



Chartered
Institute of
Environmental
Health

Consultation on the future shape of the English Housing Survey

February 2015

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

As a **professional body**, we set standards and accredit courses and qualifications for the education of our professional members and other environmental health practitioners.

As a **knowledge centre**, we provide information, evidence and policy advice to local and national government, environmental and public health practitioners, industry and other stakeholders. We publish books and magazines; run educational events and commission research.

As an **awarding body**, we provide qualifications, events, and trainer and candidate support materials on topics relevant to health, wellbeing and safety to develop workplace skills and best practice in volunteers, employees, business managers and business owners.

As a **campaigning organisation**, we work to push environmental health further up the public agenda and to promote improvements in environmental and public health policy.

We are a **registered charity** with over 10,500 members across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 CIEH greatly values the English Housing Survey. We believe it to be an invaluable source of data on the impact of housing policies that can inform policy-makers at national and local levels. Data gathered and analysed through the EHS provides vital information on the effectiveness of housing policies and strategies to reduce potential negative impacts on health and well-being, and to give indications on which are of those are the most cost effective.

1.2 The annual data produces invaluable information about housing and related trends at a time of rapid social change. Such information is essential for planning homes and neighbourhoods, for local government's plans for housing related provision such as social care, public health and neighbourhoods as well as health sector planning. The data is also important for the housing and housing related service sectors more widely, both social, third sector and private sector.

1.3 There have already been relatively recent changes to the data collected by the survey, representing a contraction of the scope and detail of the data collection, particularly in relation to stock condition. Any further reductions in scale, and in frequency, would mean a further decline in data quality upon which critical policy decisions are made about home building, welfare, energy policy, home adaptations and public health.

What cost-effective solutions are there to redesign the survey? We are open to any innovative ideas for improving the delivery and/or cost effectiveness of the survey. Please describe your ideas, detailing how the approach would meet your analytical needs.

1.4 We think the current format should be retained. The continuous model has operated effectively since 2002 and this has proved to be a most effective and efficient vehicle to deliver survey objectives. It facilitates continuous analysis of performance and ability to implement improvements at the earliest opportunity and is adaptable to the needs of survey users seeking to incorporate key measures quickly.

1.5 The smaller sample size has enabled the close integration of the interview and physical surveys and has produced a higher proportion of paired surveys. Data quality and consistency has been significantly improved. A continuous model means that administrative tasks and IT systems can constantly be monitored and improved upon without the need for lengthy catch up processes. We do not believe that the proposals put forward would improve cost effectiveness; we feel the survey already represents good value for money and the resources employed and used efficiently.

Pausing the English Housing Survey for one year in 2015-16 and/or running the survey on a biennial basis are possible approaches to deliver cost savings. Would you be affected if the department were to adopt either or both of those approaches? If so, please explain how, using examples on the way you use the data to illustrate your response.

1.6 We think that all users of the survey data would be affected by these proposals. The key issues for us being a loss of continuity, a lack of up-dated housing data, increased 'down time' between fieldwork periods risking drift in surveyor judgments and the increased

training costs when fieldwork recommences – this final point we believe calls into question the possibility of achieving the cost savings hoped for.

1.8 The re-training would likely to be more costly than is currently the case. To provide meaningful outcomes, the results from at least two sets of data collected would need to be combined and analysed. This is unlikely to be more economical, and could mean that, to monitor changes and effectiveness of policies, it would be four years before sufficient data has been collected. This would delay the evidence necessary to inform policies.

If the department were to run the survey on a biennial basis, what would be the best approach to carry out a robust and cost effective survey? We are particularly interested in views and suggestions on set up costs, feasibility of a biennial survey, sample size options, ideas for following up respondents from the earlier surveys in the series and data collection methods

We most emphatically are opposed to this option. As already explained, we do not consider it to be effective use of available resources, it would interfere with the quality and continuity of the data collected and furthermore is unlikely to be economical. A biennial survey would mean that, to monitor changes and effectiveness of policies, it would be four years before sufficient data had been collected.

Which topics in the survey are of most and least value to you?

The topics of most value to the CIEH include those dealing with household characteristics, tenure, the breakdown of housing conditions and information on hazards under the HHSRS.

Are there any questions that you would consider removing?

No, indeed, we would like to see the reintroduction of some questions previously removed from the survey.