

# **Providing value for money – assessment of the similarities and differences between the NIHCS and the Stock Condition Survey**

## **NIHCS background information**

The NIHCS is the only source for key Government measures of housing quality (Decent Homes Standard, including the fitness standard, fuel poverty and the energy efficiency of homes). It also provides an update on the dwelling stock, its residents and other measures of housing quality, including its state of repair and the Housing Health & Safety Rating System. The NIHCS assesses the condition of dwellings of all tenures across Northern Ireland. It is a sample survey, a weighting and grossing process ensures that data reflects the overall stock in Northern Ireland. The survey is carried out at least every five years, with the most recent survey being carried out in 2016.

## **The Savills Stock Condition Survey**

During 2014/15 NIHE commissioned a firm of chartered surveyors called Savills Plc. to undertake a Stock Condition Survey. The purpose of the survey was to assess the current and future repair and maintenance liabilities of the Housing Executive's properties and related assets (assets included garages, hostels, commercial units, travellers' sites, leasehold properties, and septic tanks).

The survey involved a sample survey of 25% of the properties (over 22,400 surveys) and a detailed structural, mechanical and electrical assessment of the condition of the tower blocks. Survey results were modelled based on two standards. Firstly the Tenatable Repair Standard which is essentially the minimum works required to meet all statutory obligations and to keep the properties in good and tenatable repair. Secondly, the results were modelled against a Commonly Adopted Standard which is a higher standard adopted by many landlords in other jurisdictions, and includes a degree of improvement to the properties moving forward. The Savills Report provided costs for the next 30 years based on both standards. The costs were calculated on the basis of 87,439 properties in the NIHE stock at the time of the survey.

## **Key differences between the NIHCS and the Stock Condition Survey**

The Stock Condition Survey provided an assessment of NIHE properties only. These make up a relatively small proportion of the overall Northern Ireland dwelling stock. The NIHCS 2011 showed that the majority of dwellings in Northern Ireland were owner occupied (68%), followed by private rented (18%), while social housing (NIHE and Housing Association dwellings) accounted for 16% of the overall stock. The NIHCS provides information about housing of all tenures in Northern Ireland, which is not available from the Stock Condition Survey.

Although the NIHCS produces data on NIHE dwellings, it would not be possible to source that data from the Stock Condition Survey because of differences in the following aspects of the surveys:

## **The survey form**

The Stock Condition Survey form contained the following sections: Condition Survey, Energy Survey, The Housing Health and Safety Rating System Survey, The Fitness Survey, Decent Homes, Adaptations. While these are similar to the NIHCS, the NIHCS gathers a great deal more information which would not be available from the Stock Condition Survey eg. household profiles and fuel poverty.

## **Sampling**

The Stock Condition Survey (2014/15) was a sample survey of 25% of NIHE properties (over 22,400 surveys). A requirement of the brief for the Stock Condition Survey was to have the ability to produce accurate survey results within the different groups of properties within the areas/districts. The statistics team carried out a detailed analysis of the survey data collected from the 2009 survey to assess the variability of the repairs and maintenance characteristics of the properties and this was supplemented by knowledge from surveys undertaken in other jurisdictions. A detailed piece of work was then undertaken in order to calculate the number of surveys required by region, by district and by property type.

The NIHCS is a survey based on a stratified random disproportionate sample of dwellings in Northern Ireland. The sample is drawn from the Pointer database which contains the common standard address for every property in Northern Ireland. Dwellings of all tenures are included in the sample. The published data are estimates for Northern Ireland housing stock based on this sample. The sample design process, and the weighting and grossing process are carefully designed to ensure that the results are accurate and representative of the total housing stock. User consultation highlighted the importance of having results at Council level (there are 11 councils in Northern Ireland). In order to produce accurate results at this level the sample needs to be of a sufficient size. However, budgetary pressures also need to be considered. Sample size is an important factor in the design of the NIHCS sample as it ultimately determines the level of geographical disaggregation for any analysis undertaken. The agreed sample size of 3000 in 2016 reflected an optimal balance between user requirements and budgetary priorities.

## **Methodology**

The Stock Condition Survey assessed the condition of all types of NIHE properties and assets. The NIHCS includes domestic properties of all tenures, but dwellings must be habitable in order to be surveyed.

In many cases the Stock Condition Survey used the same definitions as the NIHCS eg. Decent Homes, and the Fitness Standard, and results were broadly similar. However the same models were not used for both surveys. It is essential that the NIHCS uses the government approved BRE models in order to meet one of its

objectives 'To facilitate a comparative analysis of housing conditions in Northern Ireland with other parts of the UK'.

The NIHE works in partnership with BRE to ensure the NIHCS uses broadly the same survey questions and methodology that the English Housing Survey uses (with the exception of questions or circumstances which are specific to Northern Ireland). In particular any updates to modelling for the English Housing Survey are implemented in the NIHCS. Modelling for Decent Homes, the HHSRS, Fuel Poverty etc. is carried out by BRE using the same methods used for the English Housing Survey therefore allowing comparability.

Data from the NIHCS undergo a weighting and grossing process to ensure that published figures reflect the characteristics of the overall housing stock. The process has a number of stages reflecting the separate stages of the sampling process and the survey process itself.

## **Surveyors/training/validation**

The Stock Condition Survey involved a team of over 70 (more than 40 surveyors, plus engineers, IT support staff and administrators). The NIHCS 2016 had a team of 18 surveyors, five supervisors, five NIHE statistical staff, and a technical support team in Building Research Establishment (BRE).

Different surveyors were used for both surveys, and the training processes were also different. This means that although some of the areas assessed were the same there would be differences with how data is collected and with the way surveyor judgements are made.

Savills surveyors carried out the Stock Condition Survey. Ten of the surveyors had worked for Savills for ten years carrying out similar work to the Stock Condition Survey, and they led the survey teams on the ground. The training for the survey was also carried out by Savills (using vacant NIHE dwellings).

NIHCS surveyors mainly come from an environmental health background, or are chartered surveyors. The majority of them have worked on the NIHCS since at least 2009. NIHCS surveyors complete a 6 day training course on the fundamental aspects of the NIHCS methodology (survey form, conventions etc.) when they begin working as a surveyor. Before a new NIHCS begins all surveyors attend a 2 day training course which is carried out by NIHE, BRE, and HCS supervisors. A further training session is held 1 week later. Surveyors provide feedback on the tablet/software to enable any problems to be rectified before the survey begins. Surveyors also have the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any issues with supervisors and with the technical experts from BRE.

Both surveys used tablets to collect the data and both had built in validation. However differences in the hardware, software and validation mean that comparison is not possible.

## **Time period of surveys**

The NIHCS is carried out at least every five years while there is no specific timetable for the Stock Condition Survey. The last Stock Condition Survey was carried out in 2014/15. The most recent published NIHCS was carried out in 2011, and the NIHCS 2016 is due for publication at the end of 2017/beginning of 2018. The differences in the time periods of the two surveys mean that comparison is not possible.

## **Conclusion**

Although there are some similarities between the Stock Condition Survey and the NIHCS there are also many differences. The NIHCS needs to produce data relating to housing of all tenures in Northern Ireland, and also needs to ensure that data is comparable with other parts of the UK, therefore it is not possible to use data from the Stock Condition Survey. Examination of the two surveys confirms that there is no duplication of data or resources, and that the NIHCS continues to provide value for money.

If you would like more information about the Stock Condition Survey please follow the link to the [Asset Commission section of our website](#).

**Research Unit, NIHE**

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