

**HOUSE CONDITION REPORT
(Report by Head of Environmental Health Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to apprise members of the findings of a survey of the condition of the housing stock in the Huntingdonshire District Council area.

2. SUPPORTING/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Local authorities have a duty under section 605 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended) to consider the condition of the housing stock within their areas in terms of their enforcement and enabling responsibilities. These include unfit housing, housing in disrepair and houses in multiple occupation.
- 2.2 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has issued guidance to Local Authorities that they should establish a robust evidence base to inform their housing enforcement actions and wider housing strategies, notably grants and housing assistance.
- 2.3 The ODPM has also issued updated guidance on the methodology to be used in carrying out a housing stock condition survey and this survey was carried out in accordance with that advice.
- 2.4 More recent guidance from ODPM in February 2004 made it clear that the Decent Homes standard has now been extended from social housing to private sector housing, with emphasis on vulnerable households, and that Local Authorities would have to establish baseline conditions for future reporting. To meet the Decent Homes standard a house must meet all of the criteria set out in table 1 below:

Table 1 - Categories for Decent Homes

Category	Description
A	Must meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing – currently the fitness standard
B	Must be in a reasonable state of repair – must have no old and defective major elements
C	Must have modern facilities and services – adequate bathroom, kitchen, common areas of flats and is not subject to undue noise
D	Must provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

3. THE SURVEY REPORT

- 3.1 A copy of the survey report has been placed in the Members' room and it can be seen at P:\Council Papers\Housing Condition Report 2005\House Condition Report 2005.doc. It was carried out by an

independent contractor following a competitive tendering exercise and consisted of a sample survey of 1,000 dwellings. The survey was based on a random stratified sample of addresses to provide a representative picture of house conditions in the district.

- 3.2 The district was divided into four sub-areas to allow comparison between the main areas of the district. As can be seen in the report, the survey has provided a profile of the housing stock, a profile of residents, information on unfitness and disrepair, predicted costs for improving the stock, a baseline for Decent Homes and energy efficiency information.
- 3.3 An extract from the executive summary to the survey report is attached at the annex to this report and includes comparative statistics from the report that sets out the conclusions reached in the context of England as a whole, the Eastern region and comparative rural authorities.

4. FINDINGS OF THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE HOUSE CONDITION SURVEY 2004 - HIGHLIGHTS

- 4.1 Conditions in Huntingdonshire are markedly better than those found in England as a whole. However, in comparison with similar and neighbouring authorities, Huntingdonshire's private sector stock is better, but by a smaller margin.
- 4.2 The total cost for the repair of the housing stock is estimated to be £380.7 million, an average of £5700 per dwelling, with the highest costs arising in the pre-1919 stock. The biggest unit costs arise in those dwellings that are in worst condition: unfit or non-decent. To make all unfit dwellings fit to a good habitable standard would cost £11.6 million or £13400 per unfit dwelling and it would cost over £85.8 million to raise non-decent dwellings up to the decent homes standard, an average of £8,838 per dwelling (Autumn 2004 costs). The other repair costs would arise for minor works and routine maintenance/upkeep of the general stock.
- 4.3 83% of private sector homes occupied by vulnerable residents are decent in Huntingdonshire. This currently exceeds the government target of 70% by 2010.
- 4.4 There is a relatively low requirement for intervention in the owner-occupied and housing association stock. However, some of privately-rented stock is in relatively poor condition. The authority will have to maintain a good level of involvement with landlords in order to prevent any deterioration in the privately-rented sector.
- 4.5 The bulk of fuel poverty (80%) is found in the private sector, and there is a far greater instance in relation to vulnerable occupiers so this may need to be a key private sector target in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The findings of the house condition survey report will satisfy the Government requirement for robust evidence-based knowledge about local house condition, which is generally good.

- 5.2 Although overall Huntingdonshire's housing is markedly better than that found in England generally, the findings give a clear steer about those deficiencies that are present in Huntingdonshire's housing stock, across all tenures. This detailed information will inform the Council's Private Sector Housing Strategy which will be presented to Cabinet at the end of 2005. It will also enable the Council to review the Repairs Assistance Policy to ensure that the authority is addressing disrepair and decent homes in an appropriate manner.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is RECOMMENDED that Members note the content of this report and the conclusions of the house condition survey.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Housing Act 1985
House Condition Survey Report April 2005
Housing Act 2004
Explanatory Notes to the Housing Act 2004

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Summary of Findings

The survey was carried out on 1,000 dwellings within the District. The total private sector housing stock of the District is an estimated 67,000 dwellings. The total is based on the weighted results of the survey and is an estimate at the time of the survey. The total number of dwellings changes on an almost daily basis.

