



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL



Private Sector House Condition Survey 2008 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 2008

Portsmouth City Council



1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Private sector House Condition Surveys (HCS) are conducted on a regular basis by local authorities as a means of maintaining a detailed picture of housing conditions in the private sector. Such a picture forms a useful evidence base on which to build strategies and inform investment decisions, and feed into statistical returns and other internal reports. The information is also useful in presenting the potential obligations on the authority in relation to current housing legislation:

- Section 3 Housing Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform Order (RRO)

1.1.2 The survey was a sample survey of 1,000 dwellings from an initial sample of 2,100 addresses.

1.1.3 Comparisons to the position for all England are drawn from the 2004 and 2005 English House Condition Surveys (EHCS), published by the CLG and available as a download document from their website.

1.1.4 The tenure profile of the housing stock is shown below.

Tenure	Portsmouth 2008		EHCS 2005
Owner occupied	53,300	63%	71%
Housing association (RSL)	5,300	6%	8%
Private rented	15,300	18%	11%
Local Authority*	11,200	13%	10%
Total	85,100	100%	100%

Source: Portsmouth Private Sector House Condition Survey 2008
** Local authority figures are shown here for comparative purposes. Figures given generally throughout the report are in relation to the private sector only.*

1.2 General survey characteristics

1.2.1 The following list gives some of the key features of Portsmouth's housing stock and population.

- A Greater proportion of the housing stock was built before 1945, but much lower levels after 1944, particularly between 1965 and 1980.
- The stock is dominated by medium/large terraced houses and converted flats.

- More older residents (60+).
- Fewer single parents, but more adult group (3+ adults) households.
- Average incomes are similar to that for England as a whole with nearly 27% below £15,000.
- Benefit receipt at 15.5% is slightly below average (mainly two adult, single parent and lone older households).

1.3 **Decent Homes Standard**

1.3.1 It is Government policy that everyone should have the opportunity of living in a "decent home". The Decent Homes Standard contains four broad criteria that a property should:

- A - be above the legal minimum standard for housing, and
- B - be in a reasonable state of repair, and
- C - have reasonably modern facilities (such as kitchens and bathrooms) and services, and
- D - provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (effective insulation and efficient heating).

1.3.2 If a dwelling fails any one of these criteria it is considered to be "non decent". The following characteristics were identified in relation to non decency in Portsmouth:

