

**Private Sector House Condition Survey 2009**

**Rossendale Borough Council**  
*Working in partnership with*

# Executive Summary

## **Introduction**

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)

The survey was carried out as part of the Pennine Lancashire Consortium House Condition Survey involving the five authorities in the Pennine Lancashire sub region in conjunction with Elevate East Lancashire (the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder). In addition to providing the usual stock condition information, the survey was also intended to provide results specifically for the Area Development Framework (ADF) areas identified as priority areas by the Pathfinder.

The survey was carried out in two phases. Phase 1 involved a simple random survey of 1,500 properties across the Pennine Lancashire sub-region with 300 in Rossendale. Phase 2 involved a further 200 properties within the Rossendale ADF area and additional properties outside the ADF area to make a total nominal sample of 1,000.

The survey covered all tenures including properties owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). There are no local authority properties following stock transfer. Phase 1 and 2 of the survey were based on a stratified random sample of addresses in Rossendale. In all, a total sample of 2,000 properties was drawn with 982 surveys undertaken which is statistically robust to provide baseline evidence.

Comparisons to the position for all England are drawn from the EHCS 2006 and the Survey of English Housing 2006-2007, both of which are published by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and available as a download document from their website. Some comparative data is drawn from the Family Resources Survey 2006-2007 which is published by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP).

The tenure profile of the housing stock is shown below:

Tenure	Rossendale 2008		EHCS 2006
Owner occupied	22,190	73%	71%
Private rented	3,640	12%	11%
Housing association (RSL)	4,700	15%	8%
Local Authority*	0	0%	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,530</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Rossendale 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 and RSL stock only (all former local authority properties have been transferred).

### **General survey characteristics**

The following identifies some of the key features of Rossendale's housing stock and population.

- A substantially higher proportion of the housing stock was built pre-1919, with lower proportions built in the following periods especially between 1939 and 1944.
- The stock has high proportions of terraced houses especially medium/large terraced houses.
- A very similar age profile of residents when compared to the whole of England.
- Average incomes are lower than those reported in the EHCS 2005 (including when adjusted for inflation) and the proportions of households with low incomes is significantly higher than nationally.
- Benefit receipt at 38% is significantly above the national average.

### **Decent Homes Standard**

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).

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 Rossendale:

