

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Research & Intelligence Programme 2019/20

Carried forward from 2018/19

Project	Client	Lead Researcher	Completion
House Sales Scheme Survey	Regional Services	Perceptive Insight	2019/20
Traveller Housing Needs Assessment	Regional Services	Perceptive Insight	2019/20
Strategic Housing Market Analysis	Regional Services	ERE	2019/20
House Prices, Rents and Affordability	Regional Services	Ulster University	2019/20
Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS)	Housing Services	Perceptive Insight	2019/20
Review of Temporary Accommodation	Housing Services	Campbell Tickell	2019/20
Homeless Acceptances/Analysis of Refusals	Housing Services	Fiona Boyle Associates	2019/20
Brexit and the Housing Market	Housing Services	RSM	2019/20
Universal Credit: The Customer Journey (Qualitative)	Welfare Reform	RF Associates	2019/20
Private Landlords Survey	DfC/Welfare Reform	Cognisense	2019/20

New Projects 2019/20

requested by key internal and external stakeholders

	Client	Estimated completion
Regional Services		
Evaluation of Solar PV Scheme	Sustainable Development	2019/20
2016 House Condition Survey Modelling*	Land & Regeneration	
Affordable Warmth**	PSIS	2019/20
Housing Services		
Customer Segmentation (Phase 1: Data Audit)	Housing Services	Start 2019/20
Homelessness Customer User Journeys	Housing Services	Start 2019/20
Day Services Provision/Chronic Homelessness	Housing Services	Start 2019/20
Impacts of Chronic Homelessness for Women	Housing Services	Start 2019/20
Experiences of Youth Homelessness	Housing Services	Start 2019/20
Homelessness Data Analysis: Pilot**	Housing Services	2019/20
Evaluation of Assisted Living Pilot**	Housing Services	2019/20
Improving Rent Arrears Collection**	Housing Services	2019/20
Community Surveys Programme marker**	Housing Services	2019/20
The impact of domestic abuse for housing providers: scoping study**	Housing Services	2019/20
Welfare Reform		
Welfare Reform: DLA, PIP and Housing Executive tenants	Welfare Reform Team	Start 2019/20
Universal Credit: The Customer Journey (Quant)	Welfare Reform Team	Start 2019/20
Universal Credit: The Rural Perspective	Welfare Reform Team	Start 2019/20
DfC/Joint/Other		
Comparison of new build social/private housing	DfC/Housing Services	2019/20
Fundamental Review of Allocations: Modelling	DfC	2019/20
Understanding Housing Stress	DfC/Housing Services	Start 2019/20
Private Tenants Survey	DfC/Welfare Reform	Start 2019/20
Corporate Surveys Marker**	Internal Clients	2019/20

* Marker only; no budget or costs associated with this activity at present

** Carried out in-house by the Research Unit.

Regional Services Projects

18/2.1 House Sales Scheme Survey

Key Client: Regional Services

The Housing Executive has been operating a House Sales Scheme (HSS) since 1979, initially on a voluntary basis prior to the introduction of the current statutory scheme which was introduced under the Housing (NI) Order 1983. By October 2017, around 120,000 former Housing Executive dwellings in total had been sold to tenants since the inception of the scheme. House sales have been an important source of capital receipts for the Housing Executive, and the sale of Housing Executive dwellings provided an affordable route to owner occupation for thousands of households, effectively creating mixed tenure estates right across Northern Ireland.

However, the Housing Executive has not been in a position to replace the sold dwellings with newly built properties, with the result that the organisation has an ageing and gradually decreasing stock. There is anecdotal evidence that many former Housing Executive dwellings are now in the private rented sector, and while this has created an accessible housing option for many households, it can also create management challenges within mixed estates. In addition, there is growing concern across the UK and in Northern Ireland about ensuring that a supply of social housing is retained to meet housing need.

In 2004, the Housing Executive published research on the House Sales Scheme and the housing market. The proposed project, which will take the form of a survey among the occupants of a sample of former Housing Executive properties, would update this research in the light of current policy issues including the availability of funding for social housing, any evidence on the prevalence of former Housing Executive dwellings in the private rented sector, the Social Housing Reform Programme, Welfare Reform, investment in adaptations, housing need and Programme for Government targets, and policy developments elsewhere in the UK and Ireland.

Expected Impact/Outcome

In providing new and updated data and insights on the outcomes of the House Sales Scheme, the research will help inform consideration of options for possible changes to the Scheme, thus guiding the development of policy for future approaches.

18/2.4 Traveller Housing Needs Assessment

Key Client: Regional Services

The Housing Executive is responsible for the provision and management of accommodation for the Traveller Community and also for establishing the accommodation needs of the Traveller Community across Northern Ireland. In fulfilling this role, the Housing Executive carried out comprehensive assessments to establish the accommodation needs (for social housing, Traveller-specific 'Group' housing, serviced sites and transit sites) of the Traveller Community across Northern Ireland in 2002, 2008 and 2014.

This work was partly a response to the final report of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers (December 2000), which recommended that: 'The Housing Executive should undertake a comprehensive strategic needs assessment of current and projected accommodation requirements of all Travellers in consultation with Traveller organisations, members of the Traveller communities and District Councils'.

