UNISON

Open College

BLOCK HIR.101
HOUSING
INFORMATION

Contents

A. Introduction to Housing Information and Research

Everyone working in housing collects and deals with information in their job. In this Block, we will look at what we mean when we talk about housing information and what sort of information different people need and use.

It is important to note the difference between collecting information and carrying out research. The collection of information is not in itself research. Information can be defined as any kind of data, either facts or figures. Housing staff will collect information regularly, but they will not necessarily know how this information will be used. Collecting information is an essential part of a research process, but research involves the systematic collection of information and then interpreting that information through applying a particular theory.

If you think about your own organisation, you will see that a whole range of information is collected regularly. This information is necessary to allow the organisation to carry out its day-to-day functions.

Handling the tenants' rent accounts is part of the system. Each tenant will have an individual account of their rent, and housing staff have to be able to answer any queries they may receive from tenants about the state of their account. An important part of the rent accounting system is being able to deal with rent arrears. This database will show the state of individual tenant arrears, and many rent accounts systems have in-built 'triggers' which advise housing staff on the procedures to take when arrears get to certain levels. In local authorities, the rent accounting system will be linked to the systems used by Housing Benefit, so that staff are quickly able to check whether benefit has been paid. A final important element of the rent accounting system will be an account which deals with service charges. This account will calculate the service charges for rent accounts and help with service charge administration.

As the above examples show, an information system is made up of a number of inter-relating modules. There are three important considerations to be borne in mind when we are looking at information systems in the context of how effective they are in helping housing staff to do their job.

Firstly, the information you get from the computer is only as good as the information that has been entered in the first place. If a repairs request from a tenant has not been correctly entered, then the information on that repair is bad.

Secondly, the nature of an information system is that it contains information which is not static but which changes. For example, as rents increase, the information on the rental accounting system will change. As houses are lost through Right to Buy, the estate management profile will change, and so on.

Thirdly, the technology which we all rely on so much to do our jobs is changing. Computer technology changes fast, and as it does, the way we gather and use information changes too.

The information systems that we are likely to see more of in the future are going to be web-based and interactive ones. There are many housing organisations at the present who are beginning to use an interactive approach to information. This approach asks for the active involvement of the tenant in using computer technology to provide information to the housing provider. Two examples of this approach are –

*   *Interactive Repairs reporting*. This involves the tenant reporting faults or repairs requests through an easy-to-use pictorial system. The tenants would use the mouse to click on photographs of items around their house to indicate what is wrong and then record other information such as name, address, rent book number, and a convenient time to visit. The information logged can then be summarised and then emailed to the appropriate Department for a work order to be raised and actioned.

*   *Internet Lettings*. This is an area of housing activity which is growing in popularity. Landlords will advertise properties for rent on a site which has easy-to-use graphics, and there will be facilities for those interested to register the fact that they would like more information about the home.

The use of information by both tenant and landlord is going to be computerised increasingly in the future. While this should be make differences to how well how housing services are supplied, we must always remember that information from a computer is only as good as the information that is entered in the first place.

B. Information and Data Systems

Information can be broken down into **operational information** and **strategic information**.

Operational information

Operational information tells us about the day-to-day running of the organisation. This sort of information would include levels of empty homes, re-let periods, the numbers of allocations, rent arrears, waiting list details, the numbers and types of repairs carried out, and so on. When a house is let and the housing officer puts the detail of the new let into the computer, this is adding to the organisation's operational information. This information is often produced on a monthly basis and monitored to see how well the organisation is doing. It is only by measuring changes that you can see if the organisation is meeting its goals. Operational information can be considered as "micro" information – information particular to one part of the organisation.

Strategic information

Strategic information is used to inform policy and investment decisions. This type of information can be seen as "macro". It will be information which takes the trends shown in operational information, adds other sets of information – such as population projections – and gives the "big picture" of the state of the organisation and its operating environment. A good example of the use of strategic information is when a housing organisation is preparing its capital programme.

1. Types of Housing Data

1.1 Who Needs What Information?

What information is needed depends on what job you do in your organisation. In writing this section, we asked people in different roles in different housing organisations what their information needs were.

We looked first at senior levels in a relatively large Scottish urban local authority and heard the views on information of the **Head of Performance:**

> *I need, first of all, information on how much money is being spent by the Department. There is in this local authority an annual revenue budget of approximately £80 million, so even if expenditure is out by just 1%, that would mean an overspend of nearly £1 million.*

A second important kind of information is on what customers think of the Housing Service we provide. The methods we employ to gather this information include exit surveys of tenants who are leaving their homes, structured interviews, and focus groups with existing tenants. This information is needed because information on customer satisfaction is the ultimate test of whether the organisation is getting it right or wrong.

One important kind of operational information I need as Head of Service is information which indicates whether all of our managers are achieving their operational targets. I need this information because it is my job as a Head of Service to act/intervene if targets are not being met. I also need to know, not just how my authority is performing, but also information on how other local authority landlords are performing. This is required because we need to be able to benchmark our own organisation's performance against others in the same business.

We also must have strategic information on changes (actual and projected) in the city's population, e.g. age, household size, health; this is essential for our assessment of housing needs in the city and informs our work on planning the provision of housing.

The local **Councillor with responsibility for Housing** commented:

I want to have Information about new research, good practice and policy ideas primarily, but not exclusively in Britain. This is to help to keep me informed and to develop improved services. I also need information about the Housing Department's service performance in order to monitor whether policy initiatives are being successfully implemented in practice. Here in Scotland, I need to be in close touch with the Scottish Executive and Parliament. I must be informed about legislative and policy changes. National governmental changes, such as housing benefit reform, also need to be monitored.

Of course, in local authorities these days we have to look beyond our own housing and we need to have information about broader housing availability within the area – such as that provided by housing associations and the private rented sector – so that we have a clear understanding of how the local housing market is working.

Information on voluntary sector funding and provision of services is also important because this sector provides some key services in such fields as care provision and homelessness and we need to ensure that we work with them effectively.