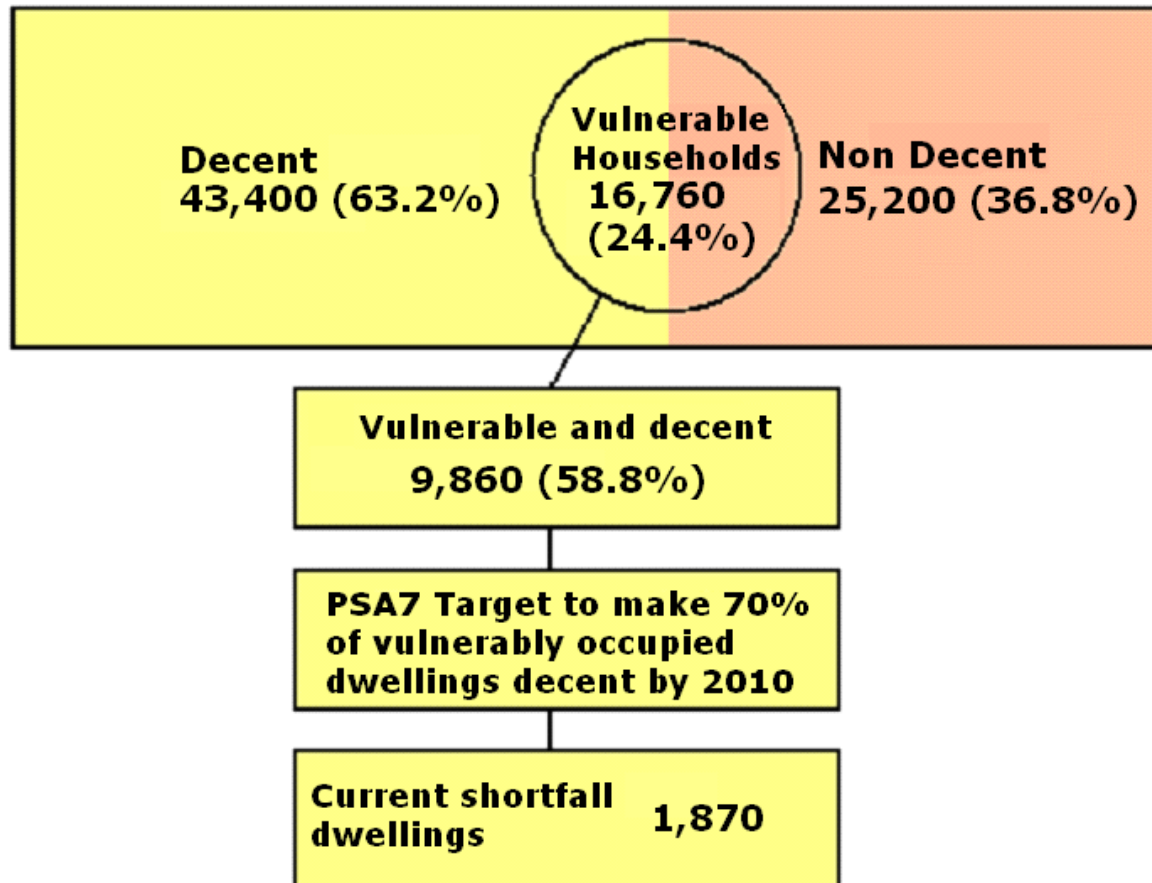
	Private Sector Non Decent	% Private Sector Non Decent	England % Non decent
Portsmouth	25,200	36.8%	27.1%

- Non decency, at 36.8%, is substantially higher than the national average (EHCS 2005 = 27.1%)
- Failure rate largely driven by Category 1 hazards and energy efficiency standards
- Non decency has become a greater problem since April 2006 with the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

1.3.3 The following diagram illustrates the position in relation to the government's Public Service Agreement 7 (PSA7). This agreement is aimed at ensuring vulnerable occupiers in private sector housing have the opportunity of living in a decent home. It requires that 70% of vulnerable occupiers be able to live in a decent home by the year 2010.

Decent Homes Standard and Vulnerable Occupiers

Private Sector Dwelling Stock 68,600 Dwellings



- 1.3.4 The diagram illustrates that there is currently a 1,870 dwelling shortfall against the 2010 decent homes target. This means that 58.8% of vulnerable households, in the private sector, are living in decent homes, a figure that needs to be raised to 70%.

1.4 Impact of the Housing Act 2004

- 1.4.1 The Housing Act 2004 removed many of the powers of the Housing Act 1985 and a number of other Acts and changed the obligations on local authorities in terms of private sector housing.

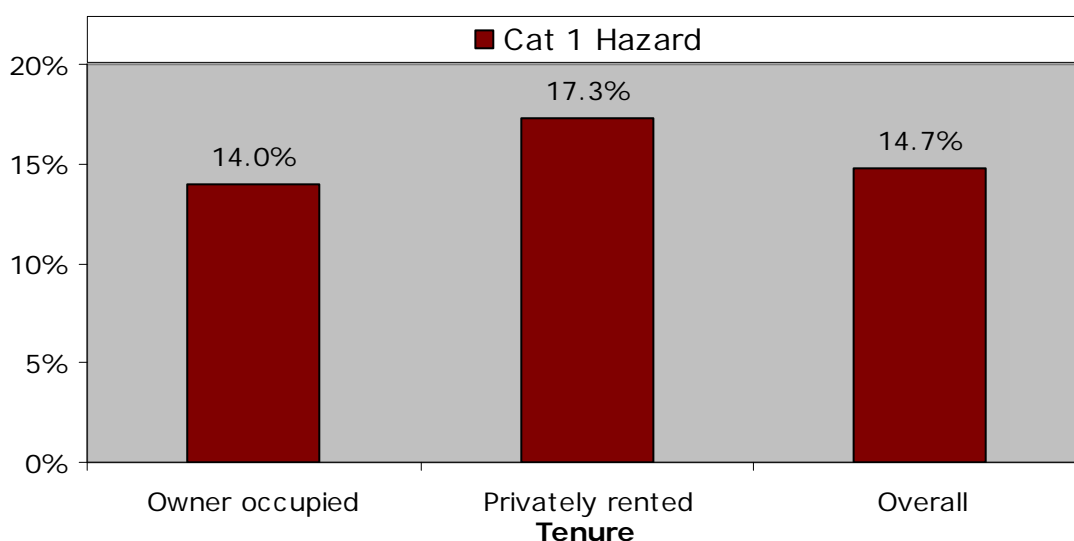
- Change from the Fitness Standard to the Housing Health & Safety Rating System.
- 290 HMO's (shared houses, bedsits, hostels etc of 3 or more storeys with 5 or more residents) now fall under mandatory licensing, introduced by the Housing Act 2004.
- Powers to grant Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) and deal with empty properties better. Portsmouth has 2,450 vacant properties, with 880 vacant for over 6 months.