More recently, the Equality Commission *Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland* (April 2017) noted that access to appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers was limited, while the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* report (March 2018) made a series of recommendations in relation to the Housing Executive's roles and responsibilities on provision and management of accommodation and services for Travellers in Northern Ireland.

A number of consultation and liaison events were led by the Housing Executive in 2018 in preparation for this project, and the updated Traveller Accommodation Need Assessment will once again involve wide engagement with Travellers and Travellers' Groups to gather as much information as possible on Travellers' current housing circumstances and future housing needs.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will help the Housing Executive continue to fulfil its statutory responsibilities in relation to provision and management of accommodation for the Traveller Community by providing updated information on Travellers' housing circumstances and needs, and will also form part of the Housing Executive's response to the reports by the Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission.

18/2.5 Strategic Housing Market Analysis

Key Client: **Regional Services**

As part of the 2017/18 Research Programme, the Housing Executive commissioned research to prepare an updated set of functionally-based housing market area boundaries for Northern Ireland, taking account of Travel to Work Areas, migration data that have become available since 2011 (including Census data) and the new Local Authority boundaries that came into force in 2015.

A necessary follow-on from this research is the completion of a detailed Strategic Housing Market Analysis for each of the newly delineated Housing Market Areas (HMAs). As was the case for the first iteration of the HMA research in Northern Ireland, which was completed in 2010, it was proposed that the full scale Housing Market Analysis report for at least the first – and possibly two – of the new HMAs should be carried out as a pilot study on a commissioned basis.

Following consultation with internal stakeholders, it was agreed that research was required to provide a comprehensive Strategic Housing Market Analysis of the Belfast Metropolitan and Derry and Strabane Housing Market Areas, including key economic, demographic and housing data. The study was broadened to incorporate elements that had previously been earmarked for two separate projects (an update of the Net Stock Model and a 15-year Social Housing Need Assessment), such that the Strategic Housing Market Analysis will also attempt 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.

Completion of these exemplar projects would include production of guidance to provide Housing Executive Planning, Place-Shaping and Housing Analytics officers with a template and the tools to facilitate completion of further, similar work in-house.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The proposed project will result in fully completed Housing Market Analysis reports for two of the newly-delineated Housing Market Areas in Northern Ireland, thus informing Housing Investment Plans, Community Planning activity, Local Development Plans and a range of other policies and strategies, and providing Housing Executive staff with the tools and expertise to carry out further analysis.

Key Client: Regional Services

This suite of interlinked research projects will provide 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 four main component parts:

1) Northern Ireland Quarterly House Price Index

A comprehensive, mix-adjusted analysis of a large sample of open market transactions gathered from a Northern Ireland-wide network of estate agents. 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

This project will continue to produce a biannual index of private sector rents for Northern Ireland using comprehensive data from a website-based lettings company, combined with data from the Housing Executive's Local Housing Allowance database.

3) Asking Price House Price Index

This project is the equivalent of the Rightmove and Hometrack price indices, which are produced for GB but not for Northern Ireland. Asking Price indices provide a much earlier warning of changes in the housing market than indices based on completed sales (DCLG, UU, LPS) or mortgage-based indices (Halifax and Nationwide).

4) Composite Affordability Index

The Housing Executive's Affordability Index for first-time buyers has used a typical Bank/Building Society annuity formula to calculate the maximum price a household with a median household income can afford to pay, assuming a typical interest rate, a 90% mortgage (loan to value ratio) and a 25 year repayment period. The model provides a useful indicator of the degree of difficulty experienced by first time buyers purchasing a property with a ten per cent deposit. Given the changes in house price to income ratios in Northern Ireland and greater caution on the part of lenders in relation to loan-to-value ratios, this index was considered no longer as meaningful. The new Composite Affordability Index developed brings together two measures (house price to income ratio and the savings ratio / percentage of annual disposable income required as a deposit) to reflect both the much lower house price to income ratios on the one hand and the need for larger deposits on the other.

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.

Housing Services Projects

18/2.1 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey

Key Clients: **Housing Services**

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 (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 2019 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 and quality assessments, 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 by the interviewer. 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;
- The Social Housing Reform Programme;
- 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.

18/1.7 Review of Temporary Accommodation

Key Client: **Housing Services**

For some 'Full Duty' homeless applicants, an immediate permanent housing solution may not be available. In such circumstances, the Housing Executive will seek to discharge its duty in stages, via temporary accommodation placements where necessary. Currently a range of temporary accommodation solutions is available, including:

- Housing Executive hostels;
- Voluntary Sector hostels;
- Single Lets (houses/flats etc. made available under licence agreement to households on a short term basis);
- Dispersed Intensively Managed Accommodation (DIME) - for individuals with complex issues and potential behavioural issues which require higher levels of management and support;
- Short-term B&B or similar (used only in exceptional circumstances and for as short a duration as possible).

Households are placed in temporary accommodation appropriate to their circumstances and with the necessary level of support. Households' support needs range from none to high, and these needs can be met either within their accommodation placement or through provision of floating support in a private single let where support needs are low.