As a local politician, information on news coverage of housing issues is important to me so that I can see how we are perceived by the media and how our partners such as housing associations and tenant's groups react to current issues of concern. So it's not just research reports or reports to committees I want to see, I want to know what the press is saying, and not having time to read all the newspapers I want my staff to extract what is relevant for me. Equally, I am interested in the information my Department collects on tenants views – they are both the customers of our service and part of the electorate I serve as a Councillor.

Looking now at a medium-sized housing association in the North of England, the **Chief Executive** identified one of his key difficulties as the overload of information, and one of the key issues is the need to prioritise. This is a common problem for those in senior managerial positions and often leads to a need for those supplying them with information and research to provide this in short, summary form. On his part, the Chief Executive has to sift the information coming to their attention to separate out what is important and what is not. He suggested that:

At the level of a Chief Executive where, to an extent, information is needed to provide strategic guidance, what is relevant to me might include data which is not just about housing. For example, data on regional labour availability and wage inflation might be equally relevant.

In the section later in this Block on Published Data Sources, although the main emphasis is on housing data, some references are made to sources of statistics on other things – population structure, family expenditure, for example – which might form part of these information needs. Sometimes, though, this kind of information is more difficult to obtain:

I find the interface between Housing and Health one area of weakness in the information availability, as is more general information on the 'joining-up agenda' of the current government. I tend to have to make judgements about the future without detailed analysis of these things.

> *Websites are a useful source of information. I use the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (ODPM) website and the Housing Corporation website on a weekly basis, I try to discipline myself to look at them every Friday afternoon – if I don't, I could miss new regulations and so on. I'm not so interested in 'research' as in operational data. What concerns me is the need to predict the future for organisation - not much of the research available has a future focus, it tends to be reviewing the past.*

Not all information collection and provision concerns statistics and numbers. Talking of his contacts with the Housing Corporation, the Chief Executive suggested that:

> *The main area I have to report on to the Housing Corporation is on issues of governance – it's not a matter of numbers and forms. This includes issues such as breach of regulations. In a similar way, I sometimes have to deal with the Housing Association Ombudsman Service.*

A key source of information for the Chief Executive is a (recently installed) computerised management and finance system. This provides a performance management system, mainly giving financial data and involving an interface between the financial and management data entered into the system through routine management operations and financial transactions. The system also provides development scheme spreadsheets. Again, with a comprehensive data system such as this, one potential problem is information overload:

> *I need to be selective in my use of this information and to focus on getting an overview. Essentially, for me the information system is a management tool for allowing people to do their job and for monitoring to make sure that ' what matters is getting measured'.*

The information flow between local authorities and housing associations is also two-way and the Chief Executive of a housing association needs to have information on local authorities. This is often provided through liaison meetings and by a *quid pro quo* exchange of data with the local authorities in which the association works.

At the second tier of the management structure in the housing association is the **Housing Services Manager**:

A major part of my job is performance reporting – to staff, to the Management Board, to residents via our twice-yearly newsletter (one of which focuses on performance measures), to the local authorities we work with, and to the Housing Corporation

In the case of the last two, this involves filling in forms provided. In the case of the Housing Corporation, this is the RSR – an annual report on all aspects of our activities, e.g. rent levels in particular areas. The report runs to 40 pages of performance information. I may also have to make ad hoc *responses of information to the Housing Corporation, as does my opposite number in the Development Section.*

The CORE system operated by the Housing Corporation (see below) requires us to record a lot of information on lettings and rents onto software provided to us. This fulfils the dual purpose of reporting to the Housing Corporation and providing information that can be used by our organisation.

For local authorities, I also fill in annual forms to provide an up-to-date profile of housing association activity in their area – housing stock, rents, disabled and supported housing, and so on. The range of issues I have to report to local authorities on has increased, for example, for they now receive information on energy efficiency ratings for our housing.

Best Value means that I need to refine and develop the information we provide for tenants. But I also need to do this in ways that are useable to them. It needs to be non-technical. It's difficult to get feedback on how effective our information to tenants is but, for example, our residents' panel has suggested that they prefer text rather than graphics for describing statistics.

The Board of Management is also composed of people who are not housing professionals. In general, the information we provide to the Board is more technical compared to what goes to residents; it is easier for Board members to ask for what they want, and to have the information explained to them.

Most of the information I use in my job comes from our own computer system. One example is maintenance data. Individual items of maintenance spending are logged onto the financial system. A comparison of spending with the budget for maintenance is posted bi-monthly or quarterly. In our case, this covers both responsive repairs and planned maintenance, which is the responsibility of the Housing Services section.

In an organisation such as this, we don't usually do research as such, but I've recently agreed a small research project on customer turnover and the reasons for leaving of terminating tenants.

I do use information derived from research and try my best to keep up to date. I use websites for this – the Housing Corporation, National Housing Forum and the Chartered Institute of Housing sites. I also have some weekly information digests sent to me by email – the CIH News and one called Rachel's Digest. One useful way is to look at summaries or news reports and then, when I need to, use the web link to take me to the larger original documents. You can do this on the Housing Corporation or ODPM websites, for example. Another useful one is the Joseph Rowntree foundation, where you can sometimes link from their Findings summaries to the full reports.

I also look at Inside Housing, Housing Today *and* The Guardian. *There is so much information out there, the only limit on information is time – but I do find the Internet invaluable.*

Actually, in this organisation access to the Internet is limited for more junior level staff. Our internal communication is mainly by notice boards and by email. I see it as part of my job to keep staff appraised of what is going on, and email is very useful for this. Some members of staff are members of specialist email information networks – for example, for supported housing officers. I do feel, though, that as an organisation we don't have a real overall strategy on informing staff.