- New options for serving overcrowding notices.

1.5 **Category 1 hazards**

- 1.5.1 One of the most significant changes under the Housing Act 2004 was a change in the minimum standard for housing. The fitness standard was removed and replaced by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a prescribed method of assessing individual hazards, rather than a general standard to give a judgment of fit or unfit. The HHSRS is evidence based – national statistics on the health impacts of hazards encountered in the home are used as a basis for assessing individual hazards.
- 1.5.2 The HHSRS system deals with a much broader range of issues than the previous fitness standard. It covers a total of 29 hazards in four main groups:
- *Physiological Requirements* (e.g. damp & mould growth, excess cold, asbestos, carbon monoxide, radon, etc)
 - *Psychological Requirements* (crowding and space, entry by intruders, lighting, noise)
 - *Protection Against Infection* (domestic hygiene, food safety, personal hygiene, water supply)
 - *Protection Against Accidents* (e.g. falls on the level, on stairs and steps and between levels, electrical hazards, fire, collision, etc).
- 1.5.3 Examples of a category 1 might be:
- A dwelling that has little or no insulation and is using electric fires for heating.
 - A dwelling with a steep, narrow poorly lit staircase that has no hand-rails.
 - A dwelling with loose and uneven crazy paving over a large area with a high risk of causing a trip resulting in a fall.
 - There are 29 potential hazards under the system, but many of these (such as radiation) are very uncommon.
- 1.5.4 The following indicates some of the key points in relation to hazards:
- Local authorities are required to take action where a category 1 hazard has been identified (as formerly with unfitness).

- Shift from unfitness to category 1 hazards is a major change with implications for training and resources.
- Primary hazard failures in Portsmouth are Excessive Cold, Falls on Stairs, Falls on the Level Damp and Mould Growth.
- Category 1 hazards are strongly associated with older dwellings occupied by those on lower incomes and benefit receipt.
- Category 1 hazards are strongly associated with privately rented dwellings.