The Homelessness Strategy 2012-17 acknowledged the need for a review of temporary accommodation provision to ensure strategic relevance and cost effectiveness. Although an evaluation of accommodation-based services was carried out (RSM McClure Watters, 2015), the full strategic review was put on hold due to the redesign of Housing Executive frontline services: it was considered important to defer any further review allowing for the analysis of any implications arising from service redesign.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will help the Housing Executive make best use of limited resources and meet the objectives of the Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017-2022 (implementation of which is a target in the draft Programme for Government) by providing evidence on the strategic relevance, financial viability and access criteria of the temporary accommodation portfolio.

18/1.8 Homeless Acceptances and Analysis of Refusals

Key Client: **Housing Services**

The 2017 Northern Ireland Audit Office report on homelessness in Northern Ireland made a number of recommendations, including that the Housing Executive needs to be more innovative in its analysis, interpretation and presentation of the homelessness data it collects. Specifically, the Audit Office recommended that, to fully understand the causes of homelessness, the Housing Executive should:

- Carry out research to determine why the level of statutory homelessness acceptances in Northern Ireland is significantly higher than in other UK regions;
- Analyse the reasons for variation in acceptances across its regions; and
- Analyse the data relating to the 'accommodation not reasonable' category.

The Housing Executive, in collaboration with the Department for Communities, has already taken initial steps to review the type and format of homelessness data that are regularly collated for release in statistical publications. However, additional research is required to provide more in-depth analysis on some of the points raised by the Audit Office. The proposed research will investigate the high levels of statutory homelessness acceptances in Northern Ireland in comparison to other regions of the UK, with the aim of assisting policy makers and strategic/operational managers to be more innovative in the data collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation of the homelessness data currently gathered by the Housing Executive.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The proposed research will seek to provide insight on whether there are any systemic or structural reasons for the higher incidence of statutory homelessness in Northern Ireland and analysis of the reasons for acceptance, particularly in relation to 'accommodation not reasonable'. It will also assist the Housing Executive in delivering the Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland.

18/2.2 Brexit and the Housing Market

Key Client: **Housing Services**

When the UK-wide referendum on EU membership was held in 2016, the majority of voters in Northern Ireland (56%) opted to remain in the EU. As the only part of the UK that shares a land border (totalling some 310 miles) with an EU member state, the region is in a unique position, and many of the practical

implications for trade, day-to-day movement and cross-border bodies and services that have been developed over the last two decades to meet the needs of largely rural communities on both sides of the border remain unclear.

Some initial research on the implications of Brexit for specific border regions of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic has already been carried out. One such study considered the situation in the North West (Derry/Donegal) border region – home to around 350,000 people – which would be one of the few city regions within Europe bisected by an EU/non-EU international frontier (UUEPC & Gallagher, 2017). The study showed high levels of cross-border movement on a daily basis as part of a picture of complex cross-border relationships that existed across trade, retail, commuting, tourism and access to public services. Similarly, a qualitative study carried out for the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) (Hayward, 2017) sought to give a voice to residents on both sides of the border in this predominantly rural area. Again, there was a strong focus on the movement of people and goods, and the report noted that some respondents had already decided to move to the other side of the border in anticipation of future difficulties in cross-border work. Although neither of these reports, and little of the analysis to date, has focused specifically on housing, it seems reasonable to assume that the UK's withdrawal from the EU may have some impact on housing markets, at least at a localised level.

The amount of 'imported labour' in Northern Ireland increased substantially between 2001 and 2011, when the Census showed that approximately 81,500 Northern Ireland residents (4.5%) had been born outside the UK and ROI, around 36,000 of whom had been born in one of the 12 countries that joined the EU after 2004. Research carried out for the Housing Executive in 2014 by O'Sullivan used the contrasting experience of Dungannon and Larne to consider the influence of migrant workers on local housing markets. It indicated that housing demand (particularly for private rented accommodation) from concentrations of migrant workers had helped certain areas avoid the worst of the housing market slump and prevented new developments from being left unfinished or unoccupied. It follows that any large-scale exodus of migrant workers could equally have consequences for housing markets in specific localities in Northern Ireland. It is therefore considered that it would be useful to carry out research with to scope:

- The future (post-Brexit) intentions of migrant workers currently living in Northern Ireland;
- What any large scale departure of migrant workers currently living in Northern Ireland might mean for housing markets;
- Whether there are typologies of housing markets within Northern Ireland that are more or less likely to be impacted by Brexit.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research would help the Housing Executive and other stakeholders scope and plan for any possible housing supply and demand issues that may arise in certain locations as a result of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

Welfare Reform/DfC/Joint Projects

18/1.4 Universal Credit: The Customer Journey

Key Client: Welfare Reform Project Team

As part of the Government's wider programme of welfare reform, a number of working age benefits, including the rental element of Housing Benefit, are being replaced by Universal Credit (UC).

The first phase, 'Natural Migration', introduced UC for new claims in Northern Ireland and was rolled out between September 2017 and December 2018. During the phasing-in period, if a household living in a UC area and receiving one of the benefits/credits being replaced experienced a significant change in circumstance which meant they were reassessed for the 'legacy' benefit/credit, they were likely to move

to UC. New claims for any of the 'legacy' benefits/credits were also directed to claim UC, unless they met one of the exemptions.

