



DESIGNING FOR LIFE:

new social housing in Northern Ireland
post-occupancy survey

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Housing
Executive

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We are especially grateful to the residents living in the homes surveyed, who took the time to participate and whose goodwill and co-operation made the survey possible.

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About the Housing Executive's Research Unit

As the strategic housing authority in Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive has a statutory responsibility to regularly examine housing conditions and need, and may also conduct or promote research into any matter relating to any of its functions. Good quality data and research evidence is extremely important in shining a light on important issues and we are mindful that decisions need to be evidence based, particularly at a time when resources are scarce.

Research undertaken by the Housing Executive informs the organisation's corporate and business plans, provides an evidence base for decision making, assists in the evaluation and impact assessment of policies and strategies and feeds into broader collaboration with other research and housing organisations across the UK.

The Housing Executive's research programme is drawn up in consultation with key internal and external clients and stakeholders. In keeping with the strategic and enabling role performed by the Housing Executive, the research programme looks at a range of issues including and beyond those relating to its landlord function, and seeks to inform data and evidence needs across all tenures.

As such, the research programme comprises both surveys and analysis carried out in-house and commissioned work undertaken by independent experts and social/market research companies, where a larger fieldwork resource is required. The various discrete research projects can be grouped into four broad strands of work: strategic, customer, technical and supporting vulnerable people.

For more information on the Research Unit please visit:
www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/housing_research.htm

SECTION 1: Background

Background to the study

Through the Social Housing Development Programme, which is managed by the Housing Executive and delivered by housing associations, the Department for Communities invests around £100 million each year in new social housing in Northern Ireland. In order to ensure value for money and sustainability, it is important that this funding delivers new homes and communities that are high quality, liveable and meet tenants' needs and expectations, both now and in the future.

Housing design can have a significant impact on people's well-being, and nowhere are the benefits of good design more apparent than in the home, where people eat, sleep, work, socialise and play. Furthermore, individual houses cannot and should not be considered in isolation; the quality and design of the wider neighbourhood is vital in creating safe and attractive streets with a sense of place, which help foster wellbeing, belonging and community. Well-designed places improve over time and help create stable and sustainable communities in which residents can take pride.

The Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020 (Department for Communities, 2016) notes that one of the benefits of participation is that 'Tenants have the opportunity to influence design'. The housing associations in Northern Ireland survey their tenants as required by the regulator, however their surveys need to cover a range of issues such as satisfaction with service delivery and management, meaning that there is usually limited chance for more detailed exploration of design and quality issues.

More focused 'Post Occupancy Evaluations' (POEs) are widely recognised as best practice in the construction industry and are a useful way to gather more detailed information on how well dwellings meet users' needs. They also help housing providers to identify residents' priorities and ways of improving building design, performance and liveability.

In 2018 the Housing Executive, in partnership with the Department for Communities (DfC), therefore commissioned Perceptive Insight Market Research to undertake a post occupancy survey of housing association (HA) tenants to obtain feedback on the quality and design of new homes funded through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) that were completed between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. It was agreed that the two-year period between completion of the dwellings and carrying out the survey would allow sufficient time for most residents to make objective and informed judgements on how their home and the wider surroundings met the day-to-day needs of their household.

Aims and Objectives

It was proposed that the Post Occupancy Survey would focus on design elements and would be conducted with a wide range of tenants from different housing associations.

The objectives of the project were:

- to highlight good practice and successful design;
- to inform continuous improvement in the quality of new homes, neighbourhoods and residents' lives;
- to identify which areas of design and quality are most important to residents;
- to find out what tenants think of their homes across all new social housing;
- to inform future revisions of the Design Standards¹;
- to disseminate key messages and lessons learnt from the survey; and
- to help monitor housing associations' performance in terms of quality.

¹ The Design Standards sit within the 'Development Guide' section of the Department for Communities' *Housing Association Guide*, which provides guidance around aspects of Development, Finance, Procurement, Governance and Housing Management functions. For more information see www.communities-ni.gov.uk/collections/housing-association-guide

SECTION 2: Sample and Methodology

Sample and methodology

The Housing Executive Research Unit designed a questionnaire in partnership with a small Project Advisory Group comprising the Department for Communities, NIFHA and the Housing Executive's Development Programme Group.

