



# Proposals for changes to the English Housing Survey

## Summary of responses to consultation



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## Summary

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consulted on proposals arising from a cost review of the English Housing Survey from 13 August to 17 September 2010.

Analysis of all of the submissions received from the consultation exercise indicated a broad level of support for the majority of the cost saving measures proposed but there was considerable concern about the proposal to cut the sample size and in particular about the larger cut proposed. Therefore, we intend to adopt most of the proposed changes for the 2011-12 survey but to implement the smaller of the sample cuts (20-25%) together with a number of small modifications in response to issues raised during the consultation.

# 1. Background

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consulted on proposed changes to the 2011-12 English Housing Survey; arising from a cost review of the survey to identify where efficiency savings could be made. The consultation ran from 13 August to 17 September 2010.

The consultation was conducted according to the Code of Practice on Consultation. As a technical consultation on statistical outputs, it was open for five weeks rather than the formal 12-week public consultation period.

The five main changes proposed to the survey were outlined in the consultation document and are repeated below.

- A. DCLG are proposing to drop some little used questions from the interview survey; scale back some topics and only include some other topics on a rotating basis.
- B. DCLG are proposing to drop the independent market valuation exercise in both 2010-11 and 2011-12 and rely on either historical data sets or the proxy measure provided by owner occupiers.
- C. DCLG are proposing to introduce one-day annual regionally based briefing courses for surveyors rather than residential courses.
- D. DCLG are proposing a cut in the sample size. Two options are presented - firstly a low-saving option involving a 20-25% cut in the interview and physical sample sizes
- E. Alternatively DCLG are proposing a high-saving sample cut option involving a 35-40% cut in the interview and physical sample sizes

A detailed Appendix to the consultation proposals provided guidance on the impact of a sample reduction on survey results.

Consultees were asked to comment specifically on each of the above proposals and in addition were asked:

*In responding to these issues users should make clear any specific demands on the survey that could not be met in full if any of the above proposals were implemented – please provide full details of*

- *the analysis you need to undertake, for what purpose,*
- *its frequency; need for time series and expected year on year change*
- *at what geographic level analysis is required?*
- *what level of precision is required for these estimates?*
- *what would be the consequences if key estimates were not longer available or only available in a more aggregated form?*

- *what would be the consequences if more aggregation over years was required and estimates were therefore less timely?*

This document summarises the responses received and the Government's response to these.

## 2. Outcome of consultation

In total, 34 written responses were received from central government, other bodies, voluntary organisations, local authorities, academics and other respondents. No respondent requested anonymity or confidentiality of response.

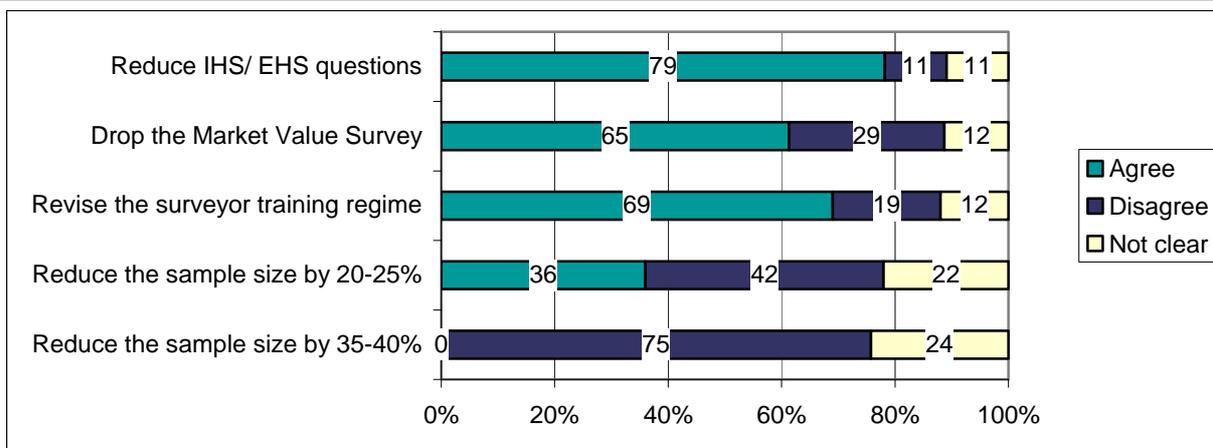
<b>Table 1: Type of respondent</b>		
<b>Type of organisation</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Central Government	2	6
Other bodies/voluntary organisations	12	35
Academics	10	29
Local Government	7	21
Other	3	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

A full list of responding organisations is shown in Annex A. While the majority of responses were from other bodies and academic researchers, the wide cross section of responses reflects the importance of the EHS to the wider housing community as a key source of information on people's changing circumstances and the condition and energy efficiency of the stock.