From July 2020 until December 2023, claimants receiving any of the six benefits being replaced by UC (including the HB rental element) who not 'naturally migrate' will be moved to the new benefit. 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 Universal Credit housing costs four-weekly in arrears.

In addition, for households receiving UC, Housing Benefit for rates is being replaced by the 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 initial *qualitative* research to help gain an understanding of the customer journey experienced by tenants who have claimed UC.

Expected Impact/Outcome

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

18/1.6(a) Private Landlords Survey

Key Client: Department for Communities/Welfare Reform Cross-Sector Research Group

As part of the 2017/18 Research Programme, the Research Unit set up and co-ordinated the (still ongoing) work of a cross-sectoral Welfare Reform Research Group, comprising representatives from the Housing Executive, Department for Communities, NIFHA, CIH, the Law Centre, Citizens Advice, Advice NI and Housing Rights. The purpose of the group was to bring together representatives of all stakeholders with an interest and expertise in housing and welfare reform, in order to:

- Collate existing research evidence;
- Scope out gaps in research; and
- Minimise overlap in welfare reform-related research activity.

The Group has met on several occasions, providing updates and discussing issues that have contributed to identification of a number of matters on which research would help to guide the policy development and the targeting of information/advice services.

Given the important role of the private rented sector in Northern Ireland's housing market and the fact that around half of private tenants are estimated to be in receipt of Housing Benefit, both the Welfare Reform Research Group (WRRG) and the Department for Communities have identified the need for research on how welfare reform may impact the private rented sector.

In consultation with the Department for Communities and other stakeholders, an approach was formulated whereby landlords' views, experiences and awareness of welfare reform would be gathered as part of a broader landlord survey that would help inform wider policy development with regard to the private rented sector. Accordingly, the proposed objectives of the project are to:

- Explore landlords' entry into the sector and their role as a landlord;
- Explore landlords' awareness of, and attitudes to, welfare changes;

- Ascertain the sources from which landlords seek advice/support, including in relation to welfare changes;
- Consider the future viability of the sector by examining topics including:
 - Landlords' attitudes to and experiences of letting to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit and the housing cost element of Universal Credit;
 - Landlords' most recent property letting, to consider up-front charges for tenants and the return of deposits;
 - Future rental practices, including rent levels;
 - Landlords' personal financial circumstances; and
 - Changes to landlords' portfolios and (where applicable) plans to exit the sector.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will help the Housing Executive, Department for Communities and other key stakeholders devise ways to support the private rented sector to maintain rent payments and sustain tenancies, ensuring the ongoing availability of affordable and accessible accommodation to meet the needs of a range of households.

Regional Services Projects

Evaluation of Solar PV Scheme

Key Client: Sustainable Development Unit, Regional Services

In summer 2016 the Housing Executive completed a solar photovoltaic panel scheme in partnership with Saliis Ltd, installing solar panels at 1,000 homes, using private finance based on the 'rent a roof' model. At the time of installation, the scheme was the largest solar PV project for residential properties in Northern Ireland, and it is estimated to have generated savings of £150-£200 per household on annual energy bills (based on the assumption that tenants use 50% of the electricity produced by the panels).

The private company recoups its investment and makes a profit over 20 years from the sale of Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) and the sale of any electricity not used by tenants, which is fed back into the grid.

The Sustainable Development Unit carried out an initial, in-house assessment of some data to measure the outcomes of the scheme. However, based on the lessons learned from this exercise, the need has been identified for a larger piece of research that would require liaison with the key electricity suppliers (PowerNI and SSE: to be facilitated by the Sustainable Development Unit).

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will provide a clear evidence base on the savings to households arising from the provision of PV panels, which would inform policy and influence future approaches to use of renewable energy and thus assist the Housing Executive in fulfilling its Home Energy Conservation Authority role.

16/1.1 2016 House Condition Survey (Modelling)

Key Client: Strategic Planning & Research

House Condition Surveys have been conducted every five years in Northern Ireland since 1974 and Interim Surveys were conducted 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. All types and tenures of housing are included: owner occupied, private and social rented housing, vacant dwellings, apartments, houses in multiple occupation, and urban and rural dwellings.

In January 2016 the Board gave its approval for the 2016 House Condition Survey to be carried out, with five main objectives which were broadly consistent with those in 2001, 2004, 2006, 2009 and 2011:

- To provide a comprehensive picture of the dwelling stock and its condition in 2016 for Northern Ireland and each of the 11 council areas;
- To facilitate a comparative analysis of housing conditions in Northern Ireland with other parts of the UK;
- To examine the association between dwelling conditions and the social and economic circumstances of households;
- To examine changes in the condition of the stock over time in terms of key government measures: Decent Homes and the Housing Health and Safety Rating Standard;

- To 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.

The fieldwork stage of the 2016 HCS was completed during 2016/2017 and headline figures on the dwelling stock and tenure, dwelling age and location and unfitness (at Northern Ireland level) were published in March 2017. From 2016, House Condition Survey findings have National Statistics status, which denotes that they have been assessed by the Office for Statistics Regulation as fully compliant with the Code of Practice for National Statistics.

