

Fact sheet

The state of Scotland's housing

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The information in this briefing is taken almost entirely from the 2002 Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS), published by Communities Scotland in November 2003. This covers all types of housing, whether owned or rented flats and houses, in urban, rural and island locations throughout Scotland. The SHCS is the largest single housing survey undertaken in Scotland, and contains key information required for policy development and investment.

In the following text the term 'house' is used to refer to all types of dwellings.

The SHCS shows a profile of housing that falls far short of standards needed for people in Scotland in the 21st century.

Key findings

- 360,000 (17%) of Scotland's houses are affected by dampness or condensation.
- The average Scottish house scores only 4.5 out of ten on the energy rating scale.
- 88% of Scottish homes fail to meet the energy standards (7 out of 10), which have been required of new houses for more than a decade.
- Fuel poverty has dropped from 738,000 (35%) in 1996 compared to 369,000 (17%) in 2002, but is common in households with no central heating, pensioner households and those in the private in rented sector.
- **The total repair and improvement bill for Scottish Housing is in excess of £10 billion.**
- 776,000 (35%) households include at least one person with a long-term illness or disability.
- There are 3.5 times more people in need of 'barrier free' housing than there are barrier free homes.
- The worst conditions of disrepair are in the private rented sector.
- Rural stock is in poorer state of repair than urban stock.

Scotland's Houses

The total number of houses in Scotland is 2,279,000, 4% (87,000) of which are vacant. Most vacant properties are empty only for a short period of time between occupiers, only 23,000 (1%) are long-term vacant. Long-term vacant properties may be empty for various reasons: for example, they may be in locations where no one wants to live. They are generally in much worse condition than occupied properties.

- 20% of Scotland's stock was built before 1919
- 4% has been built since the last SHCS in 1996

Dampness and Condensation

According to the SHCS 360,000 (17%) of houses are damp or affected by condensation. 6% are damp, 11% have condensation. It is likely that these figures are underestimated as the survey is actually carried out during the warmer months of the year.

There are at least 102,000 families with children and 98,000 households containing older people living in houses affected by dampness or condensation. 54,000 single pensioners are living in these conditions.

There are 240,000 households in Scotland in which people have a respiratory problem, 50,000 (21%) of whom are living in conditions of dampness or condensation. However this number is based on surveyor's assessment of whether dampness or condensation exists.

The survey also asked householders themselves if they experienced dampness and condensation. In this way some assessment can be made of whether dampness or condensation exists other than on the day the surveyor visits. If these figures are considered then 94,000 (39%) households with a breathing problem live in conditions where they are troubled by dampness and condensation.

The SHCS also showed that households with a member who suffers from a long-term illness or disability are more likely to live in houses with dampness than other households.

35% (127,000) houses affected by dampness or condensation are council houses and 14% (50,000) are in the private rented sector, 21% (77,000) are in rural areas. The fact that 77,000 rural houses are affected by dampness and condensation means that 22% of all rural houses are blighted by dampness or condensation compared to 15% in towns or cities.

25% of homes in 1996 were affected by condensation and dampness, compared to 17% in 2002. It is positive that the number of homes affected by dampness and condensation is falling, but there is still a long way to go. The fact that 360,000 many homes are plagued by dampness or condensation in the twenty-first century is alarming and more should be done to address this. Eradicating damp homes could radically improve the nation's health.

Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty

Closely related to the huge problem of dampness is the poor energy efficiency of Scotland's homes. Energy efficiency is measured on a scale of 0 to 10, and is referred to as the National Home Energy Rating (NHER). The average Scottish home scores 4.5 on this scale, compared to 4.1 in 1996.

301,000 (14%) of Scotland's homes score 2 or less on the scale. 12% score 7 or more (7 is the score that most new housing is expected to reach). 88% of houses fail to meet the energy standard of 7 out of 10, compared to 93% in 1996.

As in most aspects of poor housing conditions the private rented sector is worse than any other sector with an energy score of 3.65. Housing in rural areas only scores an average NHER of 3.3 compared to an average of 4.7 in cities or towns. In towns and cities 10% of homes have an NHER of less than 2, compared to 31% in rural areas.