At the more operational level of the same organisation was the **Housing Officer**. He works on a generic basis and is responsible for a full-range of day-to-day operations - lettings, rent control, tenancy enforcement:

> *I work a lot with our computerised rent accounting, which has its faults and needs more tuning, but is extremely useful – it has a reporting system, for example. It can pull up rent accounts, and produces automated letters – but I can also do 'ad hocs' if I need to. The system has a diary and notebook to record interactions with customers*

> *The system also provides me with a computerised waiting list for allocations and voids control – there is an applicants file and a property file. I can pull off reports on vacancies, for example, and applications for particular locations or schemes. The system does voids and void arrears reports which feed into the management information system.*

> *The other main system I use is the computerised maintenance system for both planned maintenance and day-to-day repairs. With planned maintenance, we have three technical teams to carry out the work, and myself and the Technical Officer jointly put in bids for the maintenance budget for our patch. I use an Excel spreadsheet to monitor the programme – it consists of a list of properties and budget for each.*

> *For day-to-day repairs, our Responsive Customer Care Centre logs repairs onto the system and allocate jobs directly, except in difficult cases. They contact the customer to make an appointment for the contractor. We have quality control slips – tear-off slips which customers return to us. It's important because contractors are the 'face' of the organisation and we need to monitor their performance – it's as important as direct face-to-face contact by the Housing Officer. The Customer Care Team is also monitored on their response times, etc.*

> *It is not all computerised, we do still have paper files – tenant and property files for ad hoc letters and records of property inspection for gas safety are examples of things we still do on paper. One of the main gaps is a data system relating to nuisance, though this is recorded manually.*

An interesting aspect of my job at the moment is that I am doing a research report on customer turnover. I have a small team of staff and we are interviewing terminating tenants. The purpose of the research is to help to develop a strategy to address the problem of high turnover in some of our properties. I will also be doing something similar in areas where properties are hard-to-let. The research arose out of our appraisal system; I suggested that we needed to know more about these issues and that I would like to undertake some research and this was agreed.

As a Housing Officer, I feel that I do have quite a range of information needs to help me to do my job for my customers effectively. For example, I would like to have more information on asylum seekers as they are now becoming our tenants. I would also like to have more information on and understanding of mental health and care in community issues.

There is a problem of keeping up-to-date. For example, I feel I need to be aware of current developments in the law and the legal powers available to us. For information on legal issues I look in the housing press, but also make use of the association's legal advisers.

I am able to use the Internet for research purposes, but I feel that at my level I have little contact with people outside of the organisation. I am sometimes able to go on courses to give me detailed awareness of a particular issue, for example, I recently went on a course on neighbour nuisance.

In general, though, I feel I need senior management to spot changes which will affect us. Internal information comes mainly from minutes of meetings – senior managers, Board of Management – and we also have regular staff briefings from the Chief Executive – this is a small and open organisation which helps with keeping in touch with what is happening.

A more specialist role with its own particular information needs is that filled by the **Finance Director**:

I have a strong reliance for information on the in-house IT system. As an organisation we do store a lot of data, but ease of access is an issue. Report building – getting the information you really need from the data we hold –

requires a high level of expertise. At the moment I am looking at rent restructuring and need to get information on our rented stock to give vacant possession values for rent calculations – but this is complex and I need the IT manager to do this for me.

I need rented stock to give vacant possession values for rent – again, I need the IT manager to do this.

Rent restructuring is a very complex issues which needs a lot of data as well as information on how to do it. There is a ODPM booklet which explains the system as well as guidance from the National Housing Federation and the Housing Corporation. The National Housing Federation has a CD-Rom with a statistical model called 'the rent restructuring estimator' which can work out rents under the new system. It requires information on County average earnings and on local housing values. Detailed information provided by valuers on the market values of our properties is also required.

While the computerised system is useful, it could be improved. I would like to be able to develop more rigorous management accounts more easily from the system to help with budgetary control and budget holder accountability

I make use of sources of up-to-date information on housing such as the Housing Corporation and National Housing Federation websites and Housing Today. I receive NHF Bulletins, which provide updates on current issues right across housing, though I do tend to concentrate on finance and just skim the non-finance issues. I'm a member of a networking group – the local NHF Finance Officers group which meets quarterly. Through the NHF Forum I get to see financial accounts from other organisations and see how policy changes impact on them.

As a finance officer, I need information from outside of the housing world itself. For example, I need to be aware of economic indicators – on the Web, in economic surveys sent to us by the association's bank, or publications such as 'Money Facts'.

One non-housing issue I am having to find information about at the moment is our policy on company cars in the light of new Inland Revenue rules seeking to reduce CO_2 emissions. In many ways I have to be able to deal with the kind of issues which would affect any company.

One issue I would like to see action on is our internal communications with staff within the organisation. I feel we need to have an Intranet so that policies, statistics, management accounts and so on are available on the desktops of staff.

You can see from the above examples that different people require different types of information depending on where they work in their housing organisation. We have concentrated here on the local level, but at a national level there are a range of organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that use information to show national trends. This information is often researched – remember that the collection of information is a central part of any research process – and is used to inform national policy and investment decisions.

Activity

Now think about your own job in housing and make a note of the following:

What kind of information is most important to you in doing your job?

What kind of information do you create and record as a part of doing your job?

C. Information Systems used in Housing

As we have seen, everyone working in housing deals with information. In whatever part of your organisation that you work in you need to receive, give out and keep information to do your job. In all of these areas, the importance of reliable information is obvious – neither you nor people you work with will do your job well if the information is poor or not kept well. In this section, we will look at how information is kept, what information is kept, and what the systems that store information do to help you in your jobs.

Of course, information today is kept on computer. You will receive information first hand from telephone calls or letters or face-to-face contact, but the storage of that information will be done on computer. Most local authorities and housing associations will have computerised networks in their workplaces. These are called local area networks or LANs. Within a single building or geographical area, a network will allow you to connect a group of personal computers. Staff who use networked computers will be able to share information with one another. The big advantage of this is that different people can work together on tasks that require coordination and communication, even though they might not be close to one another. A local area network has several advantages over a non-networked stand-alone personal computer. These are –

- A LAN allows many users to share a single file which is stored on a central file server. This helps the organisation to keep its records and documents consistent.

- A LAN allows staff to copy files from machine to machine without having to exchange floppy disks.

- A LAN allows anyone to run software from any workstation.

- A LAN allows the sharing of printers amongst several workstations.

Within the LAN of your housing organisation, there will be a number of different information systems that are used. These systems keep the information that you need to do your job.

1. What Information Systems Are Used?

The key thing about information systems used by housing providers is that they will contain information about people and property. They will be set up so that they can deal with all parts of the housing business. An information system will usually have a number of different components, or databases, which can be used on their own or in combination. These components will make up the whole information system. We will now look at examples of different databases and information systems that are used by housing organisations.