Some respondents provided views on each of the main proposed changes while some provided general comments on their use of the survey to their work.

The responses for the five main proposed changes to the guidance are summarised below.

**Figure 1: Summary of responses for each proposal**



Note: Not clear is where respondents presented a view on the proposal but it was not possible to clearly determine whether they were opposed to or in favour of the changes. Where respondents made no mention of a proposal they are not included.

These figures indicate a general endorsement for the majority of the proposed cost saving measures. In the main users recognised the need for efficiencies and felt the proposals being put forward were sensible. The exception is the proposal to make significant reductions to the sample size – particularly the larger of the sample cuts.

There was a wealth of detail provided in some of the responses to support the views being put forward. These provide a fuller picture of respondents’ views on the proposed changes to the survey. Responses to each of the main proposals are discussed in more detail below.

**Dropping some little used questions from the interview survey; scaling back some topics and only including some other topics on a rotating basis (proposal 1)**

- Of the 34 consultation respondents, 28 (82%) presented a view on proposal 1.
- Of the 28 responses received on proposal 1, 79% were positive and 11% of responses received were negative.
- Remaining consultation respondents who presented a view on this proposal provided comments but it was not possible to clearly determine whether they were opposed to or in favour of the changes.

There was a general recognition from respondents that efficiency savings needed to be made and that the scope of the household interview should therefore be reviewed. The majority of respondents endorsed the proposals put forward for dropping, reducing or rotating topics to reduce the overall interview length. Reservations were expressed about some elements of the proposals with academic researchers and other bodies particularly keen to retain householder satisfaction questions; questions

on attitudes to the neighbourhood as well as questions on access to cars and vans and distance moved and education.

DCLG have reflected these views in their detailed planning for the 2011 survey. We expect to retain some key satisfaction measures, distance moved, access to cars and vans and highest level of education qualification. While the block of neighbourhood questions will be dropped for 2011 we will review its inclusion again for 2012-13 when we consult users again through the EHS Advisory Group. A small number of respondents also argued for the retention of questions on religion, sexual identity and national identity. DCLG do not however consider there is sufficient demand for these topics to justify their inclusion on a permanent basis but their inclusion will be reviewed again for future surveys.

### **Proposal to drop the Market Value Survey (Proposal 2)**

- Of the 34 consultation respondents, 17 (50%) presented a view on proposal 2.
- Of the 17 responses received on this proposal, 65% were positive.
- 29% of responses received were negative.
- Remaining consultation respondents who presented a view on this proposal provided comments but it was not possible to clearly determine whether they were opposed to or in favour of the changes.

The great majority of respondents either made no comment on this proposal or supported it. A small number however considered the loss of an independent market valuation as a serious loss and did not consider the valuations provided by householders as an adequate proxy measure. The usefulness of the market valuations was emphasised including their potential for assessment of equity release schemes; equity of pensioners and economic value of subsidies.

In the light of the general support for this proposal DCLG will not be continuing the funding of the Market Value component of the EHS. We will however explore alternative more cost-effective approaches to collecting independent valuations and seek to introduce these as early as possible to minimise the gap in data series.

### **Revising the surveyor training regime (Proposal 3)**

- Of the 34 consultation respondents, 16 (47%) presented a view on proposal 3.
- Of the 16 responses received on this proposal, 69% were positive.
- 19 % of responses received were negative.
- Remaining consultation respondents who presented a view on this proposal provided comments but it was not possible to clearly determine whether they were opposed to or in favour of the changes.

The majority of respondents commenting on this proposal felt the suggestions to be acceptable provided there was no negative impact on data quality. The increased use

of web based training was seen as sensible. Several respondents emphasised the need to monitor the impact of the change on survey quality. Those disagreeing with the proposal felt it was important to retain the opportunity for practical fieldwork exercises and surveyor team building.

DCLG has considered these comments and will be taking forward the proposals for a revised surveyor training programme for the 2011-12 survey. The new arrangements will however be closely monitored and evaluated with feedback sought from the surveyors and their management team together with an assessment of any impact on data quality.

#### **Proposal to reduce the sample size by 20-25% (Proposal 4)**

- Of the 34 consultation respondents, 33 (97%) presented a view on proposal 4.
- Of the 32 responses received on this proposal, 36% were positive.
- 42% of the responses received were negative.
- Remaining consultation respondents who presented a view on this proposal provided comments but it was not possible to clearly determine whether they were opposed to or in favour of the changes.

There was widespread concern about introducing a sample cut expressed by all types of respondent. A significant number however recognised, somewhat reluctantly, that a cut was necessary to achieve the required cost savings and therefore supported the smallest sample cut possible. This proposal for a 20-25% cut was therefore seen as just acceptable. Respondents, particularly other bodies including voluntary organisations, academic researchers and local government, emphasised the importance of a large sample for sub-regional analysis and analysis of small sub-groups of households and the stock. It was recognised that data sets could be pooled across years for such analysis but that this would then impact on the timelines of results in a rapidly changing area.

