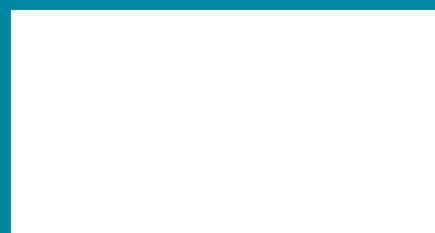


A Housing Research Audit for Wales

National Assembly for Wales





Further copies of this document can be obtained free of charge from:

Sioned Lewis

Housing and Community Renewal

National Assembly for Wales

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Tel: (02920) 823353

E-mail: sioned.lewis@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Website: <http://www.wales.gov.uk/>

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Foreword

At the first meeting of the National Consultative Forum on Housing (N.C.F.H.) in February 1998 the Centre for Housing Management and Development at Cardiff University (C.H.M.D.) and the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales (C.I.H. in Wales), presented a paper on the role of research in informing housing policy and practice in Wales (N.C.F.H. 1998a). This was in response to concerns that existing capacities and mechanisms for undertaking, commissioning and funding research and good practice in Wales were inadequate, particularly given the context of impending devolution. The paper argued that to think strategically about Welsh housing, research of various kinds is needed to identify and plug information gaps to inform policy and practice. Independently, at this same meeting, a paper from the Welsh Office (N.C.F.H. 1998b) argued that a national housing strategy should be 'evidence based', implying a key role for research and information.

Research serves more than one purpose. At one end of the spectrum it can involve statistical data collection and monitoring, essentially of a descriptive nature. At the other end, academic research may be concerned with testing and refining theory. In between these extremes research helps in evaluating policy and practice and in considering a range of policy options, in developing "good practice" guidance and in looking forward to consider how projected social, economic and environmental changes may demand shifts in policy.

The C.H.M.D./C.I.H. in Wales paper argued that if Wales is to tune its housing policies to Welsh needs then it must have the research capacity to fulfil all of these functions and to consider issues in depth. A precursor to achieving this was an audit of recent and current housing research in and about Wales and of Welsh research needs. In a second paper to the Forum (N.C.F.H. 1998c) proposals were put forward on how such an audit should be undertaken. The Housing Minister Win Griffiths M.P. then agreed to fund the two organisations to carry out the audit, overseen by a steering group of Forum members.

The audit consisted of;

Face-to-face interviews with representatives of those bodies who are members of the National Consultative Forum for Housing in Wales;

Telephone interviews with senior housing officers from local authorities and housing associations in Wales, using a pre-determined interview schedule;

A postal survey of other housing related organisations, other interested organisations, research funders, housing consultants and those working on housing related research relevant to Wales in academic institutions;

Case studies in three local authority areas (Gwynedd, Merthyr Tydfil and Wrexham) to examine the research linkages between housing and other local authority services, other statutory organisations, the private sector and voluntary organisations.

The audit was carried out by Pauline Papps and Robert Smith of the Centre for Housing Management and Development in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cardiff University and by Tamsin Stirling of the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales.

This is the report of their findings. It will be used by the National Assembly to guide the development of its housing research programme and will be of interest to all concerned with Welsh housing matters.



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In addition, we are grateful to the National Assembly for Wales for funding the study. Finally, we would wish to express our thanks to the members of the National Consultative Forum for Housing, who helped to support and advise our research whilst in progress.

Executive Summary

Introduction

In 1998 the Welsh Office Housing Division commissioned the Centre for Housing Management and Development at Cardiff University and the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales to undertake a housing research audit across Wales. The aims of the study were to:

Consider what research had been completed in relation to housing in Wales in the recent past.

Identify on-going housing research in Wales.

Identify views on key research issues and questions to inform housing debates in Wales.

Examine key gaps in knowledge and information relevant to housing in Wales.

Explore housing research capacities in Wales.

Consider the extent to which the fruits of research are used by the housing policy and practice community in Wales to inform their work.

The study has been undertaken with the support of the National Consultative Forum for Housing (N.C.F.H.) in Wales, whose members advised on the conduct of the audit.

