and Nationwide).

5. Composite Affordability Index

The composite affordability index developed for the Housing Executive by Ulster University brings together two measures (house price to income ratio and the proportion of annual disposable income required as a deposit) to reflect the main factors that influence first time buyer affordability. A typical bank/building society annuity formula is used to calculate the maximum price a household with a median household income could afford to pay, assuming a typical interest rate, a 90% mortgage (loan to value ratio) and a 25-year repayment period.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The reports on the owner-occupied and private rented sectors provide important insights into trends in the housing market, where possible disaggregated by geographical regions and by property type. Comparisons with the market as a whole and with performance in previous years are provided, giving a longer term view of past trends, and an insight into possible future trends in house prices/rents and transaction rates. Affordability measures provide a valuable insight into where there is evidence of hot spots or market failure. Key findings are included in the annual Review of the Housing Market and in the Housing Market Analysis which underpins Housing Investment Plans, and have been shared at *Insight* events. Data is also used to inform the DfC's ongoing affordability work and its strategy for the Private Rented Sector, and private rental data is shared with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) under a service level agreement in order to inform a number of UK indices.

21/1.1 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS; 2021 calendar year)

Key Client: Housing Services (Landlord Services Support)
Contractor: Perceptive Insight Market Research Ltd

The Housing Executive has carried out a comprehensive annual survey among its tenants each year since 1994, facilitating comparative analysis of tenants' views over time and allowing collection of specific information for various client groups (both internal and external). The 'omnibus' format of the survey provides important flexibility, allowing a rapid response to carry out research among Housing Executive tenants on specific issues without the delays and expense associated with the commissioning of individual small surveys.

The 2021 CTOS will continue to provide extensive and up-to-date information on the Housing Executive's tenant population and a valuable insight into attitudes to, and satisfaction levels with, the Housing Executive's services. It is a vital source of information, not only for guiding the development of public sector housing policy, but also for performance statistics, including KPIs, which allow the organisation to assess the extent to which it is *delivering quality public services* (Outcome 4, Housing Executive Corporate Plan, 2017/18-2020/21). Each quarter, 50 tenants will be drawn at random from each housing management area and led through the detailed questionnaire during a face-to-face interview. In this way, more than 2,600 tenants will be interviewed throughout the year.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The CTOS will continue to measure the organisation's progress on a number of key performance indicators and provide customer-related evidence to inform:

- Ongoing business and process review and improvement;
- Benchmarking against other, similar organisations across the UK;

- Housing policy and practice; and
- Quality awards submissions (e.g. Customer Service Excellence).

The survey will also provide essential information on customer satisfaction, attitudes to living in public housing and, importantly, the social, economic and demographic profile of tenants.

18/2.0 Tenant Segmentation (Phase 1: Data Audit)

Key Client: Corporate Services (Communications)
Contractor: Savanta

Segmentation techniques have been used across a range of sectors to provide better insights into the best ways to communicate and interact with different groups of customers and thus improve customer satisfaction and service delivery. Over the last decade, this customer profiling approach has increasingly been applied by housing organisations in order to gain a better understanding of their customers' needs and expectations, with the aim of designing and delivering better services, in the knowledge that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach does not benefit either the service provider or the customer.

Customer (in this case, specifically *tenant*) profiling brings together the available demographic, behavioural and perceptive information that organisations hold on their customers, then uses statistical analysis to identify 'segments' of relatively homogenous groups of residents, which can be measured, analysed and targeted to drive service improvement and increase satisfaction.

A critical first step is to undertake an audit to establish existing data and processes and any additional data that may be required. This research seeks to answer a number of key questions and to increase information in key areas to support the organisational commitment to customer excellence and to provide a solid foundation upon which to undertake appropriate, meaningful and measurable customer engagement and cross-channel campaigns.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The data audit will form the basis for a customer segmentation exercise which will help the Housing Executive gain a better understanding of customers' needs and expectations, with the aim of designing and delivering better services. Specifically, the research will help the Housing Executive to:

- gain a better understanding of customers' needs and expectations, with the aim of designing and delivering better, more cost-effective services;
- create and communicate targeted campaigns and messages that will resonate with specific groups of customers; and
- select the most effective and appropriate communication channel for the segments identified, improve existing customer relationships and develop new ones.

19/1.5 Experiences of Youth Homelessness

Key Client: Regional Services (Landlord Services Support)
Contractor: Fiona Boyle Associates

In 2018/19 a total of 2,836 single person households between the ages of 16 and 25 presented as homeless to the Housing Executive. Of these, a total of 1,569 households were accepted as homeless and the relatively low level of acceptances (55% acceptance rate compared to an overall acceptance rate of 69%) highlights the challenges facing young people in terms of meeting the legislative criteria for homelessness. This

challenge is exacerbated by the challenge that Welfare Reform presents for those who are not statutorily homeless and therefore, are often left with only the private rented sector as an option.

Additionally, the Housing Executive and Health Trusts are guided by '[Regional good practice guidance between the Housing Executive and trusts on meeting the accommodation and support needs of 16-21 year olds](#)' which outlines arrangements for 16/17 year olds who present as homeless. This guidance also outlines the planning processes to be attended to in transition planning for young people leaving care and moving into the community. Implementation structures aligned to the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 have been advised of anecdotal evidence suggesting difficulties in the transition between the Health Trust and Housing Executive in some cases. In addition to the general challenges facing young people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, this research will explore difficulties around processes in greater detail.

The research will also consider implementation/planning structures which might give direction and weight to better alignment of Trusts' Joint commissioning structures for young people's services alongside the Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy implementation structures.