DCLG have considered these views and recognise that a smaller sample will impose some constraints on the scope for detailed analysis. A sample cut is however the main area where significant cost savings can be delivered. The detailed work undertaken on the impact of a sample cut on sampling errors (as set out in the Annex to the original consultation) suggests that the sample of the size now proposed would support most key analysis. DCLG will therefore be implementing this proposal for the 2011-12 EHS. To facilitate the pooling of data across years, which may be necessary for some detailed analyses as a result of this cut, we will consider both issuing further guidance about combining data sets and the release of three-year weights for the housing stock data set.

### **Proposal to reduce the sample size by 35-40% (Proposal 5)**

- Of the consultation respondents, 33 (97%) presented a view on proposal 5
- Of the 33 responses received on this proposal, none were positive.
- 75% of responses received were negative.
- Remaining consultation respondents who presented a view on this proposal provided comments but it was not possible to clearly determine whether they were opposed to or in favour of the changes.

As indicated by responses to Proposal 4 above, most users saw any cut in sample size as unwelcome. While there was an acceptance that a cut of 20-25% was manageable, no respondents felt they could support a larger sample cut of 35-40%. The larger cut was seen as being particularly damaging, leading to a significant reduction in the reliability of the results.

DCLG have considered these views and agreed that we should move forward with the smaller of the sample cuts. See above.

## **Summary of responses**

### **Main changes proposed to the EHS**

On balance, DCLG assess that the majority of respondents accepted the need for cost saving measures and felt the proposals put forward were sensible and appropriate. The concerns raised about the content of the survey can largely be addressed and detailed proposals are being discussed internally and through the EHS Advisory Group. Serious objections were raised about the proposals to cut the sample and the Department has responded to these concerns by limiting the sample cut to 20-25% rather than the larger cut also being considered.

### **Other comments received**

The other comments received largely related to the importance of the EHS as a key component of the housing evidence base and the need to maintain its robustness and reliability.

A small number of consultees also commented on alternative approaches to achieving cost savings by running the survey periodically. However while some users preferred to maintain a continuous large household survey with a periodic physical survey, others saw a continuous physical survey as of more critical importance for annual monitoring purposes.

Some users commented on the desirability of more timely results and to explore the option of local authorities being able to buy into the survey to increase the samples in their areas.

These issues will be considered for the 2012 survey forward.

### 3. Next steps

The changes to the survey outlined above will be implemented for the 2011/12 survey starting in the field in April 2011.

In line with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics the methodology and outputs of these statistics will be kept under review to ensure that they meet user needs. Any feedback on these statistics or this consultation outcome is welcome and should be made to Barbara Rose.

[Barbara.Rose@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Barbara.Rose@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

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## Annex A: List of respondents

Name of organisation	Type of organisation
1. Department for Climate Change	Central Government
2. Department for Work and Pensions	Central Government
3. Shelter	Other body/voluntary organisation
4. National Housing Federation	Other body/voluntary organisation
5. World Health Organisation / UK Public Health Association	Other body/voluntary organisation
6. National Energy Action- (national fuel poverty charity)	Other body/voluntary organisation
7. Homes and Communities Agency	Other body/voluntary organisation
8. Building Research Establishment	Other body/voluntary organisation
9. Food and Environment Research Agency/ DEFRA	Other body/voluntary organisation
10. Joseph Rowntree Foundation	Other body/voluntary organisation
11. Macmillan cancer support	Other body/voluntary organisation
12. Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)	Other body/voluntary organisation
13. Age UK	Other body/voluntary organisation
14. Care and Repair- (national charity to improve housing for older and disabled people)	Other body/voluntary organisation
15. Herriot Watt University	Academic/Research
16. Centre for Housing Policy - York University	Academic/Research
17. Oxford Brookes University	Academic/Research
18. Cambridge University	Academic/Research
19. School of Real Estate and Planning- University of Reading	Academic/Research
20. Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research	Academic/Research
21. University of Glasgow	Academic/Research
22. Oxford University	Academic/Research
23. Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research	Academic/Research
24. Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research	Academic/Research
25. London Borough of Islington; (Residential Environmental Health)	Local Government
26. Worcestershire County Council	Local Government
27. London Borough of Camden	Local Government
28. Northumberland County Council	Local Government
29. London Borough of Southwark	Local Government
30. Kent County Council	Local Government
31. Luton, Bedford and Central Bedfordshire	Local Government
32. Scottish House Condition Survey team	National housing stock

<p>33. Northern Ireland Housing Executive – house condition survey team</p>	<p>survey practitioner National housing stock survey practitioner</p>
<p>34. EHO/EHS surveyor</p>	<p>Housing stock survey practitioner</p>

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