Methodology

The Audit has been carried out in four linked stages:-

Face-to-face interviews with representatives of those bodies who are members of the National Consultative Forum for Housing In Wales;

Telephone interviews with senior housing officers from unitary authorities and registered social landlords in Wales, using a pre-determined interview schedule.

A postal survey of other housing related

organisations, other interested organisations, research funders, housing consultants and those doing housing research directly relevant to Wales in academic institutions.

Case studies in three unitary authorities to examine housing related research issues across Departments.

Current Research Themes

Given the broad definition of housing research which we have used the audit has identified a fairly wide range of policy related housing research either on-going or completed within Wales in the last two years. The research has been categorised under the following broad themes:-

Information gathering

Housing needs (including studies of the needs of specific groups such as older people, the homeless, rough sleepers and young persons).

Regeneration

Customer Satisfaction

Service Delivery

Organisational Needs

Good Practice

Other Research

Much of the work undertaken by social landlords is of direct relevance to local housing policy and practice and focuses very much upon the landlord services provided. However some of the work undertaken in local authorities, for example the growth in local housing needs assessments and the consideration of the needs of particular groups, reflects a more strategic and enabling approach. In the case studies we have examined how local research, often across Departments, has been used to inform the Housing Strategy

and Operational Plan (H.S.O.P.) and Local Agenda 21, as well as policies on economic development and combating crime. Research undertaken by national organisations has inevitably tended to be more wide ranging and concerned with evaluating policy and/or promoting good practice. In addition we have drawn attention to the role of the Welsh Office (now the National Assembly for Wales) in particular in providing a wealth of statistical data in relation to housing in Wales. However, there is somewhat of a dearth of more basic housing research specific to Wales.

Future Research Priorities

A number of general comments were made about the current context in which future research priorities need to be seen. Concerns were expressed that there is at present a lack of a clear understanding of the Welsh context in which policy is being formulated and implemented.

Secondly, that there has been a lack of evaluation of past housing policies and initiatives, which ought to have fed into future policy development. Views were also expressed that Assembly Members will need better information than currently exists in order to make informed decisions on housing in the future and that the dissemination of research findings needs to be more effective in order to raise awareness in the housing policy community. There were also specific concerns about the need to develop a strategy for housing research over the longer term to inform the development of strategies and policies across Wales and that this needed to embrace the private market as well as the social housing sector.

The research priorities identified have been categorised under ten headings as follows:-

Housing information

Linking housing and other areas of policy (such as health, education and social welfare)

The changing nature of needs and demands and understanding housing markets

Housing investment and finance

Policy evaluation

Understanding change in housing organisations

Issues of sustainability

Regeneration

Service users

Good Practice

As might be anticipated, the ideas for new research are wide ranging. However, the Research Audit has sought in its concluding commentary, to set priorities, focusing on key issues. These include:-

The desirability of establishing a continuous survey of Welsh households and their housing.

The need to link housing with other key areas of public policy, including health and land use planning.

The importance of evaluating the outcomes of recent policies, for example in relation to 'Home Buy' and the development of foyers.

Research examining changing demand for housing, which encompasses not only perceptions of housing (and different tenures) but also develops a better understanding of local housing markets by looking at needs and demands, mobility and choice, both within and between tenures.

The development of good practice guidance.

The Audit also highlights the need to develop a fuller awareness of housing research being undertaken elsewhere in the UK and to use the findings of such studies to feed in to reviews of policy in respect of Wales.

Resources

There was a strongly held view that within the resources available to the National Assembly there should be a specific budget for housing related research. This should fund:-

Information gathering and dissemination

National studies of housing issues

Local studies which have national applicability or are of benefit to other organisations

Issues of guidance on legislative change and good practice.

It is reassuring to note that since the research was undertaken an announcement has confirmed a three year programme of housing research to be funded by the National Assembly.

The report also examines other funding sources and the opportunities for more formal partnerships to create a research and information capacity to inform policy and practice at the local

level. In many cases these research partnerships may cross organisational, professional and departmental boundaries.

