

Consultation response

Proposals arising from a cost review of the English Housing Survey (EHS)

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Shelter is a national campaigning charity that provides practical advice, support and innovative services to over 170,000 homeless or badly housed people a year. This work gives us direct experience of the various problems caused by the shortage of affordable housing across all tenures. Our services include:

- A national network of over 40 advice services
- Shelter's free housing advice helpline which runs from 8am–8pm
- Shelter's website (shelter.org.uk/getadvice) which provides advice online
- The government-funded National Homelessness Advice Service, which provides specialist housing advice, training, consultancy, referral and information to other voluntary agencies, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and members of Advice UK, who are approached by people seeking housing advice
- A number of specialist services promoting innovative solutions to particular homelessness and housing problems. These include Housing Support Services which work with formerly homeless families, and the Shelter Inclusion Project, which works with families, couples and single people who are alleged to have been involved in antisocial behaviour. The aim of these services is to sustain tenancies and ensure people live successfully in the community.

We also campaign for new laws and policies – as well as more investment – to improve the lives of homeless and badly housed people, now and in the future.

Introduction

Shelter welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. The English Housing Survey, like the Survey of English Housing before it, forms a vital resource for Shelter in providing a strong evidence base to support our research and policy work.

Consultation questions

1. What are users' views on the proposals?

A. CLG are proposing to drop some little used questions from the interview survey; scale back some topics and only include some other topics on a rotating basis.

IHS Core questions

Shelter's only concern regarding the dropping of questions from the IHS Core section is that details on employment status and economic activity (employed, unemployed, retired, economically inactive etc) should be retained. It is not clear from the consultation document if the 'job details' mentioned under 'looking for work details' include this information or whether it is covered elsewhere in the survey. Shelter makes wide use of this information when analysing the impact of changes to housing policy, for example in our recent analysis of housing benefit / local housing allowance claimants.

EHS Questions

With regard to the extension of the rotating module arrangement to cover condensation and damp and second homes, Shelter is concerned that the loss of information on second homes will make the monitoring of this area more difficult. The extent of second homes in England is likely to become a more significant issue as the reduction of funding for the building of social housing takes effect. We are very concerned that if the restructuring goes ahead as proposed, new information on this topic will not be made available until the results from the 2013/14 survey are published in possibly five years' time.

Looking at the other proposed changes to the questions, area by area, Shelter's views are as follows:

- drop questions on access to cars/vans

No comment

- cut back satisfaction questions eg satisfaction with: accommodation, repairs and maintenance, landlord, but retain some key measures

This proposal is of concern to Shelter. The private rented sector (PRS) has grown considerably over the last few years and looks set to continue to do so. Given the current preference for using the PRS to house homeless households temporarily and the fact that it is the main destination for households engaging with housing options and homelessness prevention teams, Shelter feels it is imperative that information is gathered on tenants' experiences within the sector.

- cut back on views on the neighbourhood but retain some key measures

No comment.

- cut back on questions to private renters about tenancy deposit scheme – this is now well established.

Although tenancy deposit schemes have been running for more than three years, Shelter is still finding evidence that there is limited awareness of them, particularly amongst landlords. In a recent survey commissioned by Shelter (YouGov, August 2010), 20% of private renters said that they were not aware of the schemes and the BDRC quarterly landlord panel survey for Q4 2009 found that 27% of landlords were similarly unaware. There is still limited information in the public domain about the take-up of the schemes and the number of tenants whose deposits remain unprotected. This is a particular concern given the increased use of the private rented sector as mentioned above.

For these reasons, Shelter believes it is essential that questions on tenancy deposit schemes should be retained.

B. CLG are proposing to drop the independent market valuation exercise in both 2010/11 and 2011/12 and rely on either historical data sets or the proxy measure provided by owner occupiers.

No comment.

C. CLG are proposing to introduce one day annual regionally based briefing courses for surveyors rather than residential courses.

No comment.

2. Which choice of sample cut is seen as acceptable?

D. CLG are proposing a cut in the sample size. Two options are presented:

- a lower saving option involving a 20 – 25 per cent cut in the interview and physical sample sizes; or

- a higher saving option involving a 35 – 40 per cent cut in the interview and physical sample sizes.

Shelter is very concerned about the implications of a reduction in the EHS sample size. The English Housing Survey is an integral part of the evidence base which Shelter uses for assessing market conditions and evidencing the impact of policy changes. In particular the availability of raw household level data is of critical importance when assessing the impact of new policy initiatives (including cost / benefit analyses).

A large part of the analysis that we undertake requires cohort level analysis, such as an assessment of trends amongst different tenure groups. A reduction in the sample size would seriously limit the opportunity for such analysis. For example, a reduction of 25 per cent to the sample size would mean that the numbers of assured shorthold tenants covered by the survey would fall from around 1100 to just over 800. A reduction of closer to 40% would significantly limit the opportunity for even the broadest segmentation of private renting households. .

Shelter has recently commissioned research on the proposed changes to Local Housing Allowance from the Cambridge Centre for Housing Policy and Research which made use of EHS data. Had the sample size been smaller than it currently is, this analysis would not have been possible. Given the changes

faced by LHA and housing benefit claimants in both the social and private rented sectors over the next few years, Shelter believes it is imperative that the data is available to enable the impact of these changes to be tracked. Similarly, proposed policy changes regarding under-occupation in the social rented sector will focus demand for a robust evidence base on this area – something which is at risk if the sample size of the EHS is reduced.

Shelter also undertakes analysis at the regional level. Such regional analysis is also subject to problems associated with a small sample size (particularly when analysing cohort level data by region). With a reduction in the overall sample size this kind of analysis could also become untenable.

For these reasons, Shelter's preference would be for the smallest possible reduction in sample size. One alternative option would be to explore the possibility of reducing the frequency of the survey to once every two years rather than every year, while maintaining the sample size at its existing level.

This would also reduce the need for using rolling 2 or 3 year average figures that smooth out changes over time and reduce the opportunity for identifying the impacts of new policy until many years after the policy has been implemented.