This research will seek to:

- Analyse the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16-25 in Northern Ireland;
- Examine the most effective homelessness prevention initiatives being employed for young people;
- Analyse the challenges associated with delivering services to young people facing homelessness, including those associated with providing 'move on' options for young people who are in hostels and 'tenancy ready'
- Explore relevant strategies employed across neighbouring jurisdictions to inform future service delivery in Northern Ireland;
- Identify and explore the challenges involved in inter-agency working, and how these might be mitigated to provide effective delivery of homelessness services and solutions.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The project will inform future policy/strategy development and will have the potential to inform future legislative development. In particular, the research will be relevant to:

- The development of homelessness policy;
- The implementation of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22;
- The development of the next Homelessness Strategy which will be published in April 2022. The publication of this research in 2020/21 will allow its findings to be used to guide potential actions in the next Homelessness Strategy, work on which will commence in 2020/21.
- Other stakeholders, in particular the HSC sector who have a responsibility for early intervention and prevention, family support, responding to children in need and supporting young people transition from care and into adult life within the community

The benefits of the assignment are the identified needs, service gaps and strategic recommendations which will emerge from the research process and final report. The research outputs will challenge the Housing Executive and related agencies to work productively together to prevent youth homelessness, and will directly inform future service provision for young people facing homelessness. This research will be instrumental in helping the Housing Executive meet its aims around putting prevention first.

19/1.10 Universal Credit: The Customer Journey

Key Client: Housing Services/Housing Benefit Project Team
Contractor: Perceptive Insight

As part of the Government's wider programme of welfare reform, a number of key working age benefits are being replaced by Universal Credit (UC). The first phase, 'natural migration', introduced UC in Northern Ireland and roll-out across the region finished in December 2018. Now, if a household receiving one of the benefits/credits being replaced experiences a significant change in circumstance which means they are reassessed for the 'legacy' benefit/credit, they are likely to move to UC. New claims for any of the 'legacy' benefits/credits are also directed to claim UC, unless they meet one of the exemptions.

Claimants receiving any of the six benefits being replaced by UC who do not naturally migrate will be moved to UC under 'managed migration', which has been scheduled to begin in 2020 and finish in 2023. UC must be claimed online and, for those in Northern Ireland who rent, the housing element will be paid directly to the landlord. The Housing Executive receives payments of UC housing costs four-weekly in arrears.

In addition, for households receiving UC, Housing Benefit for Rates is being replaced by Rate Rebate. Rate Rebate can only be claimed once UC is awarded and, like UC, must be claimed online. The Housing Executive will receive Rate Rebate payment monthly in arrears.

As the move to UC represents a substantial change in the welfare benefits system, not least in terms of how claims are made and administered, and the need for a separate Rate Rebate claim, the Housing Executive has identified a need for large scale quantitative research – as a follow-up to qualitative work initiated as part of the 2018/19 programme – to help gain an understanding of the customer journey experienced by tenants who have claimed UC. This project was originally approved as part of the 2019/20 Research Programme. However, following consultation with clients it was agreed that the work would be postponed to commence as part of the 2020/21 programme, to allow for incorporation of learning from the qualitative Universal Credit Customer Journey project undertaken during 2019/20 and accumulation of a larger sample of UC cases.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This research will help the Housing Executive plan for the eventual migration of all existing cases to UC, evaluate the effectiveness of the existing advice and support mechanisms in place to help tenants understand and negotiate the online process and manage their rent accounts and make recommendations for the development of future services and resources.

19/1.11 Universal Credit: The Rural Perspective

Key Client: Housing Services/Rural & Regeneration/HB Project Team
Contractor: RF Associates

Changes to the UK welfare system mean that a number of key working age benefits are being replaced by Universal Credit (UC) through 'natural' and 'managed' migration of all cases.

In the light of emerging evidence from Great Britain that indicates there are specific rural impacts, the Housing Executive has identified a need for qualitative research to help gain an understanding of the specific customer journey experienced by tenants living in rural areas who have claimed UC. This project was originally approved as part of the 2019/20 Research Programme. However, following consultation with clients it was agreed that the work would be postponed to commence as part of the 2020/21 programme, to

allow for incorporation of learning from the qualitative Universal Credit Customer Journey project undertaken during 2019/20 and accumulation of a larger sample of UC cases.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This research will help the Housing Executive to:

- evaluate the impact of Universal Credit on tenants living in rural areas and understand if there are any specific rural impacts (including in relation to: managing claimant commitments; accessing public transport; employment opportunities/feasibility of work; accessing childcare and digital access issues); and
- formulate plans for services and resources.

20/1.9 Move-on accommodation for PBNI Clients

Key Client: Regional Services (Housing Services Support)
Contractor: Ipsos MORI

The public protection arrangements in Northern Ireland (referred to as PPANI) were introduced in October 2008 to make more effective the work of the police, probation, Housing Executive and others to manage the risks posed by certain sexual and violent offenders when they are released from prison into the community. PPANI is not a statutory body, but a structure that enables agencies to undertake their statutory duties and coordinate their functions to enhance public protection. PPANI's strategic management board is supported by a number of sub-groups, including an accommodation sub-group, chaired by the Housing Executive.