The sample frame consisted of tenants living in 'general needs'² housing association properties completed as part of the social housing development programme in 2015/2016. A total of 818 properties were identified in the sample. However, a number of addresses were vacant, commercial, could not be found or could not be accessed, reducing the target sample to 751.

A total of 455 face-to-face interviews were conducted with tenants, using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). The majority of respondents (79%) had been living in their home for at least two years at the time of the survey.

Response rate

	Number	%
Original target	818	
No access	44	
Vacant	15	
Commercial	2	
Address not found	6	
Revised Target	751	100%
Refusal	64	9%
Non contacts	232	30%
Completed Interviews	455	61%

Presentation of findings

In quantitative research the number of respondents to any questionnaire has an impact on the way in which information can be presented in the analysis. It is the Research Unit's policy, in accordance with standard practice, to present analysis from surveys as follows:

- If the sample size is 100 or more, percentages are used in the text.
- If the sample or sub sample size is between 50 and 99 respondents, both numbers and percentages are used (for example, '...80% (110 respondents)...')
- Where the number of respondents is less than 50, numbers only are reported.
- Where findings are based on less than five respondents and may be of a sensitive nature, exact numbers are not reported to protect the anonymity of respondents. In the tables that accompany this report, less than 5 (<5) is used to denote a small number of respondents. It should be noted that, due to rounding, percentage totals may not add to 100%.

² 'General needs' accommodation refers to general family housing and dwellings for singles and couples. The accommodation is normally provided in self-contained bungalow, house, flat or maisonette form, but for singles can be in 'shared' dwelling form.

SECTION 3: Household Profile

Characteristics of Household Reference Person (HRP)³

The majority of HRPs were female (78%), while 22% were male. Almost three-fifths (59%) of respondents were aged between 25 and 44, and more than one-fifth (23%) were aged 45-59. Fewer respondents were aged 65 years or older (9%), six per cent 17-24 years, and four per cent 60-64 years.

Employment Status

Almost one third (31%) of all HRPs were working (full-time, part-time or self-employed) at the time of the survey, while one quarter (24%) were looking after family/home and one-fifth (20%) were permanently sick/disabled. More than one tenth (15%) were unemployed (not working) and the remaining eleven per cent were either retired (9%) or students (2%) at the time of the survey.

Marital Status

More than half (54%) of HRPs were single. Almost one fifth (19%) were married, while similar proportions of respondents were separated (11%) and divorced (10%) and six per cent were widowed.

Ethnicity/Nationality

In terms of ethnic origin, the vast majority (98%) of HRPs were white. More than two fifths (44%) were Irish and 40% were British. More than one-tenth (11%) described themselves as Northern Irish. The remaining five per cent of HRPs had other nationalities, including Portuguese, Latvian, Polish and Lithuanian.

Religion

More than half (54%) of HRPs described themselves as Catholic and more than one third (36%) as Protestant. The remaining 11% of respondents described their household's religion as 'none' or 'other', didn't know, or preferred not to answer the question.

Household Characteristics

Total in household

Similar proportions of respondents lived in households with two (27%), three (26%) or four or more (27%) members, while more than one fifth (21%) were living in single person households. Just over three fifths (62%) of households included one or more children under the age of 16.

Household members with disabilities

Just under half (47%) of respondents said a member of their household had a disability that affected their normal day to day activities. Of these, four fifths (80%) had one family member with a disability, and the remaining 20% had two or more members with a disability.

³ The *household reference person* is the member of the household who owns or pays the rent or mortgage on the property, or has the property as a perquisite or because of some relationship with the owner, where the owner is not a member of the household. Where two people have equal claim (e.g. husband and wife jointly own the property) the household reference person is the person with the highest annual income. This definition is for analysis purposes and does not imply any authoritative relationship within the household.