Estates Management

This database will contain information on the property features of housing stock in a given area. It will allow you to see how many houses you have in a certain area and the range of different types of home that you have available for rent. Contained within most estates management systems will be a database on voids which will involve the monitoring and management of void properties. These systems will also be those under which responsive repairs information is kept which will record workload, contractor and budget management details as well as work inspection information.

D. Published Data

This section on sources of housing information which are published and available to you has been put before the Block on surveys and information collection for a very good reason.

You should always make sure that you have made the most of the possible sources of existing information before you go out and collect information yourself. For an individual or an organisation, collecting information through surveys and similar means is time-consuming and expensive. It is important to know how to squeeze all the information you can out of available published data before you even think of collecting your own.

To do this, you need first of all to know what information is available, what kind of organisations produce housing information, and how you can get access to it. The range and scope of housing information available to you is constantly expanding. This is good news and bad news – there is more information out there, but the range of possibilities can be bewildering and knowing what is available becomes a more and more difficult task.

The availability of data through the Internet has provided a major new opportunity for housing organisations to make use of published data. Not that the Internet has really increased the amount of data, but it has increased the extent to which you can readily access what data is available. This is important for many housing professionals and organisations. In the recent past, easy access to a good range of published data sources would have been dependent on the ability to use a major library – a University library or the main civic library in a large city. Few housing organisations would hold anything like the full range of published data on housing and related issues, and even if, for example, you work in a large local authority, this kind of information might only be held by a central Research and Information section or department and not be easily available to housing professionals. Now, through the Internet, those in the smallest housing association or the most remote and rural local authority potentially can gain access to a very wide range of published data. The discussion of data sources below will, therefore, give some indication of what is accessible through the Internet.

The other useful opportunity which the Internet can provide is the common use of hypertext links to take you from one site to a range of related sites. Many major organisations which make statistics available on-line – in England, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), for example – also provide a range of such links to related sites and sources of data.

1. Housing statistics

There is a wide range of specifically housing statistics available to you. As well as identifying these sources of published housing statistics, the following discussion will examine three questions:

• To what areas and sizes of area do the statistics apply?

• Where do the statistics come from?

• What issues do the statistics cover?

In talking about statistics, people often refer to national statistics as a starting point. However, in the United Kingdom the question of what constitutes 'national statistics' is not straightforward because of the complexity which the notion of the 'United Kingdom' implies.

First of all, separate housing statistics are available for each of the four elements which make up the United Kingdom –

England

Wales

Scotland

Northern Ireland

– though there is not an identical set of statistics for each.

Secondly, some housing statistics are available for each of three different units made up from these elements:

England and Wales

Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland)

United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

There can, therefore, be a whole variety of meanings to the term 'national' statistics. It is not possible to say that any one version is 'right' and should always be used. In practice, the answer to the question of which unit to use is a pragmatic one – it depends on where and for what area the information you need is available. What is important, though, is that you are aware of what area the statistics cover and, in particular, not to compare statistics for different areas.

Activity

Suppose you want to talk about the growth in owner occupation. You find in a book on housing a set of statistics from 1983 that show the proportion of owner occupied housing in Great Britain. You then find some recently published statistics for 2003 which give the proportion of owner occupied housing in England. Can you compare these two statistics to show the extent of the growth in owner occupation during that 20 year period? If not, why not?

You may remember from your study of Housing in Year 1 that there are significant differences in the balance of housing tenure between different parts of the United Kingdom. Of particular relevance to this question is the fact that levels of owner occupation are considerably higher in England than in Scotland (where council housing is more common). Therefore, the difference in the proportions of owner occupation in the figures for 1983 and 2003 might be caused by the growth in the popularity of owner occupation *or* by the fact that the earlier set of figures include Scotland while the second set do not – or it might be a combination of both.

The review of housing statistics below will begin with statistics for England (though these may also include statistics for England and Wales, Great Britain and/or the UK).

It will look first of all at the main surveys which are undertaken to provide national housing statistics and then at the main publications in which housing data from these and other sources can be found.

2. Major Housing Surveys

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) is a major source of housing statistics and information on housing statistics. An overview, with additional useful links, can be found at www.housing.odpm.gov.uk

The ODPM carries out three main regular housing surveys:

Survey of English Housing

This was established in 1993 as a continuous survey using a nationally-representative sample of about 20,000 households who are interviewed about their housing and their attitudes towards it. Demographic data about the household is collected – including information on ethnicity, income, and economic status – as well as information on the dwelling. In addition, quite detailed information is collected about tenure and the process through which the house was bought or rented. Housing history, relocation, etc. is recorded, as well as information on disability. The level of detail of this information is greater than in other non-specialist data sources such as the Census (see below), but the really unique feature of the Survey of English Housing is the emphasis on attitudes to housing and housing problems. Respondents are asked for their views on their housing and area; renters about their views on their landlord. Problems such as arrears and re-possessions are identified.

Annual reports are made on the survey, with the most recent report for 2001/2 published in December 2003. In the report there are separate sections of tables on owners, social renters and private renters, on recent movers and on those living in the most deprived wards. There are also sections looking at views on the local area and on the attitudes of renters to their landlords.
 www.housing.odpm.gov.uk

English House Condition Survey

This is carried out every five years, and the 2001 survey was the eighth. The most important information source is a physical survey of stock characteristics and dwellings. This is complemented by a household interview survey, a postal survey of local authorities and housing associations for information on housing improvement, and a valuation survey of current market values in areas. In 2001, the main survey targeted a sample of about 20,000 dwellings throughout England.

The Survey provides a major source of information for the development and monitoring of housing policies on the repair, improvement and energy efficiency of the housing stock. It also allows the identification of those sections of the population most likely to be living in poor housing conditions. The five-yearly permits comparisons to be made over time on the changing character and condition of the housing stock and on the relationships between household characteristics and housing conditions.

The results for the 2001 survey, based on over 17,500 responses, are available on www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/research

Householders across all tenures were asked for their views on their home and neighbourhood, how their homes are heated, the availability of any disabled adaptions to their homes, as well as details of their housing costs and income. The subsequent inspection of the property collects information on interior and exterior condition together with indicators of local environmental quality and measures of energy efficiency.