An ongoing issue raised by this group is the difficulty in providing move-on accommodation for offenders when released from prison. The group has noted that in some cases move-on is slowed by clients' complex needs, including mental/physical health issues, which create difficulty for the Probation Board in sourcing appropriate accommodation. In the absence of appropriate hostel spaces, temporary accommodation placements for clients subject to PPANI are often provided in Bed and Breakfast or hotel settings. The average rate for this type of placement is £546 per week and a number of long-term placements in such accommodation are PPANI applicants. However, to date much of the discussion on this issue has been anecdotal, and a need has been identified for research to provide an evidence base that would enable key stakeholders to plan appropriate action. The research will include:

- Qualitative analysis based on semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders within the PPANI process and in associated roles such as hostel provision.
- Analysis of quantitative data from key stakeholders such as the Probation Board and Housing Executive

Expected Impact/Outcome

It is expected that the research would:

- Provide information that would help address the challenges in providing move-on accommodation by if appropriate, supporting the provision of more spaces for long-term placements.
- Help the Housing Executive deliver long-term savings by increasing the turnover in the 87 hostel spaces allocated to PBNI placements.

Status: Contractually committed.

20/1.15 Review of the Sanctuary Scheme

Key Client: Regional Services (Housing Services Support)
Contractor: Ipsos MORI

The research will help inform the further development of the current Housing Executive-led Sanctuary Scheme for people experiencing domestic violence, to cover all Housing Executive tenants and not just those currently deemed “most at risk”. This research is needed to identify current barriers to the scheme, which will enable the Housing Executive to work with key stakeholders in extending the scheme across other tenures.

Analysis of the trends and nature of domestic violence within Northern Ireland and in other jurisdictions will further enhance understanding of the scale of the issue and how to address domestic violence through the services provided and through the relationships forged with multiple agencies.

Additionally, the Department for Communities is responsible for Gender Equality on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive. Linked to the development of the Sexual Orientation Strategy and Gender Strategy the Department has identified homelessness based on same sex domestic violence or homophobia as an emerging issue for consideration.

The key objectives of the research include:

- To explore the trends, causes and nature of domestic violence in Northern Ireland;
- To provide an overview of the assistance available to victims of domestic violence in neighbouring jurisdictions with a view to identifying potential services for development in Northern Ireland;
- To identify area/regional variations in the provision of the Sanctuary scheme across Northern Ireland and potential contributing factors behind this;
- To gauge the effectiveness of the current Sanctuary Scheme;
- To identify challenges in the expansion of the Sanctuary Scheme across the Housing Executive and other tenures;
- To identify challenges in inter-agency working, particularly around the implementation of the Sanctuary Scheme;
- To identify any additional challenges/lessons arising from the rise in domestic violence as a result of lockdown arrangements implemented during COVID-19; and
- To identify any emerging evidence/trends with regards to domestic violence in the LGBT community and to identify any effective temporary accommodation provision in neighbouring jurisdictions in the absence of bespoke hostel accommodation for this client group.

Expected Impact/Outcome

It is expected that the research will enable the Housing Executive to work with key stakeholders in extending the scheme across other tenures.

Requested Commissioned Projects (no contractual commitment)

20/1.7 New Social Housing: Satisfaction Survey

Key Client: Department for Communities
Contractor: TBC

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government set out the key priorities for the Department for Communities, including an objective to increase the supply of new build social homes. To enable the Department to provide meaningful updates on progress against key outcomes, the Department needs to provide quantitative data on how this has been achieved, including evidence from tenants on how the new dwelling they have been allocated meets their housing needs. DfC has identified a need for a survey to obtain evidence from tenants living in recently-completed social housing that will help confirm the ongoing relevance of policy objectives, as well as assessing the extent to which homes delivered through the Social Housing Development Programme meet the needs of tenants.

This project was originally requested as part of the 2020/21 programme. After being put on hold for a time at the request of the client, work on specifications and questionnaire design recommenced in autumn 2020. However, the tender process was delayed by the requirement to put in place data sharing agreements with housing associations for the contact details needed to scope an indicative sample frame for costing telephone surveys.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The findings of the survey would provide key insights on tenants' experiences of living in new social housing, and would support the Department for Communities, Housing Executive and housing associations in assessing delivery of Programme for Government outcomes.

20/1.4 Understanding Tenancy Terminations and Issues for Sustainment

Key Client: Landlord Services (Housing Services)
Contractor: Perceptive Insight

The Housing Executive's *Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy* includes a commitment to provide care and support to minimise tenancy breakdown, prevent homelessness and promote stable and sustainable communities. However, data collated by the Housing Executive indicate that around 14% of new tenants do not sustain their tenancies beyond 12 months, and analysis has shown that tenancy terminations occurring after 12 months remain relatively high until the third year of tenancy comparable to year 1 – indicating a need for deeper research and analysis.

A need has therefore been identified for qualitative, in-depth, narrative-led, face-to-face interviews with a minimum of 50 exiting and former Housing Executive tenants who have terminated their tenancies within a 12, 24 and 36-month period, as well as engagement with Housing Executive staff, with the aim of:

- Developing a nuanced insight into and understanding of the reasons that tenants have been unable to sustain their tenancies beyond 36 months, by seeking the views of former/exiting tenants with this tenancy profile.
- Ascertaining the issues facing tenants in the first 12, 24 and 36 months of their tenancies.
- Identifying the point in the personal narrative of the customer when intervention may have prevented tenancy breakdown.