Future Issues

The report considers the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the National Assembly in relation to housing research, as well as what part academic institutions, professional and representative bodies and others should play in research. The audit also considers the importance of dissemination and the role that different mechanisms and structures could play. Included here are suggestions for an advisory board for housing research in Wales and a reconvened Housing Management Advisory Panel (H.M.A.P), although with a broader remit.



Introduction

What is Housing Research?

1.1 The study of housing is essentially interdisciplinary, drawing on a number of academic disciplines including sociology, politics, geography and economics. The U.K. has a long and highly creditable tradition of housing research, stretching back to the 19th century. Over that span issues of topics studied and approaches taken have varied widely, but in the last 30 years or so there has been a growth in applied research as a means of examining the problems facing policy makers, and perhaps offering solutions. As long ago as 1967 David Donnison in his influential book 'The Government of Housing' suggested that:-

'the crucial change in the climate for research arose from the acceptance by Government of more comprehensive responsibilities for meeting the nation's needs – a commitment which compelled Ministers (sometimes in advance of their administrators) to call for more information and advice and encouraged them to shed inhibitions about inquiring into social problems and publishing the results'.

In general terms research represents systematic investigation aimed at increasing the sum of knowledge. For the purposes of this report we have defined it to include the following:-

Evaluating policy and practice and considering a range of policy options;

1.2 Research is essential to the evaluation of housing policies, to determine whether or not they meet their objectives, how they are implemented and what consequences policies have, intended or otherwise. This needs to be done over time, so that policy objectives, strategies and operational practices can be reviewed periodically and revised as necessary. Evaluation needs to be undertaken in the context of stated objectives, the efficiency and

effectiveness of strategies and the processes of implementation.

1.3 There is now a general trend for policy objectives to be more oriented towards broad outcomes rather than narrower production outputs or expenditure targets. For example, policies designed to promote social inclusion cannot be assessed simply against numbers of lettings, levels of vacancy or the profile of occupants. This shift in emphasis requires a more demanding form of evaluative research, which encompasses a wide range of social, economic and environmental factors, many of which will transcend the boundaries of housing policy. At the same time, the pursuit of many key policies, for example in relation to health, regeneration or sustainability, involves a housing dimension, but the evaluation of the policy must extend well beyond the housing realm.

1.4 It is likely that evaluative research will be more important in Wales, post-devolution. As Welsh policy both nationally and regionally diverges from policy in England, it will become less and less possible or appropriate to simply 'read across' English research to Wales.

Statistical data collection and monitoring;

1.5 Research, interpreted narrowly as fact gathering, is essential to providing a picture of the Welsh housing scene and in monitoring change. However, there are a number of fairly obvious problems from a policy perspective. In some areas of housing policy there is an enormous wealth of information, and it is not always easy for policy makers to be selective in the use of the most relevant material to inform policy decisions. On the other hand, there are other issues where there are little or no data available on which to base judgement. Alternatively, information may be collected, but

not readily accessible, or there may be a lack of awareness of its availability. All of these factors highlight that what is critical is not merely the existence of information but an awareness of its availability, how it might be put to appropriate use, and its limitations. Some of these issues are considered in section 3.

Evaluating how projected changes (social, economic, demographic etc.) may demand shifts in policy;

1.6 Research has a role to play in examining social and environmental changes which are likely to have implications for housing and which require a policy response. Research is also needed to identify possible responses and the advantages and disadvantages of each. In these circumstances research is essential to elucidate particular issues, identify possible responses (including maintaining the status quo) and evaluating the pros and cons of each.

Developing good practice guidance;

1.7 Research plays a crucial role in informing good practice for local authorities, Registered Social Landlords and others. The Housing Management Advisory Panel (H.M.A.P). was set up in 1990 (although an earlier H.M.A.P. for Wales had existed in the early 1980s) to consider good practice in housing management and to make recommendations to local authorities and Registered Social Landlords on the ways in which they could improve their performance as landlords. It was disbanded in 1995, but there remains a need for identifying, collating and disseminating information on good practice across the housing sector (and not just in relation to housing management). The Chartered Institute of Housing's Good Practice Unit provides a database and specialist resource library to subscribers across the U.K. identifying good practice and innovation across the whole range of housing services. However, whilst this includes examples from Wales it is not specific to Wales.