1.5.5 The distribution of Category 1 hazards by tenure is given below.

1.6 **Energy Efficiency**

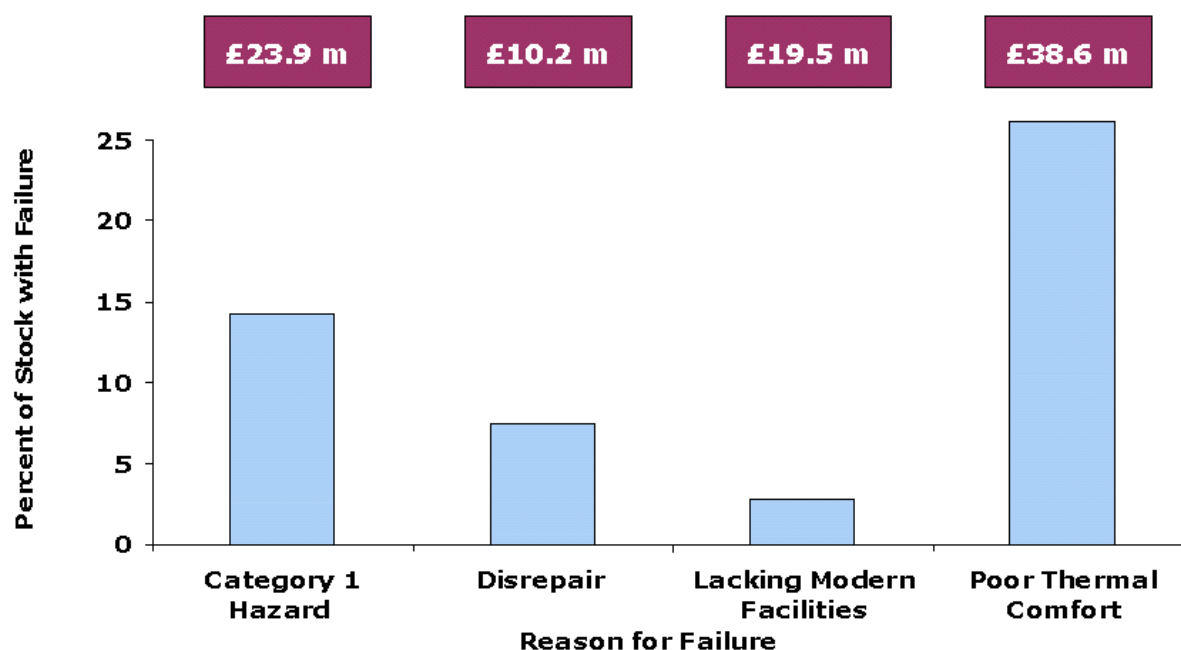
1.6.1 Energy efficiency is a key consideration in private sector housing and the following illustrates some of the issues:

- The cost to remedy the 5,300 owner occupied dwellings in fuel poverty (i.e. spending more than 10% of income on heating) is £14.6 million.
- The mean SAP (energy rating on a scale of 0 (poor) to 100 (good) is 51 in Portsmouth, compared to 46 nationally.
- The stock is inherently efficient due to low exposure and easy access to mains gas giving it a higher average SAP rating.
- The less energy efficient dwellings are older dwellings (pre 1945); converted flats and private rented dwellings
- Improving energy efficiency contributes to a range of Portsmouth City Council's corporate priorities

- The high number of excess cold hazards is an issue given the numbers of older residents in Portsmouth

1.7 Cost implications for repair and improvement

1.7.1 The following graph illustrates the total cost of remedying each of the causes of non decency listed. These costs are the total sum that would be needed for remedial work, regardless of the source of funding.



1.8 What of the future?

1.8.1 The comprehensive spending review by the government, published in late 2007, will have a significant impact on private sector housing. The principal change relates to the priorities that local authorities are expected to be measured against. All previous targets, including Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPs) have been removed and replaced with Public Service Agreements (PSAs) relating to 198 national indicators.

1.8.2 Effects of the recent comprehensive spending review are yet to be fully considered but include:

- Removal of the PSA7 target for decent homes (as a national indicator, but monitoring likely to continue at a regional level)
- Flexible target setting for individual authorities from the list of 198 PSA and national targets. Most relevant to the condition of private sector housing are:
 - PSA17 Tackle poverty and promote greater independence and well-being in later life;
 - PSA20 Increase long term housing supply and affordability;

➤ NI 187 Fuel Poverty

- 1.8.3 Measures will need to be aligned with and support Portsmouth City Council's Local Area Agreement.
- 1.8.4 The national housing agenda is changing priorities, and moving away from dwelling condition toward:
- provision of sufficient affordable housing for all
 - the health, safety and well being of occupiers
 - reduction in carbon emissions through improved energy efficiency
- 1.8.5 Portsmouth's private sector housing stock has a higher level of non decency than that found nationally, particularly with thermal comfort failure. Practical issues regarding improvement to older dwellings still exist, and meeting national priorities especially for improving energy efficiency will be challenging in many cases.