- Considering what customers feel the Housing Executive could have done, or done differently, to help them to stay.
- Identifying advice and support that could have helped the customer to stay and, if such services had been provided by the Housing Executive, whether the customer would have felt comfortable/able to access and avail of these services
- Determining if participants know who in the Housing Executive to contact if they have a problem, and what types of problems they can contact the organisation about.
- Determining what customers know about the Housing Executive's existing services in relation to customer/tenancy support and whether, if they had known more about these services, they would have availed of them.
- Identifying positives and negatives of the customer's experience as a Housing Executive tenant, for example, whether any negative experiences impacted their decision to terminate the tenancy, and any steps that could have been taken to mitigate.
- Providing information about the tenancy terminations of the tenant specific cohorts that, data indicates, are more likely to experience tenancy breakdown/ have multiple failed tenancies.
- Achieving recommendations that will provide an evidence base for actions to improve tenant care and support, and reduce preventable tenancy breakdown.
- Providing insights into the allocations and sign-up processes.
- Enabling targeted support for different customer segments.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research outputs will be used to inform the Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy Action Plan by providing an evidential base to inform policies and procedures going forward, and will be key in helping the Housing Executive understand the needs of its tenants and how best to support them. Research recommendations may be used to prioritise and direct resources/spending.

20/1.5 Strategic Housing Market Analysis: Phase 2

Key Client: Regional Services (Land and Regeneration Services)
Contractor: Economic Research & Evaluation

As part of the 2019/20 Research Programme, the Housing Executive appointed Economic Research and Evaluation to undertake a Strategic Housing Market Analysis for the Belfast Metropolitan and Derry and Strabane Housing Market Areas (HMAs). This project was a follow-up to research carried out in 2018, which reviewed and updated the 11 functional housing market area boundaries in Northern Ireland.

The overall aim of the 2019/20 project was to provide a comprehensive Strategic Housing Market Analysis of the Belfast and Derry/Strabane HMAs, to include key economic, demographic and housing data, as well as attempting to project future need at the appropriate geographic level to inform Local Development Plans and enable policy makers to have a full understanding of the dynamics of each Housing Market Area. This included the provision of a cross-tenure (private, intermediate and social) housing need assessment methodology and housing need projections across all tenures for 15 years at HMA and local government district level.

Following completion of work on the Housing Market Analyses for Belfast and Derry & Strabane, there is a need for further reports on the remaining three Housing Market Areas:

Housing Market Area	Local Government Districts
Newry and Craigavon Urban Area	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Lisburn & Castlereagh Newry, Mourne & Down North Down & Ards
Fermanagh, Omagh, Cookstown and Dungannon	Fermanagh and Omagh Mid Ulster
Ballymena and Causeway Coast	Mid and East Antrim Causeway Coast and Glens Derry & Strabane

Expected Impact/Outcome

The proposed further work on three additional HMAs will complete the suite of Housing Market Analysis for Northern Ireland, resulting in fully completed reports for all five high-level Areas and thus informing Housing Investment Plans, Community Planning activity, Local Development Plans and a range of other policies and strategies, and providing the Housing Executive with the tools, expertise and data to carry out further analysis.

20/1.10 Protection of Property Duty: Furniture Storage Provision Options

Key Client: Regional Services (Housing Services Support)
Contractor: TBC

Under the Housing (NI) Order 1988, the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to take reasonable steps to protect the property of homeless persons and persons threatened with homelessness. Applicants who have their furniture collection, storage or delivery arranged by the Housing Executive under the Order are not charged for the provision of this service. The Housing Executive's expenditure on delivering its statutory duty with regard to protection of property (furniture storage) under the Housing Order 1988 has increased by more than 36% in three years and stood at £1.86 million in 2018/19. In light of increasing pressures on the Homelessness budget, a review of possible measures that could be implemented to help reduce costs would help free up resources for investment in other aspects of homelessness service provision.

The Homelessness Strategy team would therefore wish to commission independent research on the options available to the Housing Executive in relation to charging for furniture storage provision in the discharge of its duty to protect the property of homeless households. This would include collation of evidence on how this duty is met in other jurisdictions (e.g. through desk research, consultation and potential FOI requests). The proposed research would also involve analysis of quantitative data on the effectiveness of the various approaches and costs associated with system requirements in order to support the various options.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research would provide an evidence base on the advantages and disadvantages of the various approaches available, as well as seeking to identify the most cost effective option. This would assist the Housing Executive in identifying the most effective use of resources in regard to this duty.

20/1.11 Understanding Tenant Participation

Key Client: Landlord Services (Housing Services)
Contractor: Perceptive Insight

Engaging, enabling and empowering communities is a key part of the Housing Executive's role, and as part of its *Community Involvement Strategy 2018-2023*, the organisation has set out a vision to work in active and

meaningful partnership with communities, and to give residents, tenants and leaseholders a real say in making their neighbourhoods better places in which to live. The strategy has two specific aims: to promote community involvement across communities; and to enable communities to challenge, influence and shape the Housing Executive's housing services.

The Housing Executive offers a range of ways for tenants and residents to become involved, both in community activities and shaping service delivery, including mechanisms such as Tenant Scrutiny Panels, mystery shopping, estate inspections, local residents' groups, community champions, focus groups/task teams, register of residents and 'Village Voices'. However, rates of participation tend to be fairly low, and the 2018 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey indicated that, with the exception of Local Residents Groups (22%), less than four per cent of tenants were *aware* of the majority of these initiatives in their locality.

Housing Services is therefore interested in carrying out research into tenant participation to help gain an understanding of the reasons for low interest in/awareness of participation opportunities and insights into the demographics, characteristics and motivations of those tenants and residents who *do* become involved.

Expected Impact/Outcome

As well as helping to ensure that the Housing Executive is responsive to the needs of local communities and continues to improve service delivery, community involvement also helps build capacity, skills and confidence among individuals and communities. The findings of the research would help the Housing Executive to maximise the attractiveness and accessibility of participation and involvement opportunities for the benefit of both the organisation and the wider community.