Academic research involving the testing and refining of theory;

1.8 Theoretical research can play a role in devising better ways of achieving policy objectives, whether in the design of strategies or delivery on the ground. It can result in more efficient and effective delivery mechanisms and practices or in better designed outputs.

The Research Audit

1.9 In our interviews we sought respondents' views on our definition of housing research. In general, our definition was accepted, although unsurprisingly respondents focused their attentions on the first four elements. Whilst in a more academic context greatest emphasis might be given to furthering knowledge and increasing understanding of the housing system, the clear focus throughout the audit was on the role of research to inform policy and practice. However, it should be noted that some longer term or developmental research, for example exploring new forms of tenure or subsidy arrangements, could have benefits for policy development.

1.10 At the same time, the academic/policy distinction is by no means clear cut. Whilst academic research on housing may be more broadly defined than housing research in other organisations, and may reflect individual interests, different methodological approaches, and the nature of research funding, much University and College based housing research does reflect specific concerns with policy and practice.

1.11 The Research Audit sought to explore the following key issues:-

What respondents see as the role of research in housing

What recent and current housing research has been undertaken in Wales, and how has this been used to inform policy and practice

What respondents perceive as the gaps in housing research in Wales and the future

needs and priorities

What resources have been devoted to housing research

What are, and should be, the roles and responsibilities of different organisations in relation to housing research in Wales

What the most appropriate mechanisms for the dissemination of the results of housing research are.

1.12 Throughout the audit we sought to review the current state of housing research in Wales, to explore the current pre-occupations of policy makers, practitioners and others and to identify areas of work and specific issues which may need to be more fully researched in future years. In the remainder of the report we have attempted to organise our findings around recent or current research, future research priorities and issues for the future. Whilst it has not been our intention to produce a 'shopping list' of research topics, we have tried to provide an opportunity for a wide range of organisations and individuals involved in housing in Wales to air their concerns and then to organise this into a number of common themes which we hope offer pointers for research to inform housing policy and practice.

1.13 Most organisations see research as something which helps policy makers and practitioners to tackle problems which they themselves have identified, and then promotes a way forward. This of course, raises questions as to how to make sure the right topics and issues are researched, how a research agenda is drawn

up and how a research programme is agreed. Organisations such as the D.E.T.R. typically develop their annual research programme following discussions with internal policy divisions and with external organisations. As such the research agenda and the specific annual programme of research is geared to specific policy interests. It may also be informed by discussions with other research funders, for example the Housing Corporation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and the academic community, which may help to develop longer term or strategic research, or studies which connect across different policy areas.

1.14 In the medium term we believe it would be appropriate for the Housing and Community Renewal Division of the National Assembly for Wales to consider future research requirements with other policy makers, practitioners and the academic community, as well as with other housing research commissioners in the U.K..

The N.C.F.H., or any successor body, is one group which should be consulted on a regular basis regarding housing research needs. There will also be a requirement for research which crosses subject or departmental boundaries, for example looking at the effects of poor housing on health, assessing the impact of improving housing conditions on the health of residents or the relationship between housing and land-use planning, which suggests a closer relationship between housing and other subject areas within the National Assembly, as well as the possibility of joint commissioning of research, either across Departments or between different funders.

Current & Recent Research

Introduction

2.1 This section looks at the research that has been undertaken by housing organisations, and others, during 1997-98 and 1998-99. All organisations were asked what research existed or had been commissioned, and who had undertaken the research. Additionally questions were put about the organisation's investment in research during that period. The section also draws upon findings from our three case studies, where there is evidence linking research across local authority departmental boundaries or between the authority and other agencies.

What is researched?

Information gathering

2.2 Wales is relatively well off in terms of purely factual housing information. The size, character and condition of the stock is well known through censuses and surveys. Fact gathering is essential to provide an accurate picture of the Welsh housing scene and in monitoring change over time.