Living in a house that is not energy efficient means that people have to spend much more than they should have just to keep warm. A common definition of a fuel poor household is one in which

more than 10% of its income is spent on fuel. The number of fuel poor households has dropped from 738,000 (35%) in 1996 compared to 369,000 (17%) in 2002¹.

Energy efficiency, the presence of dampness or condensation, and income level are all factors that impact on the number of fuel poor households. Energy efficiency has shown only minor improvements. Levels of dampness and condensation improved quite considerably, but remain a significant problem affecting a large number of houses. This would indicate that improvements to housing stock cannot fully account for the drop in number of fuel poor households could largely be attributed to improvements income levels. This supported by the fact that the 2002 SHCS shows that 6% of households have an income of less than £100 per week, compared to 20% in 1996. This said there has been little improvement for those who on the lowest incomes. A staggering 74% of households who are on the lowest incomes of less than £100 per week have to spend more than 10% of their income to heat their home, this figure compares to 78% in 1996. 39% (134,000) of all single pensioners have to spend more than 10% of their income to heat their home.

The continued poor energy efficiency of Scotland's housing must be addressed. It should not be acceptable for households on low incomes to have to spend a lot of their budget on heating and attempting to avoid being cold.

Repairs and Improvements

Although dampness and its associated problems are the most notorious problems in Scottish housing, the problem of disrepair affects many houses. 34% of all houses have at least one problem with urgent disrepair.

To do a basic patch up repair of Scotland's houses would cost £1.75 billion, but to fully repair all homes would cost £6.5 billion. Although the majority of repair problems are in the owner occupied sector, the private rented sector has the worst conditions. 42% of private rented properties have at least one problem of urgent disrepair.

The total repair and improvement bill for Scotland's housing is at least £8.2 billion. However this is likely to be a big underestimate. This is partly because, as part of a national survey, surveyors are not able to look into every nook and cranny of a house in order to assess problems in the way that they would if they were carrying out a survey for a potential house buyer, and also because the calculation above does not contain any of the costs of improving empty houses. Previous figures for this were estimated at £346 million. But most of all, it is because the calculation is based on theoretical costs rather than what a contractor would submit in a tender if asked to carry out the work.

The estimated total repair and improvement costs for Scotland's housing is shown in the table below.

¹The definition of fuel poverty, and how it is measured has changed to the definition used in the Fuel Poverty Statement, if the 1996 definition had been used the figure would be 262,000.

Repair and Improvement work on Scotland's houses		£ Million
Comprehensive repairs		6,501
Additional costs of improving houses that are below the tolerable standard		10
The cost of carrying out improvements as well as repairs		1,693
Total		8,204

It is not possible to estimate exactly how much the underestimate will be but it is safe to say that the actual repair and improvement bill for Scotland's housing will remain over £10 billion² and is likely to be even more than this.

Even if this full programme were carried out on, Scotland's houses would still not reach the score of 7 out of 10 for energy efficiency.

Council housing in Scotland would cost £1,280 million to repair fully, plus a further £350 million to carry out improvements, making a total of £1.63 billion. For the same reasons as mentioned earlier, the actual costs to carry out this work are greater than the theoretical figure used in surveys. The real figure could for the same reasons as described earlier, be in excess of £3 billion. This compares to the £768 million¹ that councils spent on housing in 2002-3. This is a quarter of the total amount required and some of this has to be used for other costs than repairs, for example to fund the small numbers of new homes, which are built. There has been little reduction in the amount of money required to fully repair Scotland's council housing, one explanation for this could be that councils have opted for patch improvement rather than comprehensive repair.

Homeowners face the biggest repair bill and they usually have to carry out such work using their own money. Many homeowners do have money to spend and homeowners carried out work on their homes valued at £2.983 billion. Although homeowners spend a lot of money on their homes it is not always on the most important things that would make sure that their homes are secure in the long-term.

Single parents and single pensioners are least likely to carry out repairs.

Amenities

Only a tiny number of houses in Scotland lack basic amenities such as electricity, a bath or shower or a sink. These problems are inherited from the nineteenth century and have all but been solved. Attention must now be placed on achieving standards of housing which are suitable for the twenty-first century.