Evaluation of the Community Cohesion Strategy 2015-2020

Key Client: Landlord Services (Housing Services)
Contractor: Sector3Solutions

As Northern Ireland's strategic housing authority, the Housing Executive recognises its changing role in delivering quality housing services to an increasingly diverse community, and ensuring that all Black and Minority Ethnic people in Northern Ireland can enjoy full and fair access to its housing services. The current Community Cohesion Strategy 2015-2020 launched in January 2016 and makes an explicit commitment to promoting good relations through its policies, partnerships and investment to speed up the pace of change towards a more cohesive society. The Strategy is managed and promoted by the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Unit.

As the strategy coming to an end, an independent review is required to establish its strengths and weaknesses and to inform the development of the next Community Cohesion Action Plan over the next five financial years. Some of the main objectives are:

- To identify what has worked well through the life of the current strategy;
- To identify how far, if at all, the Housing Executive has progressed in addressing fear and sectarian intimidation and increasing the willingness for integration and shared social housing by way of the five community cohesion themes;
- To identify delivery across the various shared community/ neighbourhood/BRIC programmes;
- To establish an understanding of key issues encountered by BME households when trying to access housing services;
- To identify investment across the five themes throughout the life of the strategy;

- To provide an assessment of the current and 5 key themes within the Community Cohesion Strategy, advising if they remain relevant, and identify any emerging good relation issues which should be considered for inclusion within future strategies, including emerging race hate issues;
- To identify lessons learned through the life of the current Strategy (in particular, strengths and weaknesses);
- To identify new mechanisms of community engagement which could be adopted through our strategy to meet the five Community Cohesion themes outcomes more effectively;
- To consideration roles and responsibilities in the current good relations delivery framework for staff delivering the Community Cohesion Strategy; and
- To examine how the current reporting framework might be enhanced to better focus activities on achieving agreed Community Cohesion Strategy outcomes/output (identifying best practice in reporting from across the UK and ROI).

Expected Impact/Outcome

This research will be used:

- To evaluate the success of the existing Community Cohesion Strategy;
- To advise on what was done effectively and what needs to improve ongoing forward, which will inform the new strategy;
- To identify any existing or emerging good relations issues (gaps) which should be incorporated into any new/future strategy;
- To provide detail on government and policy areas which will influence direction of travel in relation to delivery of the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion and Good Relations work; and
- To help inform decision making to ensure future funding allocated though this strategy has the greatest impact within communities in addressing the five key themes of the strategy.

Private Sector Leasing Scheme

Key Client: DfC/Regional Services (Housing Services Support)
Contractor: TBC

The draft Programme for Government 2016 – 2021 recognised that government must reflect wider housing needs and demands beyond the provision of social and intermediate homes. More recently in the New Decade New Approach agreement the restored NI Executive flagged its intention to make housing a specific priority, with a focus on ensuring that every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) in NI, which represents over 135,000 dwellings here and exceeds the social rented sector in terms of volume by some margin, has been (in some instances) synonymous with insecurity of tenure and high housing costs and, with 40% of housing benefit currently paid to private rented sector landlord, it is important to take steps to ensure that public money is not being used for low quality and high priced housing. Accordingly, the Department for Communities wants to explore the potential to make better use of the private rented sector with the aim of providing a wider range of housing options to alleviate homelessness and meet housing need and as part of this work, DfC officials are looking at ways to provide PRS tenants with good quality accommodation with security of tenure.

Similarly, the Housing Executive, as part of a strategic review of temporary accommodation and in parallel with the Department, has been exploring options around the long term leasing of existing PRS stock. While some data and evidence is available around the need and potential for demand for such a scheme, details underpinning the financial package to facilitate a scheme, the quality standards associated with a scheme, the contractual obligations, risks and liabilities, and the use of any third party delivery organisation (for any

aspect or all of a scheme) remain to be examined and evidence. Accordingly both organisations are seeking to establish this additional evidence basis.

The Department and the Housing Executive are seeking to commission external research/consultancy to underpin the development of a long term leasing scheme/s, examining key aspects including gathering, collating and analysing a range of data and evidence sources, and engagement with key stakeholders, to:

- Identify and quantify the costs associated with long-term leases (including provision of sliding scale of costs/economies depending on numbers of properties leased),
- Identify and quantify the ongoing costs of operating a scheme,
- Identify and describe the optimal contractual arrangements that may underpin a scheme,
- Identify the geographical locations where a long-term leasing scheme for PRS properties may be most likely to be needed and utilised and to scope the attitudes of PRS property owners and potential tenants in participation, and
- quantify the risks, constraints and liabilities for both organisations, and for any third party delivery body, of delivering a long-term private rented sector leasing scheme.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The information collected will be used to review existing service provision (in respect of the provision of Temporary Accommodation) and inform the development of new products (i.e. a Private Rented Sector Leasing scheme for general needs rental use). It is anticipated that the research outputs will be used to:

- i) Evaluate existing policy and strategy in relation to the provision of and access to good quality affordable housing and improving the Private Rented Sector;
- ii) Inform new policy and provide a basis from which to develop a new/revised scheme to effectively support the delivery of temporary accommodation and to contribute to making the PRS as good a housing option as possible for those who need it.
- iii) Work with colleagues across housing related sectors in developing new and revised policies to address housing stress.

Intermediate Rent Model Research

Key Client: DfC
Contractor: TBC

In a recent Ministerial statement on Housing Policy (Nov 2020), the Minister for Communities announced that the Department is developing new products with the aim of providing a wider range of affordable housing options to increase supply and meet housing need. The housing market in Northern Ireland has traditionally been dominated by owner occupied, social rented, and private rented accommodation. Supplementary to this is equity sharing intermediate home ownership products (e.g. Co-Ownership), which provide an opportunity for ownership for households who would otherwise struggle to get onto the property ladder.