2.3 Much of the research undertaken under this heading was completed to meet the performance and monitoring requirements demanded by either the Welsh Office or Tai Cymru. The Statistical Directorate of what is now the National Assembly has for many years been producing annual volumes of statistics covering issues such as economics and finance, health and personal social services, education, social statistics, transport and the environment and housing, as well as digests of historical and local area statistics. Welsh Housing Statistics in particular, as an annual publication, has provided a wealth of data on all aspects of housing in Wales, based primarily on returns made by local authorities. The most recently published volume (Welsh Office, 1998a) provides data on dwelling stock by age and tenure, new house building, renovations and grants, clearances, the Registered

Social Landlord sector, local authority sales, lettings and vacancies, homelessness, rents and benefits and housing finance. Where appropriate it draws together information from other data sources such as the regular Welsh House Condition Survey and the associated Welsh Social Survey.

2.4 Tai Cymru also collated and processed information on stock, new provision and renovation activity by R.S.L.s, as well as performance indicator information. In addition Tai Cymru sponsored W.H.A.T.S. (Welsh Housing Associations Tenancies and Sales database), as well as its predecessor CORE (COntinuous REcording of housing association new lettings and sales), which has provided a regular analysis of households being housed by R.S.L.s in Wales.

2.5 Local authorities, R.S.L.s and various private sector housing organisations have also developed their own information gathering, either on a regular basis or as one-off exercises to address particular policy issues. In part this may be in response to the requirements of central government or regulatory bodies, but on other occasions information is gathered to inform the organisations' own decision making processes. Examples include stock condition surveys, for the public or private sectors (or both), undertaken by a number of local authorities over the past two years. For example, local authorities such as Bridgend, Gwynedd, Merthyr Tydfil and Pembrokeshire have commissioned external consultants to carry out stock condition surveys. Some have been specific to the public sector (e.g. Newport) whilst others have focused on the private sector. Pembrokeshire C.C. commissioned the C.I.H. to produce a report on Home Energy Efficiency to aid its policy to improve the energy efficiency of its stock.

2.6 At the local authority level statistical

information has been gathered together from a number of sources to inform broader policy issues. For example, in Gwynedd as part of a Crime and Disorder Audit information has been drawn together from the health authority, from community psychiatric nurses and the University of Wales, Bangor. In Merthyr Tydfil the Council has commissioned Safer Merthyr to carry out a Crime and Disorder Audit, drawing on data from a range of agencies, including police statistics.

Housing Needs

2.7 A handful of local authorities have undertaken local housing needs surveys during the past two years, ranging in scope from a desk top exercise to detailed studies involving partnerships with local developing housing associations. Several other authorities intend to undertake housing need surveys on publication of the Welsh Office Guidance, which was issued in draft form in December 1998, and published in final form in May this year (Welsh Office, 1999)

2.8 Other work has been done on the assessment of housing need in particular areas. This has included: an evidence day in Carmarthenshire on special needs to help quantify both the nature of the problem and the extent of the need, and resulting in a network of statutory and voluntary agencies being formed to look at responding to need; ongoing assessment of the need and demand for social housing development in particular villages; consultation on housing needs with local communities; and village appraisal and needs assessment prior to housing association development (e.g. in Ceredigion). Gwynedd has commissioned a study of second home ownership and rural housing supply.

Housing Needs of Older People

2.9 Whilst district wide housing needs studies have taken account of a range of housing requirements there has been significant work on the needs of the elderly; unsurprising perhaps given that they represent a growing proportion of

the Welsh population. Some of the work has been at a general level, for example the work of G.R.A.N. (Gwynedd Rural Ageing Network) looking at issues of service provision for the elderly, whilst other research has examined particular housing provision for the elderly (e.g. the provision of sheltered housing and evidence of some of the problems of changing demand for this type of accommodation) and the options available to organisations in respect of this stock (e.g. research undertaken by Cadarn, Gwerin and Wales and West housing associations, as well as a W.F.H.A. working party). Other work has examined the repair needs of elderly private sector tenants and their landlords, supported by the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (H.A.C.T.) and Care and Repair Cymru, as well as work to look at the long term care needs of the elderly undertaken by Age Concern. The same organisation has also prepared briefing documents on the problems of homelessness amongst the elderly, as well as doing more specific work on the impact of the closure of a residential home, and the rehousing options for residents. In North Wales, Chapman Hendy, under commission from a local housing association, has also examined the prospects for the transfer of residential homes from local authority to R.S.L. control.