The SHCS shows that 40,000 houses do not have adequate kitchens. Over a half of houses in the private rented sector do not have access to adequate gas supply. 100,000 houses are not connected to a public drainage system; most of these are in rural areas. Only just under half of houses have a peephole and security chain, the most basic of security measures.

² On publication of the 1996 SHCS, Shelter estimated the total repair and improvement bill for Scotland to be over £10 million in *The Condition of Scotland's Housing*, 1997.

Importance has been placed upon the need to build or adapt houses that can be used by all members of the community: for example, elderly or disabled people. This is referred to as 'barrier free' housing. 35% (776,000) Scottish households have someone who is affected by long-term illness or disability. 53% of council tenants and 50% of housing association tenants are affected by or have someone living with them who has a long-term illness or disability.

There are 363,000 households with impaired mobility, 64,000 containing someone who is vision impaired, 67,000 who have a hearing impairment. There are only 140,000 barrier free homes. This means that there are 3.5 more people requiring barrier free homes than there are homes available.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding used to be a major problem for Scottish families. At present 5% (111,000) households are overcrowded. Overcrowding is defined by what is called the 'bedroom standard'. This is not a generous standard. Children of the same sex are expected to share a bedroom to the age of 21 and children of the opposite sex are expected to share until they are 10. When you take this into consideration, it is quite worrying that 737,000 households only just meet the criteria set by this standard. Many of these households would fail a more generous overcrowding test.

Houses Below the Tolerable Standard

At present there is only one legal standard against which all houses must be judged. This is called the tolerable standard. If a house is below the tolerable standard (BTS) a council can require work to be done to improve it or demolish it and can provide grants to help with this.

20,000 houses in Scotland fail the tolerable standard. More than half of these fail because of inadequate heating, lighting and ventilation.

There has been a lot of debate in Scotland about housing standards. The Tolerable Standard is very out of date and provides little measure of the state of Scotland's housing as we expect it to be today, as it pays no account to problems of poor energy efficiency, condensation and disrepair. The Housing Improvement Task Force report published in March 2003² contains proposals to update the Tolerable Standard, alongside proposals for the introduction of other statutory housing standards.

Conclusion

The 2002 Scottish House Conditions reaffirms the appalling conditions of many of Scotland's homes. There have been some improvements to the condition of Scotland's housing in the five years since the last SCHS. The largest set of problems is related to home ownership, in line with the majority status that this tenure now has.

The private rented sector still has the worst conditions. Council housing suffers from serious problems of condensation. Although the housing association and council housing sectors do not hold the worst conditions, the problems that do exist are compounded by the low incomes of tenants. Investment in social housing is desperately needed.

The scale of investment that is required is well beyond what is currently being committed to by the Scottish Executive. Recognition is needed that the nation's homes are its biggest asset, investing in their upkeep is good long-term policy, and will save money in the long run.

Investing in resolving the problems of dampness will reduce the amount of money that is required to treat respiratory illness. Scottish people are amongst the least healthy people in the European Union. In Scotland respiratory illness is the single most common reason for consulting a GP for children aged 14 and under. Prescribing of respiratory system drugs including inhalers, decongestants and steroids cost approximately £77 million in 2002³.

Dampness and poor energy efficiency not only costs lives and poor health. It wastes money on heating that could be spent in local economies.

New housing and homelessness laws have changed how people access housing, but they have not changed the housing that people get. It is time that a commitment was made to ensure that the people of Scotland no longer have to survive in substandard housing. The failure of successive governments (both the Scottish Office and the Scottish Executive) to fund housing expenditure is in stark contrast to the policy emphasis on housing. Since 1999 the level of commitment at policy level has been highly commendable, but without funding it will difficult to deliver.

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For further information contact Nuala Toman, Research & Policy Officer, Shelter Scotland, Scotiabank House, 6 South Charlotte St, Edinburgh, EH2 4AW. Tel: 0131 4737190, email nuala_toman@shelter.org.uk.

1 Scottish Executive figures

2 Stewardship and Responsibility: A Policy Framework for Private Housing in Scotland, the Final Report and Recommendations of the Housing Improvement Task Force. Scottish Executive, March 2003.

3 NHS Statistics