Section 4: Key findings

Dwelling Type

Description of current home



80%

Four fifths of respondents
lived in a house



16%

lived in a flat



5%

lived in a bungalow

Satisfaction with inside the home



95%

The majority of respondents said they were very satisfied/satisfied with their bathroom



92%

The majority of respondents said they were very satisfied/satisfied with their living room



88%

The majority of respondents said they were very satisfied/satisfied with their bedrooms



87%

The majority of respondents said they were very satisfied/satisfied with kitchen/dining area



94%

Of those who had a downstairs toilet, the majority of respondents were very satisfied/satisfied

Satisfaction with features in the home



96%

high levels of satisfaction with the main entrances to the home



95%

were very satisfied/satisfied with the provision for bins



95%

were very satisfied/satisfied with the warmth/heating of the property



90%

were satisfied with finishes and fixtures



85%

were satisfied with space



66%

were satisfied with storage

Overall satisfaction with inside the home



93%

Overall the majority of respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with inside their home

Lifetime Homes

The Lifetime Homes Standard was established in the mid-1990s to incorporate a set of principles that should be implicit in good housing design. The Standard seeks to enable 'general needs' housing to provide, either from the outset or through simple and cost-effective adaptation, design solutions that meet the existing and changing needs of diverse households, offering the occupants more choice over where they live and which visitors they can accommodate for any given time scale.⁴ Survey respondents were advised that 'the idea behind *Lifetime Homes* is homes that are designed for not just how you live today, but designed for your future needs, whatever they may be'.



54%

Over half of respondents were aware of the term 'lifetime home'



46%

were not aware of the term 'lifetime home'



96%

The majority of respondents thought it was a good idea



74%

Almost three-quarters of respondents thought their current house would continue to meet their needs in the future

Of those who expected their house to continue to meet their needs

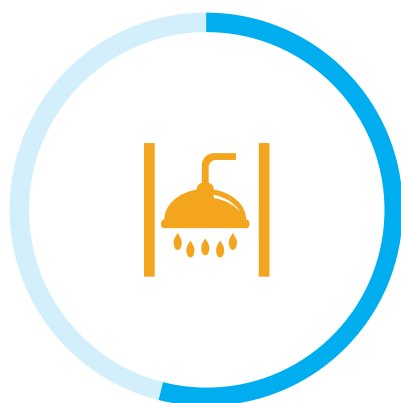
62% said all their property needs were met

13% said property adjustments were already in place to meet their medical needs

8% said the property was well designed

Lifetime Homes Standard

The Lifetime Homes Standard includes wider hallways and space for wheelchair movement, which makes it easier to move around and between rooms on the ground floor, but means that there is less space for living areas. Respondents were asked for their opinion on this design, by comparison with a number of other options.



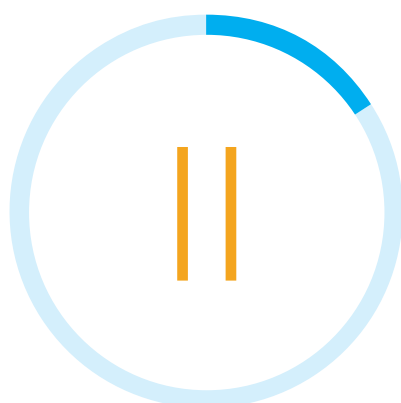
53%

said they would prefer wider hallways (space for future downstairs shower; smaller living areas)



26%

said they would prefer open plan design (few or no hallways; space for future downstairs shower)



16%

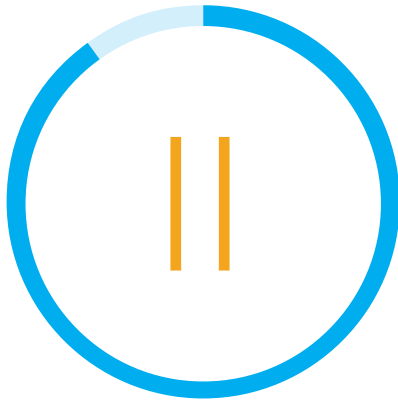
Would like to have narrower hallways (no space for future downstairs shower, but a larger living area)

⁴ For more information see: www.lifetimehomes.org.uk



Communal Areas

Almost one-fifth (16%) of respondents said that they lived in either a flat or apartment.