The age profile of the private sector stock is more modern than the position for England with more post-1964 dwellings and with fewer dwellings built before 1919. There are more detached houses in Huntingdonshire than is the case for England as a whole, and a much higher proportion of dwellings are owner occupied. A stock profile such as this would tend to suggest that better than average stock conditions would exist, as poor condition is strongly associated with age of dwelling, with houses converted into flats and with the privately-rented sector.

Table 1: Characteristics by tenure – key findings by the three tenure types.

Characteristic	Owner-occupied	Housing Association¹	Privately Rented	All Stock
Dwellings	51,900	9,300	5,800	67,000
<i>Per cent of stock</i>	78%	14%	8%	
Unfit	600	100	170	870
<i>Rate</i>	1.2%	1.1%	2.8%	1.3%
Substantial Disrepair	5,200	1,300	900	7,400
<i>Rate</i>	10%	14.1	15.3%	11%
Non Decent	6,500	11,500	1,700	9,700
<i>Rate</i>	12.6%	16.1%	29.3%	14.5%
Serious Hazards	900	600	200	1,700
<i>Rate</i>	1.8%	6.3%	3.8%	2.6%
In Fuel Poverty	1,760	530	410	2,700
<i>Rate</i>	3.2%	5.9%	8.8%	3.9%
Mean SAP	56	60	59	57
Residents over 60	16,300	4,500	1,500	22,300
<i>Rate</i>	31.3%	49.1%	25.5%	33.3%

1. The figure for housing association dwellings includes those classified as 'other public' for the sake of convenience. The figure for solely those dwellings owned by a housing association is 8,400 dwellings (12.5% of the stock).
2. The SAP is the Government's recommended system for energy rating of dwellings. The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) is used for calculating the rating, on a scale from 1 to 120, based on the annual energy costs for space and water heating.

To pinpoint where problems are most concentrated the relationship between different measures needs to be considered.

The number of dwellings classified as non-decent is a useful starting point. The private sector only has an obligation at present to ensure that 70% of dwellings occupied by a vulnerable resident (those on certain means tested benefits) are decent by 2010. The Decent Homes Standard amalgamates a number of factors into four key questions: is the dwelling fit for human habitation, is it in a reasonable state of repair, does it have adequate modern facilities, does it provide thermal comfort to its occupiers (see Figure 1). The main chapters of the HCS report examine both the dwelling and social characteristics associated with these problems.

Table 2 Comparing conditions in Huntingdonshire with elsewhere:

Characteristic	Huntingdonshire	England	Eastern	Rural residential
Unfitness	1.3%	4.3%	3.0%	3.9%
Non decency	14.5%	33.1%	28.0%	25.7%

Conditions in Huntingdonshire are markedly better than those found in England as a whole. However, the Eastern region of England and rural residential areas are generally in better condition than England as a whole. This means that in comparison with similar and neighbouring authorities, Huntingdonshire's private sector stock is still better, but not by as large a margin as when compared to England. The rounded total cost to make all dwellings decent within the District would be just over £85.8 million, an average of £8,838 per dwelling.

In Huntingdonshire at present there are 11,500 dwellings occupied by residents in receipt of a means-tested benefit (excluding housing association dwellings). Of these 2,000 are classified non-decent, which represents 17% of dwellings occupied by a vulnerable residents. Conversely this means that 83% are decent, thus Huntingdonshire currently exceeds the government target for vulnerable occupiers in the private sector living in decent dwellings. The target is 70%.

Overall the condition of dwellings in Huntingdonshire is much better than is the case for England as a whole. In addition the majority of occupiers are on medium to high incomes and there is only an average proportion of benefit receipt and occupiers with disabilities. This would suggest a relatively low requirement for intervention in the owner-occupied and housing association stock. However, although the privately-rented stock makes up a smaller proportion of the total in Huntingdonshire, some of this is in relatively poor condition. The authority will have to maintain a good level of involvement with landlords in order to prevent any deterioration in the privately-rented sector.

Another Government target that has an impact on private sector housing is the Fuel Poverty Strategy, which has an objective to move all fuel-poor vulnerable households out of fuel poverty, by 2010, and the remaining households in fuel poverty by 2016. Since the bulk of fuel poverty (80%) is found in the private sector, and there is a far greater instance in relation to vulnerable occupiers, this may need to be a key private sector target.

Figure 1: Total numbers of dwellings affected by different combinations of house condition problems within the District