The Department is seeking to introduce a new category of 'Intermediate Rent' to expand housing supply in a way that complements the current housing market portfolio. It is intended that an Intermediate Rent model can, broadly speaking, provide an additional supply of rental housing for:

- i. households (families or individuals) who have lower housing waiting list point scores and therefore are unlikely to be allocated social housing in short order; and
- ii. households who are unable to access good quality private rented housing in a preferred location and at a cost which is affordable to them (i.e. not more than 25% of the household's income).

This category may include concealed households who are currently living with family/friends etc., due to their difficulties in accessing rented accommodation in their own right.

Independent research which seeks to build a solid evidence base, establish a model based on below market rent rates, establish (at a strategic level) the likely scale of need/demand, comment on the optimal location for siting IR homes, and consider the viability of use of FTC to fund IR development, is nearing completion. The research will also consider potential eligibility parameters for tenants to access Intermediate Rent homes (for example targeting certain household/demographics, income bands etc), and exploration of market appetite to develop and operate Intermediate Rent homes here.

While the research will engage, in developing the model, with existing NI housing providers in a general way, it will not explore in depth the potential uptake for IR development, or the potential uptake from households. In order to further explore the impact of intermediate rent both on potential tenants and delivery bodies, the Department seeks to commission targeted market research to understand tenant preferences and attitudes as well as research to understand delivery partner motivations. This will help shape the IR model into one that is attractive and viable to providers and tenants alike.

This market research will build upon the independent research underway and the recent conjoint analysis survey into housing stress carried out by the Housing Executive.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research outputs will be used to review the draft intermediate rental model and help inform thinking around its ability to meet the needs of the target tenant group and potential providers. It is anticipated that the research outputs will be used to:

- i) Evaluate and review the intermediate rent model and identify any revisions/amendments required to meet the needs of target tenants and potential providers; Provide voice of the tenant and provider which will inform policy and supply an evidence basis for the need for delivery of intermediate rental products.
- ii) Provide voice of the tenant and provider which will inform policy and supply an evidence basis for the need for delivery of intermediate rental products.

Alternative Supported Housing Models

Key Client: Department for Communities
Contractor: TBC

The provision of Supported Housing has been based on a social housing model, built by Housing Associations, subsidised through Housing Association Grant (HAG), and where the majority of tenants have rent and service charges paid through Housing Benefit (HB), housing support costs met through Supporting People funding and any health and social care assistance met through domiciliary care packages. This work, which will supplement the Department for Communities Housing Supply Strategy, will focus on the potential for developing alternative models for housing-focussed supported accommodation.

Whilst some initial desk top analysis has been carried out by the Department, this would need to be enhanced through case studies of existing supported housing models, how they are funded, outcomes achieved and value for money. This research would also include a review of existing literature and data.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The main objective of this is research into alternative approaches for supported housing which can help inform future policy decisions around how supported housing models can be improved to provide

sustainable supported housing for the benefit of vulnerable clients in a cost effective approach to deliver better outcomes for clients and value for money for the Department.

Homelessness Funding: Comparative Review

Key Client: Finance Audit & Assurance/Regional Services (Housing Services Support)
Contractor: TBC

The demand for homelessness services in Northern Ireland has grown significantly over the last four years, with increasing need for the provision of temporary accommodation. The Housing Executive homelessness programme is funded as part of the Regional Services Deficit Grant from the Department for Communities and has been subject to significant real-term cuts since 2015/16. As a result, the Housing Executive is having to prioritise operational requirements ahead of investing in strategic initiatives that would have the potential to better tackle the root causes of homelessness, ensure the services offered represent value for money, and optimise the ability to deliver real changes to the lives of those experiencing homelessness.

The main objective of the research would be to identify comparative funding levels for homelessness across the UK. Additionally, there is scope for the project to look at aspects such as homelessness prevention and how targeting funding at this would deliver savings across the public purse.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This research will assist the Housing Executive in bidding for funding on a basis commensurate to neighbouring jurisdictions, as funding announcements from Westminster for homelessness funding in England always point to a significantly higher commitment to homelessness funding pro-rata.

The research may also assist the Housing Executive in seeking cross-departmental funding if, as evidenced by [research produced for Crisis](#), the research shows the savings to the public purse if homelessness is prevented.

Housing Benefit Customer Satisfaction Survey

Key Client: Finance Audit & Assurance (HB Project Team)
Contractor: TBC

During the financial year 2019/20, the Housing Executive administered over £500 million in Housing Benefit to tenants in the social and private sectors, and at the end of March 2020 there were a total of 126,819 customers claiming Housing Benefit (HB). Almost 25,000 new claims were assessed during the year, and nearly 3 million changes to existing claims were notified by claimants or the department for Work and Pensions. The HB team has identified the need for a survey to measure levels of customer satisfaction with various aspects of HB, with a view to identifying areas for improvement, where appropriate.

The research would take the form of a telephone survey with 200 customers per HB Unit (1,200 completed surveys), with a separate, shorter survey completed with 200 customers of the HB Recovery Unit.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This research will provide a comprehensive socio-economic profile of Housing Benefit customers, as well as measuring their level of satisfaction with the service provided by the Housing Executive. It will also contribute to the measurement of business improvement activity.

Housing Stock Profile (Pilot)

Key Client: Department for Communities
Contractor: TBC

The Housing Market Symposium, which reported in 2018, recommended seven specific research pieces, including an examination of the potential to develop a comprehensive and consistent housing stock profile in NI. The Department for Communities chaired a working group comprising key partners (including the Housing Executive and LPS), producing a summary report with options for developing a suitable profile model for NI.