The 1996 Survey Report (DETR 1998) includes sections which review the profile of the housing stock in terms of size, type and tenure, and review the profile of households, emphasising the identification of those types of households most likely to be disadvantaged in housing. The density of occupation and levels of vacancy in the different tenures and housing types are identified. The main body of the report then looks at a number of measures of unsatisfactory housing and the incidents of, and change of time in, these problems. The three key indicators are

levels of amenity and equipment (bathroom, central heating, etc.), levels of disrepair, and levels of unfitness. In comparison with 1991, the 1996 Survey reflected a long-standing picture of improving levels of amenity in dwellings but unchanging levels of disrepair and unfitness.

These indicators are then combined into a measure referred to as 'poor housing', and the incidence of poor housing among different sections of the population analysed. Households in 'poor living conditions' are also identified. This looks beyond the dwelling to the neighbourhood – poor living conditions involve concentrations of poor housing and/or environmental problems. Again, this is linked to disadvantaged groups – minority ethnic populations (especially Bangladeshi and Pakistani) and households with unemployed heads are most likely to be living in such areas.

A final section on Household Responses to Poor Conditions looks at attitudes and reveals that many in poor housing or poor living conditions are not dissatisfied with their housing, though, again, this varies greatly between different sections of the population.

A valuable addition to the 2001 Survey was the inclusion of Housing Quality Indicators, used to measure overall dwelling quality – location, visual quality, external layout and landscape, dwelling size, internal layout, thermal efficiency, accessibility. This is seen as focusing on more positive aspects of housing rather than just on problems.
www.housing.odpm.gov.uk

Survey of Mortgage Lenders

This is a monthly survey by ODPM collecting house price information from about 50 mortgage lenders, together with information on dwellings sold. It is used mainly to produce a quarterly house price index. A monthly statistical release is published on the ODPM website:
www.odpm.gov.uk/pns/newslist.cgi

3. Government Statistical Publications

Special surveys are not the only sources of statistics on housing. There is also a wide range of information which is routinely gathered by housing organisations – local authorities and housing associations, for example – and which then form the basis of statistical returns to organisations which oversee and monitor their activities such as the ODPM and the Housing Corporation. Many of the most important sources of housing statistics make extensive use of this 'administrative' information and combine it with information from special surveys.

Annual and quarterly housing statistics

This is the key source of statistical data published by the ODPM. At the beginning of 2004, the most recent edition of the annual statistics was for 2003, published in December 2003. The statistics which make up the annual data are also published quarterly to provide a more up-to-date picture. These series appeared under their present names in 1999, but essentially carry on a long-standing statistical series known as the Housing and Construction Statistics, and by using these, it is possible to trace changes over long periods of time on a wide range of housing issues.

Although published by the ODPM, many of the tables include data, not only for England, but also for Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and for the combined units of England and Wales, Great Britain and the UK. There is, though, some variation between tables in their areas of coverage so do make sure you take note, especially if you are making comparisons between tables.

They also have some tables which provide information at the level of the English regions, and for metropolitan areas and counties. They do not provide information below this spatial scale, and there is not, for example, any information at the level of the individual local authority.

Much of the data is collected from routine returns from local authorities or from the Survey of English Housing and the Survey of Mortgage Lenders, though a wide range of other statistical sources is used as well.

The housing stock itself is a major focus of these statistics. This includes data on the existing stock of dwellings by tenure (updated more frequently than other sources), the construction of new housing, and the renewal of existing housing by social landlords and, through the provision of grants, to the private sector. Other areas of local authority policy, such as sales of public sector dwellings and action on homelessness, are included. There is also a substantial range of information on financial issues – spending on housing action and rents and rent regulation data, as well as information on household income and rent and mortgage payments.
www.housing.odpm.gov.uk

Local Housing Statistics

These annual statistics, also published by ODPM, provide data at a local authority level, though the range of information is much more limited than is available in the other statistical series. Its main areas of coverage are housebuilding, renovations, sales of local authority owned dwellings and land and action under

homelessness legislation. This is a long-standing statistical series which again provides the opportunity for time series over a number of years. It is dependent on local authority returns and this does lead to some problems of missing data.
www.housing.odpm.gov.uk

Construction Statistics

These are now published separately from housing statistics, but the Construction Statistics series will be of interest to those involved in the development side of housing work. The statistical series is currently quite strongly linked to the Egan Report: *Rethinking Construction* and its blueprint for a change in the construction process and the relationship between clients and contractors in the construction industry.
 www.dti.gov.uk/construction/

3.1 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Wales

Welsh Housing Statistics: This is an annual publication prepared by the National Assembly for Wales and gives statistics covering all aspects of housing in Wales. The data is based mainly on returns made to the National Assembly for Wales by the old local authorities and the new unitary authorities. Three surveys have been published so far, the most recent in 2003. The data is similar in range to the Annual Housing Statistics for England, with an emphasis on housing stock, construction, condition, and local authority action on housing. However, it does include a substantial amount of data at the local authority level.
www.wales.gov.uk/keypubstatisticsforwales/content/publication/housing/2003/whs2003/whs2001-e.htm

Welsh Housing Condition Survey: Again, now published by the Welsh, these are similar in content to the English House Condition Survey, though the coverage is not identical. For example, the Welsh statistics do not use the categories of 'poor housing' and 'poor living conditions'. They also have a different cycle – the most recently published survey is for 1998, with previous surveys in 1993 and 1986.
www.wales.gov.uk/keypubstatisticsforwales/housing/condition.htm

There is not an equivalent for Wales of the kind of attitude data derived from the Survey of English Housing for England.