In addition to the field work and in order to produce a full report that includes updated indicators of Government measures comparable with the English Housing Survey and Scottish model and consistent with previous Northern Ireland House Condition Surveys, further data modelling work is necessary to produce statistics on:

- repair costs;
- SAP and thermal comfort;
- Decent Homes;
- fuel poverty; and
- the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

This modelling work was carried out during 2017/18 and the resulting figures and indicators were compiled into a full 2016 House Condition Survey report, providing detailed insights on the findings, which was published in late spring 2018. An infographic-led summary report was subsequently produced and published in autumn 2018, along with modelled findings on *The Cost of Poor Housing in Northern Ireland in 2016*.

Other modelled outputs that have been, or are due to be, published include a report on carbon dioxide emissions, which provides evidence to support the Housing Executive's HECA role, a SAP time series (recalibrating previous SAP calculations to match the updated methodology for comparability over time) and information on the Scottish Tolerable Standard variable.

A marker has been included for the 2019/20 financial year to enable production of further modelling if requested by users to inform ongoing analysis and policy development, subject to additional budget availability.

Expected Impact/Outcome

Undertaking the House Condition Survey, including the associated data modelling, fulfils a statutory duty to examine housing conditions and helps fulfil another statutory duty: to determine housing need. In addition, however, the statistics are used in a wide range of other research and market intelligence projects, including the Annual Review of the Housing Market, Housing Investment Plans, Community Planning, Home Energy Conservation Authority (HECA) Report; Fuel Poverty Strategy; Empty Homes Strategy and Welfare Reform and the Department for Communities uses the HCS findings to inform policy development.

Affordable Warmth

Key Client: Department for Communities/PSIS

The 2018/19 Research Programme included plans to carry out a survey of households who had used the Affordable Warmth Scheme. This project was completed in-house by the Research Unit, with the report showing high levels of satisfaction with the Scheme. A further survey will be carried out during 2019/20 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.

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.

Housing Services Projects

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

Key Client: **Housing Services**

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. Recognising the value of this approach to gain greater insight on its customers, the Housing Services division has requested the initial data audit to be carried out during 2018/19, with a view to carrying out the subsequent segmentation analysis the following year.

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.

Homelessness Customer User Journeys

Key Client: **Housing Services**

The 2017 Northern Ireland Audit Office report on homelessness in Northern Ireland made a number of recommendations, including that the Housing Executive needs to be more innovative in its analysis, interpretation and presentation of the homelessness data it collects. Specifically, the Audit Office recommended that, to fully understand the causes of homelessness, the Housing Executive should:

- Carry out research to determine why the level of statutory homeless acceptances in Northern Ireland is significantly higher than in other UK regions,
- Analyse the reasons for variation in acceptances across its regions; and
- Analyse the data relating to the 'accommodation not reasonable' category.

The research is also being commissioned in the context of the Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 and the Inter-Departmental Homelessness Action Plan, which is led by the Department for Communities. The Homelessness Strategy noted the need for 'person centred services which are tailored to meet the needs of individual customers and support them to achieve sustainable housing solutions'. The Housing Executive has a range of homelessness data that facilitates a quantitative analysis of issues

around homelessness in Northern Ireland and is keen to complement this quantitative information with a qualitative analysis that provides more detail on the circumstances of individuals who end up in the cycle of homelessness. The proposed research will therefore provide a *qualitative* analysis that will improve understanding of:

- issues which may be driving increases in the rate of homeless acceptances;
- customer journeys and what the Housing Executive – and any other relevant organisations – can do to prevent similar incidents of homelessness; and
- provision of sustainable temporary accommodation and, ultimately, a permanent offer of accommodation that is sustainable in the long term (in cases where homelessness cannot be prevented).

Expected Impact/Outcome

By understanding the life events, housing situation and service contact of individuals and households across a range of homelessness customer user journeys, Housing Services hopes to inform future commitments to achieving the actions within the Housing Executive’s Homelessness Strategy. While the Strategy is a five-year document, the organisation is guided by an implementation plan that is developed on an annual basis and it is hope that the findings of this research will be used in delivering the various actions over the remaining term of the Homelessness Strategy.

Day services provision and impacts on chronic homelessness

Key Client: **Housing Services**

The Housing Executive funds a number of homeless day services including the Welcome Organisation (Belfast), Foyle Haven (Derry) and The Link (Newtownards). In order to inform policy and decision-making about future funding allocation to both existing and potential day services schemes, research is required to help understand their impact, particularly on individuals and households experiencing chronic homelessness. The research would:

- Review day services provision in Northern Ireland (Housing Executive-funded and other services)
- Review good practice in other jurisdictions
- Detail and evaluate the Housing Executive-funded day centres.

Expected Impact/Outcome

By reviewing and evaluating the role of day services in delivering assistance to those experiencing chronic homelessness and considering good practice elsewhere, the research will inform plans for future service delivery within this sector of homelessness services. It will also link with the Housing Executive’s Chronic Homelessness Action Plan, which will be subject to public consultation, with the final version launched in 2019/20.