The Housing Market Symposium Report framed the requirement for this research priority as follows:

- A wide range of data on Northern Ireland's housing stock is available in relation to the size of the overall stock, its condition, its structure in terms of tenure, age and dwelling type and in terms of the dynamics of change. The quality of this data has undoubtedly improved in recent years. There are, however, still a number of inconsistencies around a more accurate assessment of what constitutes the total viable housing stock. Inconsistencies with regard to the overall numbers of dwellings may well be the result of the use of different definitions or standards in relation to what a "dwelling" is and how to deal with, for example, student housing, mobile homes, supported (sheltered) housing and houses in multiple occupation.
- The starting point for a comprehensive and consistent profile of Northern Ireland's housing stock should be the LPS Valuation List, which includes a comprehensive list of addresses drawn from the LPS Pointer database. This combination of locational and basic property data could be used as a basis not only for defining the overall housing stock, but also for identifying definitional issues which need to be addressed, including the extent to which primary research is required. In the longer term, and possibly in collaboration with the Welsh Government, this data could form the basis of a "dwelling spine" that draws together existing information from a range of sources on the housing stock.

As an initial step the working group examined the LPS valuation list, with the aim of identifying viable housing stock (both occupied and vacant) which is being used/could be used for housing purposes. The initial analysis concluded that while the LPS valuation list is a useful starting point, it does not cover the breadth envisaged in the Symposium recommendation, and further work is required to develop the stock profile.

The purpose of this research would be to develop, on a limited geographical scale, a single consistent and comprehensive housing stock profile model. Using the LPS valuation list, alongside other data sources including the House Condition Survey data, it is envisaged that a comprehensive, up to date profile of housing stock could be developed on a limited geography basis, to provide the foundation for a model which (if successful) could be rolled out across NI. It would be important that the profile model was based on continuing and reliable information/data sources, and be a model which could be (with relative ease) maintained and updated to ensure an ongoing, reliable stock profile would continue to be available for policy and planning purposes. The research would clarify:

- The data on housing stock which is readily available
- Identification of information/data gaps and how to address these gaps; and
- Present a comprehensive housing stock profile for the selected limited geography chosen.

The working group established following the Symposium's report indicated that the Derry City & Strabane LGD may represent a suitable geography for a pilot, given its situation with urban and rural housing settlements, and a variety of housing types and needs, although another LGD may be similarly useful.

An element of this work would be to develop and agree a suitable definition of viable dwellings for the purposes of developing the pilot stock profile model and for consideration as part of future rollout.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The production of a comprehensive stock profile within a limited geography (e.g. a LGD) could:

- provide the basis for a model to roll out across NI;
- provide specific data which would help influence policy, inform funding decisions, and assist in Planning decisions and obligations, and do so by providing a consistent, comprehensive and updateable dataset; and
- enable information to be shared with officials in Departments and Agencies, and in Councils, to assist with the exercise of their powers and duties in relation to housing, regeneration, planning and development, and the provision and siting of services (e.g. education, health, public transport etc).

Irish Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment Methodology

Key Client: Land & Regeneration

Contractor: TBC

In 2018, the Housing Executive commenced work on its fourth comprehensive survey examining Irish Travellers' accommodation in Northern Ireland. The research, carried out every five years since 2002, has helped inform the development and provision of Traveller accommodation over this period, including Grouped Housing, transit and serviced sites, and the most recent survey helped provide evidence to inform the Housing Executive's draft Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy 2020-25. This draft Strategy has identified the need for delivery of a new methodology to assess traveller accommodation requirements in line with best practice; Strategy Action 3 of the draft Strategy states:

'We will adapt our Housing Needs Assessment methodology to facilitate the assessment of Traveller-specific accommodation needs'

This key item has been included in the Five Year Action Plan accompanying the Strategy and is scheduled to be completed by March 2023. The Strategy/Action Plan is being put forward for approval by the Housing Executive Board in March 2021.

It is therefore necessary to commission research/consultancy to underpin the development of a needs assessment methodology for all aspects of Traveller accommodation (Transit, Serviced, Group housing, General Needs, Emergency Halt) for a fifteen year period, examining key aspects including gathering, collating and analysing a range of data and evidence sources, and engagement with key stakeholders, to:

- Identify demand for the various categories of Irish Traveller accommodation at settlement level over an agreed period of time;
- Identify supply for the various categories of Irish Traveller accommodation at settlement level over an agreed period of time;
- Identify voids for the various categories of Irish Traveller accommodation at settlement level over an agreed period of time; and
- Identify the overall requirement for each category of Irish Traveller accommodation at settlement level over a 15 year period.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The outputs from the research will aid the Housing Executive inform the following processes of Irish traveller accommodation requirements in Northern Ireland:

- i) Local Development Planning
- ii) Development Management Planning
- iii) Social Housing Development Programme

Research on the private rented sector (various strands)

Key Client: Department for Communities
Contractor: TBC

The Department is currently introducing primary legislation in respect of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and regulations will be required once the Bill is introduced. A second Bill will be introduced in the next mandate and, in addition, the Department is committed to carrying out a review of the fitness standard across all tenures. In light of these ongoing strands of work, the Department has highlighted the need for research to inform the requirements to be set out in the legislation and the wider review of the current fitness standard. The research would consider issues including:

- All House Condition Survey-based evidence on the rate of *unfitness* of properties in PRS, and in particular any details regarding numbers of unfit properties built before 1956 as this may have relevance for the proposed legislation.
- All House Condition Survey-based evidence on the housing stock in the PRS – for example, in relation to issues such as absence of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors/alarms and any updated detail regarding energy efficiency standards in the PRS in NI
- Any detail regarding new PRS landlords: numbers; type of properties; scale of operation etc
- Any evidence available on the number of, and main reasons for, evictions in the PRS to help the Department consider emerging issues for both landlords and tenants in NI, including anti-social behaviour in the PRS
- Any updated details on the profile of tenants in the PRS sector. Percentages of groups of people living in the PRS
- Letting agents: number in NI; fees charged; how many are signed up to an accredited body and have client money protection etc in place.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research would inform policy and the introduction of legislation.