Scotland

Scottish Household Survey (SHS): This is a continuous survey funded and published by the Scottish Executive. It is based on a sample of the general population in private residences in

Scotland. It is not specifically a housing survey; it covers a range of topics on population, employment, neighbourhoods, etc. The main data on housing is contained in a chapter entitled 'Where We Live'. This chapter examines the housing circumstances of Scottish households. It looks at housing tenure, the types of properties in which people live, and the extent to which households have moved home. Neighbourhoods and households' experiences of neighbourhood problems and crime are also examined. One feature of the Second Report is the inclusion of data at the local authority level, comparable to that in the Local Housing Statistics for England.
www.scotland.gov.uk/shs/

There is also a quarterly bulletin: *Housing Trends in Scotland*, published by the Scottish Executive.
www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/00109-00.asp

Scottish House Condition Survey: This is carried out by Communities Scotland (formerly Scottish Homes). Surveys were carried out and published for 1991 and 1996 and the 2002 survey is in preparation at the time of writing. Coverage is similar but not identical to the English equivalent. There are, for examples, differences between the Fitness Standard used in England and Wales and the Below Tolerable Standard measure used in Scotland.
(see www.shcs.gov.uk/)

Estimated results for the 2002 survey are regularly updated on the shcs website.

3.2 Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Housing Statistics: These are prepared annually by the Statistics and Research Branch of the Department for Social Development of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Most of the figures have been compiled either by the Department's Housing Division or from returns made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). They include information on the housing stock and stock condition. Housing construction information includes the private sector, housing associations and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and there is also data on lettings, rents, homeless allocations and so on in the social sector. Some information on households is included from a regular household survey, but this does not have the range of opinion data and the like of the Survey of English Housing. Some data is also published to local authority district level. A quarterly *Housing Bulletin* is also published.
www.dsdni.gov.uk/srb/housingstats.html#NI_Housing_Stats

Northern Ireland House Condition Survey: This is prepared by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The survey is carried out approximately every five years: the most recently published at the time of writing is the 2001 House Condition Survey, and the previous survey was 1996.
www.nihe.gov.uk/Research

3.3 The Census

The largest and most important source of general statistical data of relevance to housing is certainly the decennial (10-yearly) National Census, though in considering the use of the Census it is just as important to recognise its limitations as it advantages.
see www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/

The most obvious advantage of the Census is the comprehensiveness of its coverage. Completion of the Census is a legal requirement and, in theory, information on every single person and every single household in the country should be included. All other national surveys, and even most local ones, are based on obtaining information from only a small sample of the total population.

The most obvious disadvantage of the Census is the 10-year gap between each Census. The most recent Census was carried out in April of 2001 – you may recall filling in the forms for yourself and your family – but such is the scale of the task of analysing the vast amount of information collected that it was months before any results at all were published and it has taken a couple of years before all the results are available.

Activity

Think about the area where you live. What kind of changes have affected the area in ways which might significantly alter the nature of its population.

The most obvious source of change might be

Census Topics:

One of the most important advantages of the Census is the wide range of information it provides. This includes a range of information relating directly to housing. Information is collected from the person who completes the Census form on the tenure and type of landlord, the number of rooms in the dwelling, the availability of amenities such as bath, inside WC, central heating. In addition, the 'census enumerator' who collects the information records dwelling type – detached/semi-detached/terrace house; converted/purpose built flat – and the lowest floor level of the dwelling. They also identified shared dwellings and vacant dwellings and households living in non-permanent accommodation such as mobile homes.

In addition to the information specifically relating to housing, there is also a very wide range of information about the people who inhabit this housing. This includes basic information about age, sex, and marital status. The relationships between each person living in a dwelling are also established. The Census asks questions about the country of birth and the ethnic group of each person.

The question on ethnicity was included for the first time in the 1991 Census. Prior to this, the question on 'country of birth' was used to provide information on minority ethnic populations, but as the proportion of UK-born members of black and minority ethnic communities increased this became increasingly unsatisfactory. The inclusion of a specific question on ethnicity provided a much more accurate picture, and using the data on ethnicity from the 1991 Census, a series of four volumes of analysis was published which provided new information and new insights into a wide range of issues relating to ethnicity, including the issue of housing. The question on ethnicity was also included in the Census of 2001. A new question included in the 2001 Census (except in Scotland) asks people to identify their religion in order to identify faith as distinct from ethnic communities.

The 2001 Census has also increased the range of information collected about health issues. To an established question about long-term illness has been added a question in which individuals are asked about their 'general' health. In addition, individuals who provide unpaid personal health care are identified.

Information is collected on educational qualifications, and there is a wide range of data on employment status and activity of those over 16 years. This includes economic activity – full-time/part-time employment; retirement; education, etc. – and, for those in employment, their occupation. Data on occupation is classified into broad socio-economic categories based on the concept of a hierarchy of social status.

Information is also collected on the workplace – type of industry, nature and address of workplace. How people travel to work – car, bus, etc. – is included, as is a question on the availability of car(s) to the household. A question on whether people were at the same address one year before and, if not, where they lived, provides information which is used to look at patterns of migration.

Though this does represent a wide range of information, there are other statistical series (discussed below) with as wide, or even wider, a scope. What makes the Census so comprehensive in the information it provides is the fact that these other statistical series are based on sample surveys of perhaps a few thousand people or households, while the Census collects information from the whole population. This scale of data permits a huge range of cross-referencing of information to take place. It also allows what is the other unique feature of the Census – the range of geographical scales at which the information is made available.

Census Geography:

Perhaps the most important single benefit of the Census is that it provides information at geographical scales which vary from the national level of the UK as a whole, right down to 'Output Areas' with as few as 250 people for England and Wales, and 130 in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In fact, there is not really a single Census, but rather three simultaneous counts which are then separately published – for England and Wales, for Scotland, and for Northern Ireland. While in general their information coverage is similar, there are some variations. In part, these reflect differences in what is relevant – for example, in Northern Ireland the classification of ethnic groups includes 'Irish Traveller'.

So, 'national' data includes tables for the UK as a whole, but also separate information for England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Below this level, the most important units are local authorities, both County and Districts, though information is also published on other administrative units, such as Parliamentary Constituencies, and by types of area – for example, urban and rural.

Though quite a lot of other published statistical data is available only at national or, at best, regional level, a number of other statistical series, both specialist housing statistics and more general statistical data, do provide information at the level of

individual local authority. It is when one moves below the level of the local authority that the availability of published information is largely confined to the Census.