Impacts of chronic homelessness for women

Key Client: **Housing Services**

The Housing Executive has committed to develop a Chronic Homelessness Action Plan and, as part of the evidence base, a need has been identified to gain an improved understanding of the impacts of chronic homelessness amongst females. Stakeholders have cited a number of issues and challenges that have a particular impact on *women* who find themselves within the chronic homeless category; these include difficulties accessing women-only accommodation. In light of such concerns, a research project would independently verify such challenges and help identify potential solutions.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will assist the Housing Executive in understanding the scale and impact of chronic homelessness on women, as well as on additional gender-specific issues that should be addressed in future action plans and service delivery.

Experiences of youth homelessness

Key Client: **Housing Services**

Stakeholders across the homelessness sector have noted increasing pressure and challenges in relation to homelessness amongst younger people. This research will seek to:

- provide an overview of systems across neighbouring jurisdictions to inform future service delivery in Northern Ireland;
- explore the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16-25 in Northern Ireland and consider the support available to such households and individuals; and
- improve the Housing Executive's understanding of the changing demographics of hostel users and young people's experiences of homelessness.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The proposed research will provide an improved understanding of the issues that lead to young people becoming homeless, the support available to them and areas that need to be improved. This will assist the Housing Executive in seeking to prevent homelessness amongst young people and identify links across government agencies, where improvements can be made to assist in the prevention of homelessness.

Homelessness Data analysis: pilot (In-house)

Key Client: **Housing Services**

The Housing Executive's Homelessness Policy and Strategy Unit has a range of data sources available for analysis and interpretation. It is proposed that, as a pilot, the Research Unit will review and analyse key data points across files and work with the Homelessness Team to explore and draw out key themes and draft a narrative around the analysis. This work depends on resourcing and other commitments, and is an exploratory project that will be used as a pilot to examine the practicalities of using administrative data to inform future research projects.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The Northern Ireland Audit Office report on homelessness noted the need for the Housing Executive 'to be more innovative in its analysis, interpretation and presentation of the homelessness data it collects'. The proposed research will assist in the delivery of a more innovative approach to the analysis, interpretation and presentation of homelessness data.

Evaluation of Assisted Living Technology Pilot (In-house)

Key Client: **Housing Services**

The Housing Executive has undertaken an innovative pilot project to install a range of assistive smart technology equipment into a number of homes in the North West area to support tenants (or their immediate family members) with disabilities or mobility issues. The project has been delivered in partnership with the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHST) and Hive Studios, a digital Community Social Enterprise based within a Housing Executive community.

Following extensive consultation with the Occupational Health Team, Housing Executive Complex Needs officers and tenants, suitable technologies and a sample of 18 tenants were identified, across a range of age groups and disabilities. The pilot deployed some of the new technologies for the benefit of tenants with disabilities, and with a view to:

- sustaining tenancies;
- addressing mobility challenges;
- improving home security;
- addressing social isolation;
- improving quality of life;
- promoting social interaction; and
- providing an opportunity to share insights with other parties.

A mid-term report has been published in collaboration with WHSCT, and a need has now been identified for further research with the 12 tenants currently participating in the pilot, involving case studies, secondary analysis of information and stakeholder interviews with the partners in the pilot project.

Expected Impact/Outcomes

The research will help inform how the Housing Executive can use technology in its homes in future and deliberations on whether the pilot could or should be mainstreamed by the organisation.

Improving Rent Arrears Collection (In-house)

Key Client: **Housing Services/Innovation Lab (NISRA)**

Rent arrears owed to the Housing Executive totalled £12.2 million in 2017/18 and the organisation devotes substantial time and resources each year to collecting arrears and managing the tenants who accumulate them. The process of managing long term arrears through to eviction is costly and difficult and the Housing Executive would prefer to help households sustain their tenancies rather than be forced to seek evictions. In light of these issues, the Housing Executive has been working with the Department of Finance's Innovation Lab (iLab) to test the efficacy of the standard 'LT1A' arrears letter against no letter in prompting payment of arrears.

The iLab will be conducting a second trial of an improved letter against no letter and has asked the Research Unit to assist by carrying out qualitative research to enrich the understanding of the results of the trial and inform the development of further trials. This qualitative research would follow on from the second trial and is required in order to better understand:

- what works best to prompt payment after a tenant goes into arrears;
- how tenants' habits, beliefs and motivations affect whether or not they make or miss a payment; and
- the role that letters and other communications play in encouraging tenants to repay arrears once they have occurred.

Expected Impact/Outcomes

The research will be used to better understand tenants' motivation, beliefs and habits about paying weekly rent and going into arrears and in order to develop further interventions to trial.

18/2.3 Community Surveys Programme (Circa three areas; In-house)

Key Client: Housing Services

Surveys carried out independently by the Research Unit provide a valuable insight into residents' views on issues and needs in estates and their levels of satisfaction with their area. They can inform delivery of BRIC and other community cohesion programmes and/or respond to area-specific issues identified by local managers. These estate-based surveys, which are carried out on request and subject to resource availability, help build information on attitudes to the physical environment, community relations, community safety and the facilities that are available locally.