90%

of those living in a flat/
apartment were satisfied
with the shared hallways



89%

were satisfied with both
the shared entrances
and shared stairs



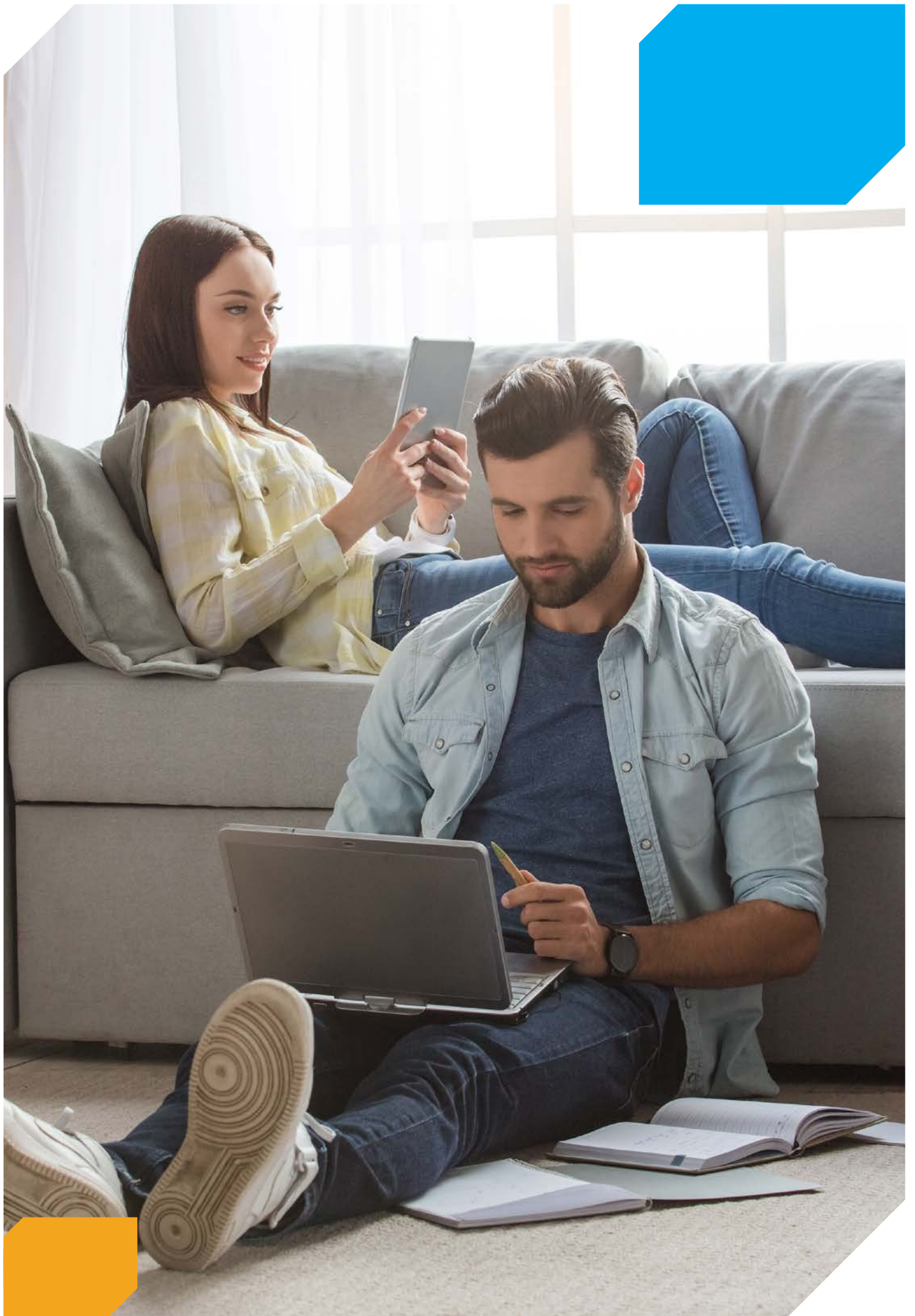
90%

of those respondents who
had access to a lift,
the majority were
very satisfied/satisfied



54%

were very satisfied/
satisfied with the internal
communal areas, overall



Comfort and wellbeing

Thermal comfort



95%

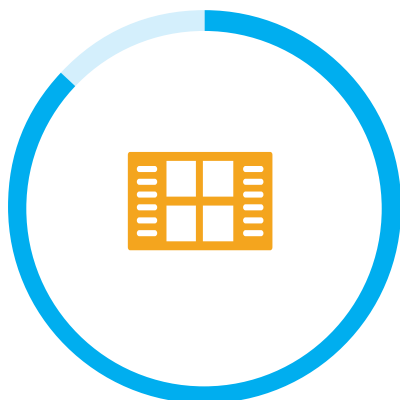
The majority of respondents strongly agreed/ agreed that their dwelling was easy to heat.

