

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness – and we campaign to prevent it in the first place. We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

For the last nine months Shelter, in partnership with Ipsos Mori and supported by British Gas, has been working with the public to understand what a home is, beyond the bricks and mortar.

At the moment we know who has a roof over their head and who doesn't, but there is no single way of knowing who has a home they can live happily in.

The result is the **Living Home Standard**.

The Living Home Standard gives further insight into the impact of the housing crisis on people's everyday lives across Great Britain. We have always believed that everyone should have a decent, safe, secure and truly affordable home and this is what the people of Britain think that should look and feel like.

The challenge we've set ourselves is to establish a housing equivalent of the Living Wage: a firm, credible benchmark for what everyone needs from a home to live rather than just get by.

Our approach was inspired by the research that created the Minimum Income Standard and informed the development of the Living Wage.

- This standard has been developed and determined entirely by the British public – it is what the public think a satisfactory standard of living is. Our result is a standard that is neither too minimal nor too ambitious.
- It is embedded in the reality of everyday life.
- This standard transcends above the day-to-day debate on housing to establish a long term outlook on housing and an overarching ambition to improve homes.
- This standard applies to everyone – from young people starting out and families settling down, to those planning for or in retirement

The final Standard is made up of 5 areas: **affordability, space, stability, decent conditions and neighbourhood**. Within each of these areas are essential attributes (that have to be met to meet the Standard) and tradable attributes (only some of which need to be met) – like majors and minors on a driving test.

This briefing gives more details on the specifics of each of these areas and outlines our policy recommendations in response to the results.

If you would like more information about the Living Home Standard or the full results please visit the Home Standard website at www.shelter.org.uk/livinghomestandard

Definition

Throughout our research for the Living Home Standard it became clear that the public do not define their homes through statistics or square footage.

The main crux of **affordability** is to be able to meet rent or mortgage payments without regularly having to cut spending on essentials such as food or heating.

The public definition of **decent conditions** includes the home having hot and cold running water; no faulty wiring or fire risks; and being free from mould or damp problems. One should also not underestimate the importance of enough natural light or being free from outside noise disrupting sleep.

There are many different ways to think about **space**: a functional requirement such as storage or cooking space; or a social requirement like space to be with others or alone. The public highlighted how important it is for children to have a space to play, and to be able to comfortably study or work in their home.

The only essential criteria the public gave for **stability** was for the household to have enough control over how long they can live in the home. The tradables include having sufficient time to find an alternative home if a household is given notice.

The **neighbourhood** criteria reaches beyond just the four walls of a home and into the wider community people live in. Safety and security in the local neighbourhood is of the most importance, but the public also highlighted the need for local amenities; family and friend support networks; and an acceptable commute.

Results

Throughout our face-to-face interviews with the public across Britain we collected a staggering amount of data which can be better explored through our online tool. Our results allow you to see those who pass and fail the Living Home Standard by tenure, region, property age, whether there are children in the household, and by age of the householder.

- **43% of people in Britain fail the Living Home Standard.** The majority of those that fail do not meet the affordability criteria set by the public.
- 1 in 10 people live in homes with mould or damp problems
- 1 in 4 private renters fail the stability criteria.
- Renters are over twice as likely as homeowners to fail the decent conditions criteria
- Younger households are more likely to fail, with 58% of 25-34 year olds failing.
- On a happier note, 95% of the public feel safe and secure in their local neighbourhood.

There were regional differences across the UK in the number of people who passed or failed the Living Home Standard. The highest pass rate was in Yorkshire and the Humber, and the lowest in London. In all regions apart from the South West the highest cause of failure was affordability.

Policy recommendations

Affordability

We need to reduce the cost of housing in the long-term. **In order to meet demand, England should be building 250,000 homes a year.** Shelter are calling for half of these homes to be genuinely affordable in order to reflect the needs of lower and average income households. Equally, with a broad range of households struggling with affordability, there should be a willingness to build houses of all tenures.

In the short term the Government must ensure that housing benefit reflects housing costs. Too often our services are seeing clients who are struggling to make up unaffordable shortfalls and are falling into arrears. This should be addressed.

Stability

Due to our legal frameworks stability is becoming increasingly hard for social and private renters. The government does now endorse a model longer tenancy agreement that can be voluntarily taken up by landlords to allow for tenancies beyond the six or twelve month norm. This is an important step in the right direction, but we know that despite many landlords being interested in and open to the idea of longer tenancies, very few use it.

The face of private renting is changing. It's time to update decade's old legislation regarding tenancy lengths and **introduce a stable rental contract giving security of tenure for five years.**

Decent Conditions

The importance of decent conditions was recognised during the passage of the Housing and Planning Act. There was a myriad of measures which will see big improvements for private renters suffering bad conditions and we hope that the government maintains their momentum and continues to drive up standards in the sector.

It is important that local authorities have the resources to target rogue landlords and successfully penalise those letting out dangerous properties. Nearly 30% of private rented properties in England would fail the Decent Home Standard, furthermore 1 in 6 homes have been found to have a serious hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

Space

Our current planning system encourages developers to compromise on space or quality to ensure their projects remain financially viable. **Shelter supports the introduction of improved building regulations to apply to all types of housing,** setting out required space and storage standards. This could be achieved through emulating successful 'proactive planning' seen in the Netherlands and Germany.

Neighbourhood

Improving affordability will ensure that all households feel able to choose where they live and do not feel forced into unsafe areas. Good housing design can also positively influence the surrounding neighbourhood and we would encourage the government **to investigate alternative forms of housing development** where the developer, investor and landowner work with the community to build more attractive homes within liveable neighbourhoods.