
News Release

Thursday, May 31, 2018.

For immediate release:

Latest House Condition survey points to reduction in fuel poverty and improvements in the energy efficiency of households in Northern Ireland

The Housing Executive this morning has released the latest House Condition Survey which points to a reduction in the number of households in fuel poverty from 42% to 22% and continued progress in achieving higher levels of energy efficiency in Northern Ireland homes

The survey which was carried out May to November 2016 is the 12th of its type to be carried since 1974 and the first since 2011.

The key objective of the House Condition Survey is to provide a comprehensive picture of the conditions of all tenures and types across Northern Ireland which can be compared nationally with the rest of the UK.

The House Condition Survey provides a wealth of information, which is readily available to government departments, government agencies, the voluntary sector, charities, universities and many private sector interests, and helps determine future housing policy and initiatives. The full report can be found here:

www.nihe.gov.uk/house_condition_survey

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Housing market tenure

The House Condition Survey showed there were approximately 780,000 dwellings in Northern Ireland in 2016, a net increase of 20,000 (4,000 per annum) since 2011. This represents a slowdown in new housing supply in the second half of the ten year period 2006 to 2016. During the first half (2006 to 2011) the net increase was 55,000 (11,000 per annum).

- Almost two-thirds (65%) of the housing stock is classified as urban and the remainder as rural.
- Owner occupation (occupied dwellings) remains the largest tenure group (63%) in Northern Ireland and has remained stable since 2011 but has significantly decreased since 2006 (67%).

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- The proportion of occupied dwellings in the private rented sector (17%) has remained steady since 2011. However, this sector has increased since 2006 when the proportion was 12%.
- The social housing sector (16%) is similar in size to the private rented sector.
- In 2016 there were approximately 28,500 (3.7%) vacant properties. This represents a statistically significant decrease since 2006 when the comparable figure was 40,300 (5.7%).

Households in Northern Ireland

The household data from the 2016 HCS confirmed a number of important housing trends including:

- The private rented sector continues to play a key role in meeting housing need in Northern Ireland, and is a similar size to the social housing sector. There appears to be an increase in the proportion of households with children living in private rented housing since 2011, and a corresponding decrease in the proportion of households with children living in the owner occupied sector.
- Only 4% of households lived in homes which were overcrowded.
- Adult households remained the most common household type in Northern Ireland.

Unfitness

Between 2011 and 2016 there was a decrease in the rate of unfitness of Northern Ireland's housing stock from 4.6% to 2.1%. This compares with 20% in the first HCS survey in 1974.

Decent Homes

Approximately 8% of the dwelling stock in Northern Ireland in 2016 failed the Decent Homes Standard. This equates to 61,000 dwellings. The figures for 2011 were 11% and 86,600 dwellings.

Fuel poverty in Northern Ireland

For the first time, the 2016 survey reports on two methods of measuring fuel poverty - the '10% definition' which was used in previous surveys and the relatively newer Low Income High Costs method which is the measure now used in England. Whilst, the Low Income High Costs indicator has not been adopted in Northern Ireland and is not part of the fuel poverty strategy for Northern Ireland, it provides a useful baseline analysis of households affected, which can be compared with England.

The 2016 House Condition Survey estimated that approximately 22% (160,000) of households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty using the 10% definition.

This represents a significant improvement in fuel poverty levels since 2011 when the figure was 42% (294,000).

This decrease of 20 percentage points in the five year period is largely due to lower average fuel prices, lower modelled household energy use (mainly due to improved energy efficiency of the stock, particularly dwelling fabric and heating systems) and increased income.

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The investment by government in domestic energy efficiency schemes of over £117 million in the private sector and £181 million in Housing Executive stock during the period 2011 to 2016 will have made a contribution to reducing domestic energy consumption and thus fuel poverty levels.

10% definition fuel poverty

Analysis of households in fuel poverty in 2016 shows that while the overall proportion of fuel poverty has dropped significantly, similar types of households continue to be affected:

- Low income continued to be a significant cause of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland (55% of households with an annual income of less than £10,399 were in fuel poverty). Indeed, 78% of all households in fuel poverty had incomes of £15,599 per annum or less.
- More than half (52%) of households living in older dwellings (pre 1919) were in fuel poverty.
- One-third (34%) of households living in small villages, hamlets or open country areas were in fuel poverty.
- Almost two-fifths (38%) of households headed by an older person (75 plus) were in fuel poverty and one-third (34%) of older household types were fuel poor.

Energy efficiency in Northern Ireland

Since 2011 there has been considerable investment, of approximately £300 million, in energy efficiency in Northern Ireland. £117 million was invested in the private sector through the Warm Homes, Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement schemes. £181 million was invested in energy efficiency improvements to Housing Executive stock through the solid fuel replacement programme and other schemes such as double glazing upgrades.

The 2016 House Condition Survey shows the continued progress in achieving higher levels of energy efficiency:

- Overall, 99% of all dwellings had central heating.
- Oil remained the predominant fuel source in Northern Ireland (68%); however the proportion of dwellings with gas central heating continued to increase, and the proportion with less efficient fuel sources such as solid fuel, electric, or dual fuel, decreased.
- Significant improvements were noted for loft insulation. In particular, there was an increase in the use of the highest standard of loft insulation (more than 150mm in thickness) from 35% in 2011 to 54% in 2016.
- Some improvement was also achieved in relation to double glazing, with the proportion of older dwellings with full double glazing increasing (particularly those dwellings built between 1919 and 1944).
- The overall SAP 2012 (using 9.93 version released in November 2017) rating for dwellings in Northern Ireland in 2016 was 65.83, rising to 66.32 for occupied dwellings.

Energy Efficiency Rating bands (EER)

- The Energy Efficiency Rating uses an A-G banding system, where A represents low energy costs i.e. the most efficient band, and G represents high energy costs i.e. the least efficient band.

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- Social housing dwellings were most likely to have an EE rating of A-C (79% compared with 49% overall).
- There was a clear link between dwelling age and EER bands. The newer the dwelling the more likely it was to have an EER band A-C.
- Proportions in these bands ranged from 15% for pre 1919 dwellings to 72% for post 1980 dwellings (49% overall).
- Dwellings in urban areas (57%) were more likely than dwellings in rural areas (35%) to have an EE rating in bands A-C.
- Households with children (64%) were most likely to live in dwellings in EER bands A-C, while older households (38%) were least likely to live in dwellings in these bands.

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