Expected Impact/Outcome

Housing Services will use the survey findings to inform programme delivery. Residents will use the findings to shape a series of activities at the community level and to build better relations in their area. Community groups will be able to use the research outputs when accessing future funding opportunities.

The impact of domestic abuse for housing providers: scoping study (In-house)

Key Client: Housing Services

Every year, nearly two million people in the UK experience domestic abuse. However, thousands of victims do not get the right support at the right time, with SafeLives research showing that 85% of victims seek help five times on average before they receive effective help.

Given that domestic abuse is largely perpetrated within the home, housing providers can play a unique role in supporting the victims of domestic abuse who are their tenants, and holding perpetrators to account. Recent research from SafeLives and Gentoo found that improving the housing response to domestic abuse not only supports more victims, survivors and children, but also makes financial sense from a business perspective.

This scoping study will aim to assess the possibility of conducting similar research for Northern Ireland, with a view to better understanding:

- the housing journey that people encounter when experiencing domestic abuse;
- what housing providers are currently doing well by way of response to domestic abuse;
- what can be improved to ensure that victims and survivors are supported; and
- whether there is scope to measure the financial impact of domestic abuse for housing providers in Northern Ireland.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This scoping study would inform key policy areas and scope the possibility of identifying cost savings if domestic abuse can be prevented and perpetrators handled appropriately. The work would also contribute to the UK-wide conversation led by CIH through its *Making the Pledge* campaign.

Welfare Reform

Welfare Reform: DLA, PIP and the impacts on Housing Executive tenants

Key Client: Welfare Reform Project Team

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) was introduced in Northern Ireland in June 2016, replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for new claims made by people aged between 16 and 64. Existing DLA claimants in this age group whose benefit is due to come to an end, or who report a change in their care

or mobility needs, will be invited to claim PIP, while DLA claimants who have an indefinite or lifetime award for DLA, are being randomly selected and invited to claim PIP over the two year period from December 2016 to December 2018. However, there is no automatic transfer from DLA to PIP.

An award of PIP affects Housing Benefit in a similar way to an award of DLA, and can provide an entitlement to certain premiums. Thus, if PIP is not awarded, disability premium and non-dependent deduction protection in Housing Benefit will be lost. In addition, the Single Room Rent Protection for those renting privately may be lost for those under 35 years. A Welfare Supplementary Payment will be available (and paid directly to the claimant) for a period of one year to offset the financial impact for some people who are financially worse off as a result of their PIP assessment. The Housing Executive does not know in advance when claimants will be invited for PIP assessment, and housing staff have been advised to monitor claimants' circumstances and be vigilant for indicators on the rent account which suggest a reduction in HB.

Evidence gathered by the Welfare Reform Project Team indicates that some tenants who had previously been eligible for DLA have not been awarded PIP, with implications for their liability – and ability – to pay rent. As the CTOS indicated that 34% of household reference persons were in receipt of a disability benefit in 2016, the change from DLA to PIP has the potential to have implications for a sizeable minority of tenants, and this research would explore in more detail the implications of this change.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will help the Housing Executive devise ways to support its tenants to maintain rent payments and sustain tenancies by providing an insight into the impacts of changes in entitlement to disability benefits and the implications for different types of households.

Universal Credit – The Customer Journey (Quantitative)

Key Client: Welfare Reform Project Team

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', currently 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 initial 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.

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.

Universal Credit – The Rural Perspective (Qualitative)

Key Client: Welfare Reform Project Team/Rural & Regeneration

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.

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.

DfC/Joint/Other Projects

Comparison of new build social and private housing in Northern Ireland

Key Client: Department for Communities

Anecdotal evidence suggests that social housing in Northern Ireland is built to a higher standard and costs more to develop than housing built for the private market. This assertion tends to be associated with a wide range of factors, including the requirement to build to Lifetime Homes and Secured by Design standards. Reflecting the objective within the action plan for the *Facing the Future* Housing Strategy (2012-2017) that standards for social housing construction should be harmonised with those used for private housing development, the Housing Association Guide has already been made less prescriptive on a number of aspects. However, a number of higher standards, including Lifetime Homes, were retained in order to reflect key areas of concern.

The Department for Communities wishes to investigate and provide an understanding, from evidence to be collected, of how social housing compares with private developments and, in particular, whether the cost of new social/affordable housing is higher than for private housing, with a range of objectives, including:

- To identify the differences between social and private housing in terms of design and specification;
- To establish conclusively whether there is a cost premium in developing social housing compared with private housing and the extent of any difference;
- To ascertain potential areas for improved value for money within the SHDP with regards to design specification;
- To inform future reviews of design standards, e.g. space standards, Lifetime Homes, Secured by Design, density etc.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research findings will be used to:

- Guide improved value for money within the SHDP;
- Provide evidence for future reviews (e.g. space standards and Lifetime Homes) and;
- Provide definitive answers to queries from elected officials, etc.

Fundamental Review of Allocations: Modelling

Key Client: **Housing Services/Department for Communities**

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Housing Selection Scheme (HSS) has been in place and largely unchanged since 2000. As measured by the Selection Scheme, more than 23,000 households in Northern Ireland are in housing stress, and more than 11,000 households per year are accepted as homeless.

