

Knowing our Homes

Local authority housing survey

Summary

December 2023

Introduction

Knowing our Homes emerged from the National Housing Federation (NHF) and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) commissioned review into the housing association sector, The Better Social Housing Review. One of the key recommendations in the review is improving how social housing providers collect and use data, both about the conditions of the homes they manage and who lives in them.

This should also help social landlords to meet new requirements emerging through the Consumer Standards which set higher expectations for how landlords gather and use information about their homes and their residents.

Although the Better Social Housing Review was initially focused on the housing association sector, the local authority sector has committed to support the work emerging from the review to make sure there is a shared approach across the whole social housing sector. The Local Government Association (LGA), Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH), National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), and Councils with ALMOs Group (CWAG) are all working together to achieve this and make sure the whole council housing sector is represented.

A survey was sent out to stock retaining local authorities, and local authorities with ALMOs in October 2023. This is the first stage of the work which identifies how local authorities are currently gathering and using data. 49 local authorities responded to the survey (around 30 per cent of local authorities with housing stock), managing around 599,000 social and affordable local authority homes across England (around 38 per cent of the total stock).

This short briefing provides a summary of messages emerging from the survey as well as case studies. The full report is available to LGA, ARCH, NFA and CWAG members. Please contact Lisa Birchall, NFA Lead Policy Officer, lisa.birchall@almos.org.uk.

Snapshot of survey findings

- Three quarters of respondents to our survey have made significant changes to the way they monitor and work to improve the condition of the homes they manage within the last year. This includes, for example:
 - Reviewing damp and mould policies and procedures, implementing training, creating new teams.

- Changing stock condition programmes, for example moving to a 100% survey, reducing the length of the rolling survey or undertaking a full assessment of stock condition.
 - Reviewing and developing asset management strategies.
 - Investing in new asset management or property information management systems. Developing processes to cross-reference data sources (e.g. property archetype, repair and cases of damp and mould) to better direct resources and identify issues.
 - Reviewing processes for identifying stock condition between surveys, for example adding requirements to the gas servicing contract to identify property condition.
 - Increasing staffing resources for quality assurance, stock condition and data management.
 - Accessing funding for thermal improvement/ decarbonisation work to support quality of homes.
 - Introducing tenancy audits, or changes in frequency or type of audit.
- The majority of respondent have – or are moving towards – a rolling stock condition survey where they survey 100 per cent of their homes. This will support them to meet the requirements within the Regulator’s Consumer Standards to have ‘an accurate, up to date and evidenced understanding of the condition of their homes that reliably informs the provision of good quality, well maintained and safe homes for tenants.’ The information gathered as part of these surveys differs across respondents, but around 40 per cent gather information on energy efficiency of properties (e.g. RdSAP).
 - The majority of respondents report having a process for proactively checking the condition of homes between stock condition surveys. This includes, for example, through tenancy checks or audits, and asking staff who visit the home to report issues. One of the key areas of work for many is making sure that IT systems can effectively record all the information about a home and the people who live in it, and that data quality is good. Around a third of respondents would recommend the IT or data systems they would use, suggesting that there is work to be done in this area.
 - Having a good knowledge of the people who live in homes is a key requirement in the new Consumer Standards; to make sure that services are tailored and equitably delivered. Nearly all respondents in our survey collect, store and retain data about tenants. This includes, for example, information on household make-up, relevant health issues or disabilities, and communication needs or preferences. Nine out of 10 respondents actively update the information they hold on tenants, for example after a repair or during a tenancy audit. Members are actively working on the processes that they use to make sure they can demonstrate they are equitably delivering services.
 - The collection of data on tenants is an area that members are working on, and where good practice sharing would be beneficial; particularly thinking about GDPR principles, how (and what) data is stored and kept up-to-date, and how it is used. We will continue to work with the National Housing Federation and their members to share good practice in this area.

Case studies

London Borough of Barnet

Barnet Homes is part of The Barnet Group, and is the ALMO for Barnet Council managing around 10,000 council homes and 4,000 leasehold properties. Over the past few years, Barnet Homes has done a lot of work to understand its stock and customers, aligning this improved information with long-term business planning. Work undertaken includes:

- A 100 per cent stock condition survey over a three-year period, moving to a 25 per cent per annum rolling annual survey approach from 2024. Alongside core Decent Homes and other statutory requirement including HHSRS assessment, the survey gathers information on the remaining life of internal and external components to help shape and inform future planned works programmes. In time, this should reduce demand on the repairs service and enable us to further develop that service for the benefit of Barnet Homes' residents.
- Energy efficiency assessments are included in the survey as a starting point to formulate sustainability strategies and energy improvement plans. This information has already helped to secure SHDF funding for 249 properties where a 'fabric first' package of works is being delivered.
- Stock condition data is used to predict likely issues, for example all residents that may have some form of damp and mould in their property based on intelligence from the survey have been contacted and encouraged to report any issues.
- A specialist asset management system (PIMSS) has been implemented which will enable the organisation to obtain and update its stock data from future surveys other sources, including repairs, housing and customer service teams and residents. Ultimately, PIMSS will interface with Barnet Homes' other database software systems.
- PIMSS will also be the single source of the truth for compliance related information on stock with the priority on fire risk assessment and asbestos data 'going live' later this year. Reporting compliance performance in this way will be more robust, requiring less manual intervention.
- Barnet Homes has reviewed and strengthened the way that the resident voice is heard at Board level and used to shape decisions. The governance structure includes a Resident Board which ensures that residents can scrutinise and feed their views into the Board. All relevant strategy papers must include a section on what it means for residents and how resident voice was taken into consideration in making the decision.
- The organisation runs a rolling customer survey that allows almost real-time information to be gathered on the quality of services. This includes TSM data and transactional surveys.

Stockport Council

Stockport Homes is the ALMO for Stockport Council, managing around 11,000 social and affordable rented homes.

- The ALMO has an intensive stock condition programme where it aims to have 100 per cent of homes surveyed before March 2025. The surveys include the current Decent Homes Standard (and proposed standard), position and suitability of renewable technology, and presence and position of CO detectors and mechanical ventilation.
- Property condition information is updated between stock condition surveys through a number of methods, including:
 - A programme of tenancy visits at various points, including six weeks after sign up, nine months prior to tenancies becoming secure, and on an ad hoc basis. Property inspections are routinely completed where there has been a reported change in tenancy or when the property becomes empty.
 - An Eyes Wide Open approach is used where all staff undertaking any home visits are expected to report any property condition or repair issues.Property inspections are also included as part of electrical and gas servicing.
- The ALMO's housing management system holds asset and customer data so the two can be accessed from the same source, with each household record including both customer and asset data. The system also holds data for stock condition-related data that is not generated via the stock condition survey.
- Repair data can be split by archetype in Power BI dashboards, with data refreshed daily. This enables trends to be identified at archetype level and supports a predictive repairs data modelling approach.
- When customers report repairs, staff can search via the person first, which will bring up any alerts they may have (for example physical health disabilities). The member of staff can amend or add information to a repairs request before it is forwarded to the contractor. The contractor can also add information. Repairs staff receive two types of alerts to their handheld device: any safety alert is provided directly to the operative, any personal alert is sent to the planners, but they will contact the repairs team to understand the detail.
- Stockport Homes regularly assesses how equitably it delivers services to residents. This includes through breaking down customer feedback and TSM data into different categories, including protected characteristics, to analyse satisfaction. It also undertakes analysis of formal complaints to understand if any customer groups are over or under represented.