Affordable Warmth Satisfaction Survey

Key Client: Regional Services (Private Sector Improvement Services)
Contractor: TBC

The 2019/20 Research Programme included plans to carry out a survey of households who had used the Affordable Warmth Scheme during 2018/19. This project was completed in-house by the Research Unit using a postal methodology, which has been used for a number of years and yielded a good response rate. The resulting report showed high levels of satisfaction with the Scheme. A further survey has recently been completed to evaluate ongoing satisfaction with the scheme and monitor customers' views on the overall process, including engagement with local councils, the timeliness of implementation and satisfaction with their contractor by providing views on services received during 2019/20. In view of the ongoing COVID

restrictions, including remote working, the most recent survey was commissioned and carried out by telephone. Allowance is being made for a similar approach to the 2020/21 survey, which has again been requested by PSIS, to be carried out during 2021/22.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This research will enable the Housing Executive and DfC to monitor customer satisfaction with the administration and outcomes of the Affordable Warmth Scheme, ensuring that the highest level of satisfaction is being achieved. It will also reveal what works well and any improvements required to maintain a high level of satisfaction.

Mid-term Evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy

Key Client: Regional Services (Housing Services Support)
Contractor: Fiona Boyle Associates

The overall aim of the research is to help policy makers develop a new homelessness strategy through an evaluation of the existing 2017-2022 strategy.

The research will review the current Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017-2022, identifying key achievements, exploring the reasons for any shortfalls in reaching targets and strategic goals and considering the directions which a new homelessness strategy could take.

Properly exploring the future direction that homelessness policy in Northern Ireland might take requires critical reflection of the achievements of the 2017-2022 strategy, making allowances for changes in the policy landscape during the lifetime of the strategy.

This research will entail:

- A. Review of published key data and trends over the lifetime of the strategy.
- B. Evidence/Policy review - review of other global issues and initiatives highlighting policy initiatives and good practice in relation to homelessness strategies in UK, Ireland and further afield – where there could be learning for Northern Ireland;
- C. The research will require consultation with a wide range of homeless people, staff and sectoral stakeholders which must include:
 1. Internal staff perspective: stakeholder interviews covering the Housing Executive’s senior policy and operational staff.
 2. Sectoral engagement: stakeholder interviews/focus groups with key representatives from groups/forums that are central to the delivery of the strategy; e.g. predominantly representatives from Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, Central Homelessness Forum and Local Area Groups.
 3. Service User engagement: Key to any evaluation is the impact the strategy has had on those people who have experienced homelessness; therefore service user consultation is crucial.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will inform the development of the forthcoming Homelessness Strategy by providing evidence on progress against the aims and objectives of the current strategy, including the views of sectoral stakeholders and service users.

Technical Projects

Moisture Control in Insulated Walls

Key Client: Asset Management
Contractor: TBC

In line with the target to achieve net zero for CO₂ emissions by 2050, insulation levels in walls have to be increased to cut heat losses to low levels in preparation for the use of electric heat pumps. Insulated walls become less effective when their moisture content is elevated by humid air from the interior or by rain hitting the outer surface of the wall. Older brick walls are a particular problem, as humidity levels within them are often high, promoting the growth of dry rot fungus in structural timbers commonly embedded in these walls. Global Heating can be expected to increase these problems. Condensation can also form within the interior of cavity insulated walls. Promoting the drying of the interiors of these insulated walls by bespoke interventions can improve their insulation performance and reduce the likelihood of damp accumulation or fungal attack.

Preliminary simulations using 'Glaser' software indicates potential in some relatively simple interventions. Simulation by more sophisticated software might repeat this, but testing actual constructions in a controlled environment can indicate the likely performance in the field better.

After hygrothermal simulation in software, the proposed research would test additions or alterations to walls in a chamber with humidity and temperature controlled to simulate local weather, rainfall, and high occupancy. These may include:

- For solid brick walls: After a test with no insulation added, as is common;
- Porous mineral insulation panels adhered to the inside of external solid walls between joists and sealed around, to allow drying of the wall to the interior while preventing air movement outwards.
- For insulated Cavity Walls: After a test with no intervention
- Creating a rain proofed opening to the insulated cavity, closing it with a thin panel of aerated concrete
- Drilling through acrylic or gloss painted render to create a vented opening bypassing this common but relatively vapour-tight finish, to reduce humidity levels within the whole solid wall.

Expected Impact/Outcome

Key expected outcomes would include:

- Verifying that small amounts of relatively expensive porous mineral insulation can help limit humidity in timbers embedded in solid walls could allow more wall insulation schemes to proceed without requiring that occupants refrain from using vapour resistant vinyl wallpapers or paints.
- Verifying that setting panels of porous mineral insulation or aerated concrete can reduce moisture levels in the insulation layer could improve the insulation performance of that layer and the inner leaf.
- Identifying other interventions that will dry walls when drilled or inset into them, and any role for synthetic wicking inserts. E.g. In allowing internal insulation of stuccoed walls, salt removal.
- Recommendations for further interventions and investigations.