The Department for Social Development (subsequently Department for Communities) launched a fundamental review of social housing allocations in 2013. Throughout the review process, the DfC has committed to the continuation of the objective assessment of housing need with the proposals aimed at ensuring that those in the greatest housing need receive priority, including recognition of their time in need.

Following research and consultation with key stakeholders, a public consultation on 20 proposals under consideration as part of the Review was initiated in September 2017. The DfC has identified the need for further modelling and analysis to assess the individual and cumulative impacts of four of the proposals, which relate to the housing assessment aspects of the allocations process:

- Proposal 7: Removal of intimidation points from the Selection Scheme;
- Proposal 8: Points should reflect current circumstances (removal of the 'No Detriment' policy for Full Duty Applicants (FDAs));
- Proposal 9: Removal of interim accommodation points from the Selection Scheme;
- Proposal 10: The Selection Scheme should place applicants into bands based on similar levels of need to meet longstanding housing need more effectively.

Proposal 10 aims to reflect an increased recognition to time on the waiting list. An alternative approach is to achieve this outcome by increasing the weighting/criteria relating to 'Time in Housing Needs Points' within the current Housing Selection Scheme (HSS). Therefore the impact of increasing 'Time in Housing Need' points will also be examined.

The Department for Communities, working with the Housing Executive, identified the need for modelling work to help assess the impact on relative need and the ranking of applicants of various individual and cumulative scenarios, relating to the four proposals under consideration, when applied to waiting list data. These will be examined at three geographical levels: Northern Ireland, Housing Executive Administrative Areas (13) and Common Landlord Area (CLA) level.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This work will provide robust and independent insight into the potential impact these proposals would have on relative need and the outputs will inform the direction and approach to any implementation of the four proposals under consideration, and in turn support the delivery of the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations.

Understanding Housing Stress

Key Client: Land & Regeneration/Department for Communities

Households who apply for social housing through the Common Selection Scheme and accumulate 30 or more points in recognition of their housing circumstances are deemed to be in 'Housing Stress'. This level of individual housing need is also, when considered cumulatively at given geographical levels, an indicator that is used to help determine the requirement for new social housing provision at local level.

One of the key draft Programme for Government indicators that fall under the remit of Housing Policy and Performance is: 'to reduce the number of households in housing stress'. At November 2018, approximately 24,000 of the households on the common waiting list were in housing stress, and there remains a significant gap between the availability of new or re-let social dwellings and the level of need represented by housing stress.

While analysis has previously been carried out to look in more detail at the elements of housing need and the types of households at various points levels, relatively little evidence has been collated about the wider characteristics and views of the households on the waiting list, including detail such as their income levels and longer term housing aspirations.

It is therefore proposed that a survey should be carried out among a sample of waiting list applicants across Northern Ireland, at a range of points levels, to provide greater insight into the issues faced by housing applicants and their characteristics.

Expected Impact/Outcome:

This research will feed into policy development in relation to innovative options for applicants (such as mid-market rent) and provide an evidence base for what is possible, based on an enhanced understanding of applicants' circumstances.

18/1.6(b) Private Tenants Survey (incorporating welfare reform issues)

Key Client: Department for Communities/Welfare Reform Cross-Sector Research Group

As part of the 2017/18 Research Programme, the Research Unit set up and co-ordinated the (still ongoing) work of a cross-sectoral Welfare Reform Research Group, comprising representatives from the Housing Executive, Department for Communities, NIFHA, CIH, the Law Centre, Citizens Advice, Advice NI and Housing Rights. The purpose of the group was to bring together representatives of all stakeholders with an interest and expertise in housing and welfare reform, in order to:

- Collate existing research evidence;
- Scope out gaps in research; and
- Minimise overlap in welfare reform-related research activity.

Given the important role of the private rented sector in Northern Ireland's housing market and the fact that around half of private tenants are estimated to be in receipt of Housing Benefit, both the Welfare Reform Research Group (WRRG) and the Department for Communities identified the need for research on how welfare reform may impact the private rented sector. Two separate strands of research were proposed to gain insights into both tenants' and landlords' awareness and experience of welfare changes. The landlord element was taken forward as part of a wider-ranging landlord survey as part of the 2018/19 programme and is due to commence shortly. It is proposed that a similar approach will be adopted with the tenants survey, which will gather data on welfare reform as part of a more comprehensive survey, taking the opportunity to update insights gained as part of the 2016 Private Tenants Survey carried out as a follow-up to the 2016 House Condition Survey.

Expected Impact/Outcome

The research will help the Housing Executive, Department for Communities and other key stakeholders devise ways to support the private rented sector to maintain rent payments and sustain tenancies, ensuring the ongoing availability of affordable and accessible accommodation to meet the needs of a range of households.

Corporate Surveys (Annual Conference etc – In-house)

Key Client: Finance, IT and HR

To design, analyse and report on staff satisfaction and provide feedback on specific events (e.g. the Annual Conference) and organisational issues, as requested by internal clients and subject to resource availability within the Research Unit.

Expected Impact/Outcome

This will enable the organisation to gain feedback on conferences and events to ensure that employees get the most out of them and objectives are met.