There are two main units. Firstly, much information is published by local authority wards – typically areas with a population of around 10,000. The smallest scale, though, is the data available at the level of what, for the 2001 Census, is referred to as the 'output area'. No other published source makes available such fine-grained and localised data, certainly not for the UK as a whole. This output data is published in what for 2001 was called the Census Area Statistics, explained in more detail below.

Type of Census information

From the Census data described above, a number of different forms of information are used for the tables which are the output of the Census:

Population: This is the simplest category, in which the information refers to all the individual people for whom data has been collected. This is the most numerous type of output – demographic information on sex, age, etc. and information on education, employment, health and the like are typically presented in this way.

Dwellings: As indicated above, a considerable amount of information is collected about the dwellings in which the population lives, and this is presented in tables with information which relates to dwellings – whether vacant or occupied, whether shared or occupied by a single household, and the tenure, size, type and floor level of the dwelling. While some tables essentially describe dwellings, in many cases the information on dwellings is cross-tabulated with information on the people who occupy those dwellings.

Households: While a smaller number of tables relate to households as opposed to individuals, this is discussed in detail here, in part because of its complexity, but also because it is perhaps of particular significance for housing. The household is essentially the shared domestic unit and it can be said that it is households, rather than individuals, which occupy housing.

Activity

Can you think of a common type of housing management information that uses the household rather than the individual as the basic unit?

Waiting lists for allocation of social housing are perhaps the most obvious example – the 'applicant' is essentially a household rather than an individual person and it is data on the household as a whole which is relevant to the allocation process.

Some census tables are about the household as a whole – for example, those that indicate household size and household types – couple, single parent, single person above pensionable age, etc. Household type classifications are constructed from the information collected on the age of individuals, together with the information on the census form about the numbers of people in the household and their relationship to each other. This is key data of relevance to measuring and predicting future housing needs.

Household and Reference Persons: There are also tables in which the household as a whole is 'tagged' with the characteristic of one individual within that household. This is most commonly done as a way of attaching a measure of economic and social status to the household as a whole. If, for example, someone wished to use Census data to look at the extent to which young people continuing their education past the age of 16 was related to the socio-economic status of their family, it is necessary to attach a socio-economic status to the household. This is done by using the employment status/occupation of the Household Reference Person.

There have been key changes in the way in which this has been dealt with between the Censuses of 1991 and 2001. For 2001, two new concepts were introduced: the Household Reference Person and the Family Reference Person.

The concept of the Household Reference Person has replaced the long-standing and perhaps more familiar concept of the 'Head of Household' in Census statistics. The main reason for this was the gendered nature of head of household who, in a couple household, was assumed be male. This element has now been removed – the Household Reference Person in a couple household is, firstly, the person who is economically active and, if both are working, the eldest.

The introduction of the Family Reference Person is of relevance to housing issues in that it relates to the idea of a 'concealed household'. This is a situation where a household consists of more than one nuclear family unit who might ideally occupy separate dwellings. A classic example would be a couple living in the house of the parents of one of them. Most often it is lack of available housing which gives rise to concealed households. In such a multi-family household, a Family Reference Person is identified for each family, basically using the same rules as are applied to the identification of the Household Reference Person.

Census Publications

The output of the 2001 Census – available in both electronic and hard-copy forms – included the following elements:

Key Statistics: This aims to provide, for each local authority area, the core data covering the range of information included in the Standard Tables.

Standard Tables: These are the core output of the Census, incorporating the fullest range of data and available at spatial scales ranging from the local authority ward up to the National level. They are the key source which will be used for Census analysis other than that which requires data down to the smallest scale of the output areas.

Theme Tables: These are an interesting and useful innovation introduced in the 2001 Census for the first time. These tables provides a wide range of data relating to a particular section of the population. There are themed tables for dependant children, people aged 16-29, 30-49, older people and pensioners, one-year migrants and ethnic minority and religious groups. This provides an opportunity to learn more about these groups than would be possible in the Standard Tables. For example, it is possible to see if migrants to a city are significantly different from its existing population.

Census Area Statistics: These are the equivalent in the 2001 Census of the Small Area Statistics of the 1991 Census. However, while they involve the provision of data for small areas of similar size to those used in previous Censuses, the basic on which these areas are derived is completely different. In 1991 and previously, these small areas were the Enumeration Districts (often referred to as 'EDs'), that is, the area covered by a single census enumerator.

These have been replaced by 'output areas', and the key difference is that these are not predetermined, but derived from the Census data itself using Geographical Information System (GIS) techniques. This represents one of the major impacts on the Census of developing computing technologies and techniques of spatial analysis. A number of factors are fed into the analysis which produces these output areas – they are clusters of postcodes with target population limits, they do not cross administrative boundaries between, for example, local authorities or wards, and they do not cross major physical barriers – main roads, rivers, etc. Perhaps the most interesting and innovative element is that they tend towards homogeneity in terms of the housing tenure and accommodation types within them.

The overall aim, therefore, is to try as far as possible to make output areas as logical and internally coherent as possible.

One price which is paid for this change is that the output areas of 2001 and the EDs of 1991 do not correspond. However, it is proposed to use similar GIS techniques to produce larger Census 'tracts' which combine 2001 and 1991 small areas which can be used for comparison purposes.

The increased capacity to analyse and make available the Census data electronically also provides a range of new opportunities for users of the Census Area Statistics. Information about output areas such as the digital boundaries can be provided to facilitate further analysis. Moreover, alternative 'geographies' can be supplied, for example, data can be provided for specified neighbourhoods – a facility which, again, might be of particular relevance to housing organisations (though additional charges are made for such provision of special data).

The information available for output areas is designed to 'nest' inside and be comparable with the Standard Tables, but involves a more limited range of tables with some simplifying and merging of categories because of the much smaller number of respondents within each area. Again, there will be themed tables, though for a smaller number of variables. This, again, provides a valuable additional source of information. It will be possible, for example,

in a situation where Black and Minority Ethnic communities form a substantial minority of the population of a small area, to obtain information about the specific characteristics of the BME populations and identify any variations from those of the areas population as a whole.

The Census 2001 website contains a wide range of information about the most recent National Census: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/

3.4 Other Government Statistics relevant to housing

A wide range of other statistical information sources is available and might be of relevance to those undertaking information collection or research in housing. A few of the most significant are described below. The Office of National Statistics is the main government body responsible for a range of published statistics, and their website provides a good overview of the range of statistics available (www.statistics.gov.uk/).