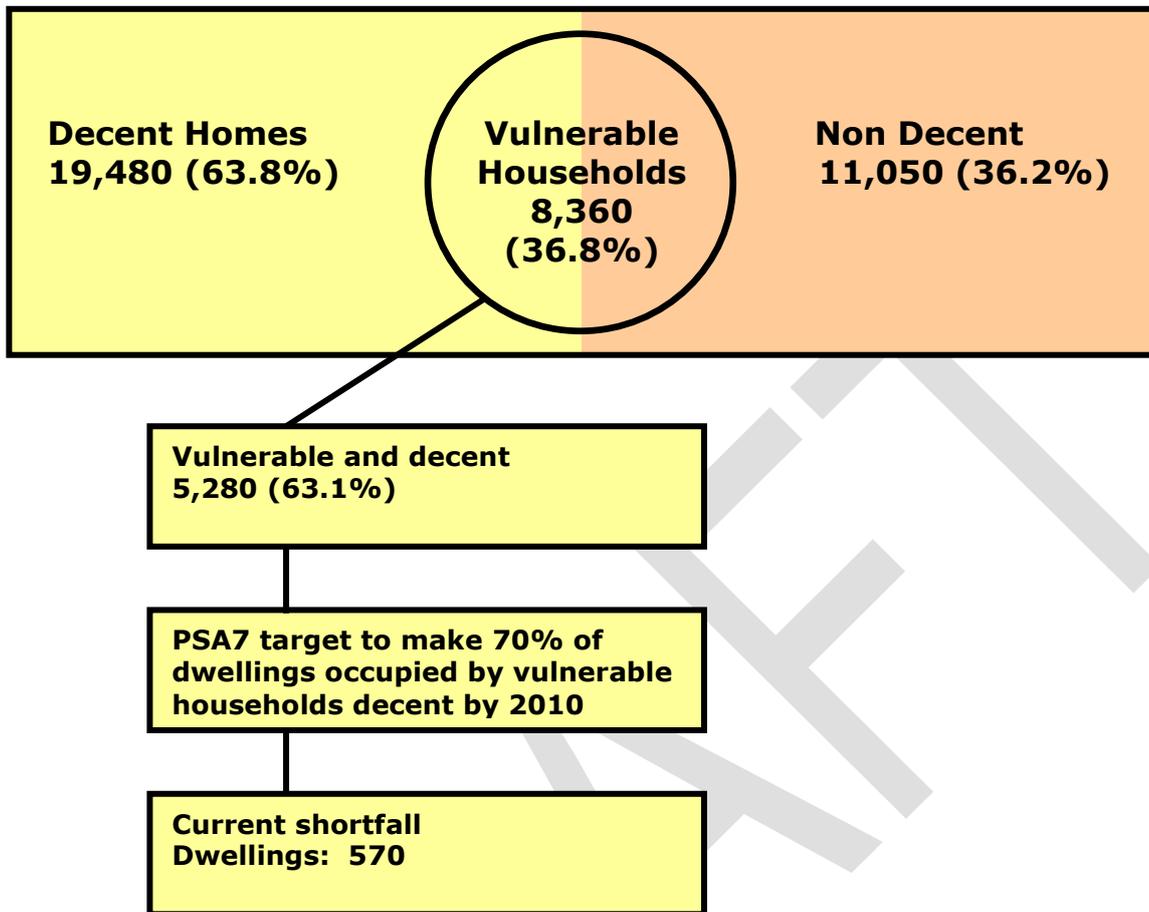
	<b>Private Sector and RSL Non Decent</b>	<b>% Private Sector and RSL Non Decent</b>	<b>England % Non decent (EHCS 2006)</b>
<b>Rossendale</b>	<b>11,050</b>	<b>36.2%</b>	<b>35.3%</b>

- Non decency, at 36.2%, is above the national average of 35.3% for equivalent tenures.
- Failure rate largely driven by energy efficiency standards and Category 1 hazards.
- Non decency will have increased since April 2006 with the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

The following diagram illustrates the position in relation to the government’s former Public Service Agreement 7 (PSA7). This agreement was aimed at ensuring vulnerable occupiers in private sector housing (excluding RSL dwellings) had the opportunity of living in a decent home. It required that 70% of vulnerable occupiers be able to live in a decent home by the year 2010.

Although this standard ceased to exist from April 2008, it is still a Communities and Local Government departmental strategic objective under DSO2 (2.8) with the indicator considering the percentage of vulnerable households in decent homes in the private sector. It also acts as a useful benchmark of local authority performance and may be taken into account by regional housing bodies.

## Decent Homes Standard and Vulnerable Occupiers Private Sector Dwelling Stock 30,530



The diagram illustrates that there is currently a 570 dwelling shortfall against the 2010 decent homes target. This means that 63.1% of vulnerable households, in the private sector, are living in decent homes, a figure that should be raised to 70%.

### **Impact of the Housing Act 2004**

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 (see below).
- The survey found no higher risk HMOs (shared houses, bedsits, etc of 3 or more storeys with 5 or more tenants forming two or more households) which now fall under the mandatory licensing regime introduced by the Housing Act 2004.

- Powers to grant Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) and deal more effectively with long term with empty properties. The survey results indicate that Rossendale has 1,580 vacant properties, 760 of which are considered to be long term vacant (6 months or more).
- New options for serving overcrowding notices.

### **Category 1 hazards**

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.

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).

Whilst there are 29 potential hazards under the system, many of these (such as radiation) are not commonly found.