Privacy



89%

of respondents strongly agreed/ agreed there was private space in their home to relax/study/work



87%

of respondents said there was reasonable privacy from neighbours.

Comfort and wellbeing

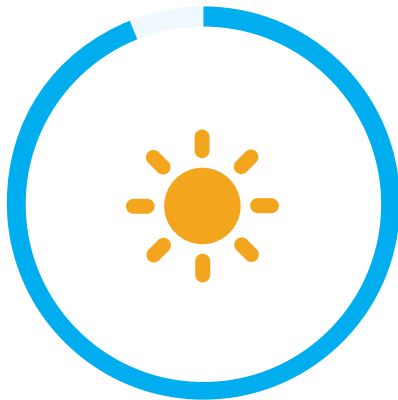
Noise



86%

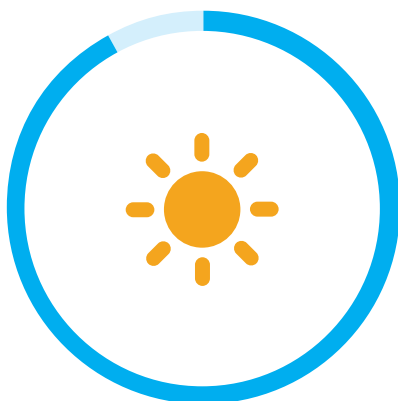
More than four-fifths of respondents strongly agreed/agreed their dwelling provided adequate sound insulation between rooms

Daylight



94%

The majority of respondents said they had a good level of daylight in their living room



92%

had a good level of daylight in the kitchen/dining room

Overall comfort



99%

The majority of respondents said overall their home was very comfortable/comfortable

Comfort and wellbeing

Health



96%

of respondents said their street was walkable⁵



92%

of respondents said their street was bike friendly



86%

of respondents said their street was child friendly

⁵ 'walkable'; a place where walking is readily available as a safe, connected, accessible and pleasant way of getting around.

Comfort and wellbeing

Sustainability



86%

More than four-fifths of respondents had Gas heating in their home



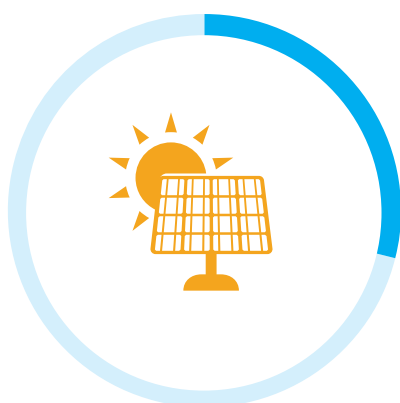
52%

More than half of respondents had heat recovery ventilation systems



39%

Almost two-fifths had solar panels for water heating



29%

of respondents had photovoltaic panels for electricity



14%

had oil heating installed in the home, compared with an overall Northern Ireland average of 68%⁶

⁶ Northern Ireland House Condition Survey, 2016.



Neighbourhood

Parking



91%

of respondents had adequate parking and said the parking was well integrated

More than four-fifths (88%) said there was adequate visitors' parking



63%

said the street had been designed to encourage cars to drive more carefully

Refuse (Bins)



97%

said there was easy access from the bin store to the street for collection

Outdoor space

There were high levels of satisfaction with:

- Patio doors 87%
- Fencing boundaries 86%
- Front garden 84%
- Shared garden 79%
- Rear garden 74%

Only a small number of respondents had balconies, but all were satisfied with this area of their home.

Neighbourhood

Street layout



54%

More than half of respondents said there was street planting that created a green character to the development



56%

of respondents stated their development had good quality communal green space



88%

More than four-fifths strongly agreed/agreed that their development created an attractive place to live

Neighbourhood

Children's play area



70%

Seven out of ten respondents said there was a suitable children's play area.

Where no play area was provided, 58% said they would like one on site or close by.



93%

Equal numbers of respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with access to the play area and convenience of play area



88%

of respondents were very satisfied with the size of play area.