Their annual publication *Social Trends* brings together a wide range of government social statistical data in an easily accessible form. It is a long-standing publication – the 2004 edition is number 34 – so that it is often possible to use the statistics to analyse trends over time, and many of the tables include time series information. As well as the regular statistical tables on a range of subjects, including housing, each edition will have an article which looks in detail a particular topic or issue. (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product

For example, in 2002 the topic was "children" and the 2004 edition features an article on ageing and gender.

General Household Survey

The General Household Survey, now published under the title *Living in Britain*, is an annual survey undertaken by the Office of National Statistics which was begun in 1971. It is a multi-purpose survey which collects information from a sample of about 2,000 households. Publication of the survey data usually takes place about two years after the survey itself – the most recent is *Living in Britain 2001* (published in December 2002). (www.statistics.gov.uk/lib/).

Although the GHS is not a housing survey as such, housing is a major category of information within it and it does provide a wide range of very useful information. In particular, it links housing factors, particularly tenure, to a wide range of characteristics of the household. Some of the information can be derived from the

Census, but the GHS has the advantage of being annual, though it does only provide information at the level of the country as a whole. This profile of social sector tenants included in *Living in Britain 2000* gives some ideas of the topics:

- A higher proportion of social renters lived in a purpose built flat or maisonette than any other group (40% compared with 22% of private renters and 7% of owner occupiers).

- Council tenants were more likely than other tenure groups to live in accommodation built between 1945 and 1964 (39% compared with 11% to 24%) which reflects the fact that this was a peak period for local authority housing construction. A further 34% lived in accommodation built between 1965 and 1984.

- Housing association tenants were more likely than other households to live in recently built accommodation. 30% lived in accommodation built since 1985. This figure reflects the fact that from around 1988, housing associations became responsible for the majority of 'new starts' i.e. building of new social rented accommodation.

- Those living in social rented housing had, on average, the lowest income of all households (housing association tenants - £191 gross per week; council tenants - £193 gross per week).

- Households consisting of single adults aged 60 or over were more likely than other households to be social renters (37% compared with 8% to 32%) – 26% rented from the council and 11% rented from a housing association.

- Lone parent families were more likely than other families to live in social sector housing (51% compared with 15% of other families).

- Households headed by a Black person were more likely than other households to be renting from a local authority or housing association (45% compared with 32% of Pakistani or Bangladeshi, 22% of White and 11% of Indian households). They represent 4% of all households in the social rented sector

In addition, the GHS includes a great deal of information about the structure of households, and patterns of marriage and co-habitation, which are of relevance to issues of demographic structure and change and how this might affect housing demand. There is information on car ownership and consumer durables, on pensions and also on a range of health-related issues – health and health services; smoking and drinking.

Family Expenditure Survey

The Family Expenditure Survey is an annual survey of around 6,500 households in the UK carried out by the Office for National Statistics and is published annually as *Family Spending*, The survey involves household interviews and also the completion of expenditure diaries. It provides a comprehensive overview of all aspects of household spending and income. It includes information on spending on housing, along with food and drink, tobacco, clothing and footwear, goods and services, motoring and fares, and ownership of durable goods. Household expenditure is broken down by age, income, household composition and socio-economic characteristics. While it is mainly national data, there is also an analysis of expenditure and income by region.
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ssd/surveys/family_expenditure_survey.asp

Neighbourhood Statistics and the Index of Deprivation

For those in housing and related areas especially, though not only within local authorities, one of the most significant recent developments in the availability of statistics is the making available of statistics at the neighbourhood (or local authority ward) level in association with the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Such statistics are used as a means of identifying which areas will be eligible special funding. For example, 88 district authorities in England have been identified as areas to which Neighbourhood Renewal Fund resources will be made available on the basis of their high incidence of the most deprived wards. The information is also intended for use at the local level to identify areas of disadvantage and social exclusion to use, for example, in the development of local neighbourhood renewal strategies.

Neighbourhood Statistics Service: When the Labour Government came to power in 1997, one of its early innovations was to establish the Social Exclusion Unit. One of the key issues addressed by the SEU was the problems of the worst estates and most deprived and disadvantaged communities, leading in 1998 to the publication of *Bringing Britain Together: A New Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.* In addition to the introduction of a number of specific regeneration measures, this report established a number of Policy Action Teams (PATs) to investigate various dimensions of the problems of deprived neighbourhoods and contribute to the development of the strategy. One of these, PAT18, looked at information needs (SEU2000), and it was the recommendations of this report which led to the establishment of the Neighbourhood Statistics Service.

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service Office is Internet-based:
www.statistics.gov.uk/neighbourhood/home.asp

A parallel service is being established in Scotland. www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/neighbours/tables/neighbours.aspx

The service is intended to remedy past failings in policy-making arising from inadequate information:

> *The absence of information about neighbourhoods has produced a series of failings at national, local and community level ... policies can easily be misdesigned or mistargeted ... important trends have been missed by national and local government. Too often problems simply go unnoticed until they reach crisis point (*SEU 2000, op cit)

The service will be developed in a series of phases to expand gradually the range of data available at the neighbourhood level, drawing on a wide range of information sources within local and central government. It will take a number of years to implement in full, and this will include the incorporation of information from the 2001 Census. Whilst initially data will be based on local authority wards, it is intended eventually to make data available at a much smaller geographical scale which would equate more closely with what we would usually regard as a 'neighbourhood'.

Indices of Deprivation: The Index of Deprivation 2000 (DETR 2000) was created by researchers at the University of Oxford for the DTLR (now ODPM). The purpose of the Index of Deprivation is to provide a measurement at ward level of the level of deprivation. It provides the means of ranking each ward within the country in terms of the level of deprivation. It revised and updated the Index of Local Deprivation of 1998, and now forms a subsection of the data available within the Neighbourhood Statistics, specifically concerned with deprivation and used, as mentioned above, for the distribution of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund resources. The individual statistical indicators which are combined into the single measure index cover six 'domains' – income; employment; health and disability; education, skills and training; housing; and geographical access to services.

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