Examples of a category 1 might be:

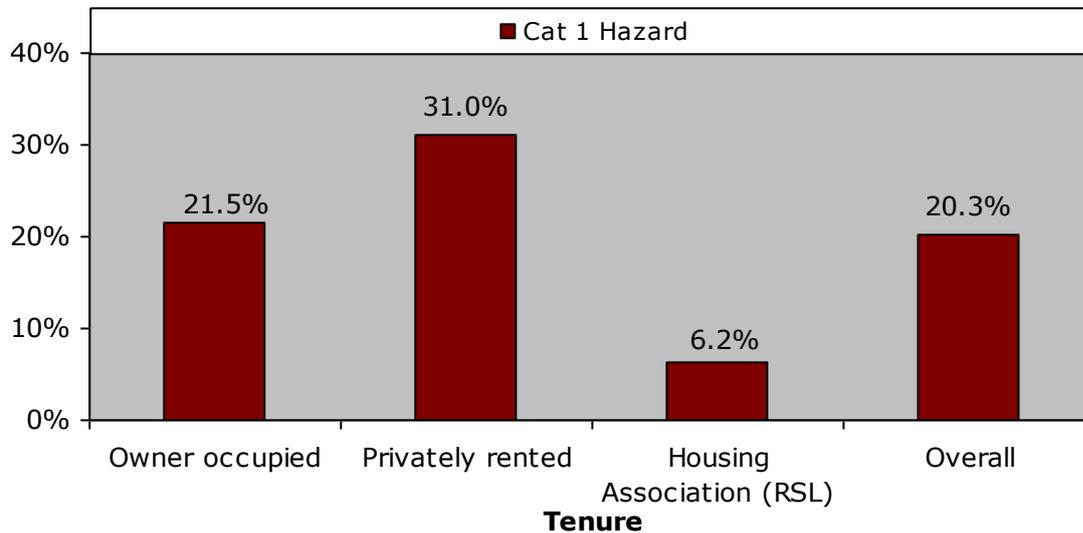
- A dwelling that has little or no insulation and is using electric fires for heating.
- A dwelling with a steep, narrow poorly lit staircase that has no hand-rails.
- A dwelling with loose and uneven crazy paving over a large area with a high risk of causing a trip resulting in a fall.

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 Rossendale are excess cold and falling on level surfaces.
- Category 1 hazards are strongly associated with older dwellings occupied by those aged 65 and over, those on a low income, those in receipt of benefit and those with a disability.

- Proportionately, Category 1 hazards are more strongly associated with the privately rented sector.

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



### **Energy Efficiency**

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

- The cost to remedy the 4,500 owner occupied dwellings in fuel poverty (i.e. spending more than 10% of income on heating) is £7.1 million.
- The mean SAP (energy rating on a scale of 0 (poor) to 100 (good)) is 52 in Rossendale, which is higher than that found nationally (49).
- The less energy efficient dwellings are older dwellings (pre 1919); converted flats and privately rented dwellings.
- Improving energy efficiency will contribute towards a range of Rossendale's corporate priorities.
- The level of excess cold hazards is an issue given the numbers of older residents in Rossendale.

### **Cost implications for repair and improvement**

The following table 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:

Reason	Total Cost (£ million)	Cost per dwelling (£)
Category 1 Hazard	£32.2	£5,200
Repair	£15.1	£4,400

Amenities	£5.1	£12,000
Thermal comfort	£7.7	£1,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>£60.1</b>	<b>£5,400</b>

### **What of the future?**

The comprehensive spending review by the government, published in late 2007, has had 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 (BVPIs) have been removed and replaced with Public Service Agreements (PSAs) relating to 198 National Indicators.

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 National Indicators and 30 PSA. 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 186 Per Capita CO2 emissions
  - NI 187 Fuel Poverty

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

Rosendale's private sector housing stock has a higher level of non decency than that found nationally, with poor degree of thermal comfort failure and properties in need of repair being higher than their national comparators. Practical issues regarding improvement to older dwellings still exist, and meeting national priorities especially for improving energy efficiency will be challenging in many cases.