84%

of respondents were very satisfied with the security of the play area



84%

of respondents were very satisfied with the safety of the play area



83%

of respondents were very satisfied with the facilities in the play area



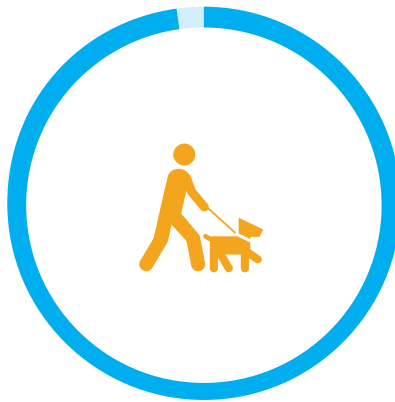
Neighbourhood

Safety



99%

of respondents said they felt very safe/fairly safe in their own home during the day



98%

said they felt very safe/fairly safe walking around the area during the day



94%

of respondents felt very safe/safe in their own home after dark



84%

of respondents felt very safe/safe walking around the area after dark



91%

of respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with their neighbourhood

Just under one fifth (17%) of respondents made comments on what would make them feel safer in their area. One fifth (20%) said 'nothing', while equal proportions (11%) said 'more lighting', 'more community policing' and 'security alarms/personal alarms'.



Overall satisfaction

Other facilities



88%

More than four-fifths of respondents had access to the internet



68%

More than two-thirds of respondents said there was adequate provision to dry clothes inside the home (without drying over radiators)



94%

were very satisfied/
satisfied with their home



4%

were neither satisfied or
dissatisfied

Conclusion

This survey provides a valuable insight into households' experiences and perceptions of living in recently-built social housing, based on a robust sample of homes completed by a number of housing associations at locations across Northern Ireland during 2015/16. The majority of respondents had been living in their homes for at least two years at the time of the survey, and had thus spent a sufficient amount of time in the property to have a good sense of how the dwelling and wider surroundings met the day-to-day needs of their household.

Overall, the findings point towards very high levels of satisfaction with both the home and the general neighbourhood: the vast majority of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the inside of their home, its overall comfort, their neighbourhood and their home overall.

Inside the home, two features that were viewed less positively than most other aspects were provision for storage and provision for clothes drying inside the property (without having to use radiators).

Outside the dwelling, respondents were generally satisfied with aspects within the curtilage of their own property, such as gardens and parking provision, and felt that their development was an attractive place to live.

While a substantial minority of respondents said that their development did not have a good quality communal green space, around half of these respondents did not want one, and it is worth noting that Planning only requires schemes of 25 or more units to provide communal green space. Similarly, while almost one third of respondents said there was no children's play area in or close to their development, opinion was divided on whether play areas should be provided where they did not exist. Where a play area had been provided, satisfaction with size, convenience, safety and security were generally high.

High proportions of residents felt that their streets were walkable and bike-friendly, and the majority also said that their street was child-friendly. However, more than one third of respondents felt that the streets in their development had not been designed to encourage cars to drive more carefully.

Three quarters of respondents expected their current home to continue to meet their needs in future, in some cases because adjustments had already been put in place to meet their personal medical needs. Just over half were aware of 'Lifetime Homes' and, when the concept was described to them, the vast majority thought that Lifetime Homes were a good idea. Most favoured a design approach that allowed for installation of a future downstairs shower, even if it meant having a smaller living area or fewer hallways.

Around one sixth of respondents lived in flats and apartments; they reported generally relatively high levels of satisfaction with shared hallways, entrances, stairs and lifts (where applicable). However, for this sub-sample, the overall rate of satisfaction with internal communal areas was lower than for any of the individual indicators (such as security and lighting in these parts of the building) on which views were sought. This may suggest that design issues alone do not account for all aspects of satisfaction with communal areas within flat and apartment blocks.

Overall, the findings of this survey serve as a useful baseline, providing important insights on how well the existing guidance on the design of new homes constructed through the social housing development programme – and the developments in which they are located – meet the needs of residents by providing a quality and sustainable living environment. This evidence should inform future deliberations on the Design Standards for social housing in Northern Ireland.

Useful Contacts

Housing Executive

Enquiries: **03448 920 900**

Enquiries textphone: **18001 03448 920 900**

Repairs: **03448 920 901** - Open 24 hours

Repairs textphone: **18001 03448 920 901**

Housing Benefit: **03448 920 902**

Housing Benefit textphone: **18001 03448 920 902**

Benefits

Advice line: **0800 232 1271**

Textphone: **0800 232 1715**

Fire, Police & Ambulance

Emergency Calls: **999**

Textphone: **18000**

PSNI non emergency: **101**

Crimestoppers: **0800 555 111**

NI Water

Waterline: **0345 744 0088**

(interruption)

Leakline: **0800 028 2011**

Flooding incident: **0300 2000 100**

NI Gas Emergency

Emergency: **0800 002 001**

Minicom: **0800 731 4710**

Electricity - NIE

Power cut: **03457 643 643**

Minicom: **03457 147 128**

Advice

Citizens Advice NI: **0800 028 1881**

Advice NI: **028 9064 5919**

Housing Rights Service: **028 9024 5640**

Energy Advice: **0800 1422 865**

Consumer Council: **028 9025 1600**

Supporting Communities NI:

028 2564 5676

Women's Aid Helpline: **0808 802 1414**

Welfare Changes Helpline:

0808 802 0020

EMBRACING ALL OUR NEIGHBOURS

If English is not your first language and you need help with interpreting & translation the Housing Executive can provide free services on request, please ask for further details at your local office.

ARABIC

كفتغل يه تيزيلجنالال اةغلل نكت مل اذا
يف قةدعاسمالا لىل ع لوصحل اجاتحتو مال
عيطتستف ، ةيطلخال او ةيفشلل قةمجرتلل
مذه ريفوت ةيذيفننل نالكسالل اةمدخ
لكنم لىل جري ، بلطلال دن ع ةيناجمالا تادخل
نم لىل صفتلابل رمالا اذه لوح راسفتسالل
يلحلل اكتبككم.

CANTONESE

如果英語不是你的母語，並且你需要
幫助來進行口譯和文字翻譯，那麼
Housing Executive可以根據請求而提供
免費的服務，請在你當地的辦公室詢問
進一步的詳情。

LITHUANIAN

Jei anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba ir
jums reikia pagalbos dėl vertimo žodžių
ir raštu, jums pageidaujant Housing
Executive gali suteikti nemokamas vertimo
paslaugas; dėl išsamesnės informacijos
prašome kreiptis į vietinį skyrių.

MANDARIN

如果英语不是你的母语，并且你需要
帮助来进行口译和文字翻译，那么
Housing Executive可以根据请求而提供
免费的服务，请在你当地的办公室询问
进一步的详情。

POLISH

Jeśli język angielski nie jest Państwa językiem
ojczystym i potrzebują Państwo pomocy
w zakresie tłumaczeń ustnych i pisemnych,
Housing Executive oferuje bezpłatne usługi
tłumaczeniowe na życzenie. O szczegóły
prosimy pytać biuro lokalne.

PORTUGUESE

Se o Inglês não for a sua língua materna
e precisar de ajuda com tradução e
interpretação, o Executivo de Habitação
pode providenciar serviços gratuitos
mediante solicitação, pode obter mais
informações no seu escritório local.

RUSSIAN

Если английский не является вашим
родным языком и вам требуется
помощь с устным и письменным
переводом, Жилищное управление
может предоставить по запросу
бесплатные услуги переводчика.
За более подробной информацией
обратитесь в ваш местный офис.

SLOVAK

Ak angličtina nie je váš materský jazyk
a vyžadujete si pomoc s prekladom a
tlmočením, kancelária úradu pre otázky
bývania (Housing Executive) vám ochotne
poskytne tieto služby bezplatne. Prosím,
požiadajte svoju miestnu kanceláriu o viac
informácií.

SOMALI

Haddii af Ingiriisigu uusan ahayn luqadda
aada hooyo oo aad u baahan tahay in
lagaa caawiyo turjumaadda oraahda ah
iyo midda qoran Agaasinka Gurayeynta
(Housing Executive) ayaa adeegyo bi-
laash ah bixin kara marka laga codsado,
fadlan faahfaahin dheeraad ah weydii
xafiiska xaafaddaada.

For customers with sensory disabilities,
information can be provided in alter-
native formats like large print, Braille
or audio. Sign language interpreters
can also be provided, but please give as
much notice as possible to allow us to
meet your request.