Young People, Employment and Homelessness

2.10 Although less work has been undertaken in relation to young people there have been some local studies evaluating the need for foyer provision for young homeless people, following the establishment of such schemes in Swansea and Wrexham. Cardiff Community H.A., for example, have undertaken a survey of young people's perceptions of foyers whilst Newport C.B.C. and Charter H.A. have commissioned work by Opinion Research Services which concluded that, whilst there was no need for a foyer in Newport, there was an argument in favour of closer links between housing and employment services at the local level.

Other work carried out for Trothwy H.A., looking at the housing needs of young people, has considered the links between housing and employment in rural areas and examined the use of rent deposit schemes to support access into the private rented sector.

Rough Sleeping

2.11 Whilst this issue has not been seen as being as significant in Wales as in other parts of the U.K., a number of rough sleeper counts have been undertaken (e.g. in Newport and in Rhondda Cynon Taff). In some instances these have been part of a wider evaluation of local housing needs, as in Merthyr Tydfil where a night time rough sleepers count was undertaken in conjunction with the Merthyr Single Homelessness Forum as one part of a homelessness survey, which in itself was one element of a housing needs study.

A joint Welsh Office/Local Authority/Registered Social Landlord survey of rough sleeping in Gwynedd resulted in the employment of an outreach worker by the Diocese of the Church in Wales in Bangor last year.

Others

2.12 A number of other small-scale local studies have been undertaken which have examined particular aspects of housing requirements. At one level many of the private developers are conducting local market research on the effective demand for new private sector housing development. Clwyd Alyn Housing Association also reported work on the likely demand for both low cost home ownership and private market rental in the areas in which they are developing. There have also been very local studies looking at the use of town centre accommodation (in Newport) and on the need for wheelchair units of accommodation. However it must be recognised that some of this work is organisationally specific and/or very particular to an individual locality or client group.

Regeneration

2.13 Whilst we have identified a number of studies concerned with aspects of housing need and demand, and in particular research to help inform additional housing provision, our audit has also identified a small number of studies which have been more concerned with regeneration. For example a number of housing associations reported studies designed either to profile specific local communities, or to examine tenants' and residents' perceptions of an area as a backdrop to community development and to the establishment of local area or estate regeneration strategies.

2.14 Local councils are also using information from a range of sources (e.g. unemployment, educational attainment, deprivation scores, reported crime and supervision orders from the Probation Service) to inform their bids under the People in Communities Programme. In Wrexham the bid was based upon an updated West Wrexham Study, a community profile undertaken by Keltecs (Consulting Architects and Engineers) Ltd.

2.15 Due to the focus of the housing research audit, and our interviews with local housing providers rather than all those concerned with wider community regeneration strategies, we feel we may have under-represented the amount of research which has been done in this field in Wales. However, in the light of shifts in housing policy and the anticipated influence of such reports as that of the Urban Task Force (D.E.T.R., 1999a) it is highly likely that this will become a more important focus for research, with housing as one aspect of social regeneration, over the next few years.

Customer Satisfaction and Perceptions

2.16 A significant amount of the recent housing research in Wales has been concerned with measuring customer satisfaction regarding service delivery or has been about seeking tenants' views over shifts in policy. A number of housing

organisations have commissioned tenant satisfaction surveys, often undertaken by market research companies. Some of these have been wide ranging, concerned with various aspects of service delivery, whilst others have been more specific (e.g. Flintshire, which has sought tenants' views on both decentralisation and the repairs service). The introduction of Best Value has also encouraged the measurement of customer satisfaction. In some cases social landlords have facilitated the training of tenants and young people to enable them to carry out these surveys. There is also evidence that some housing organisations have been using tenant and customer panels to test out policy developments or new ideas.

Service Delivery

2.17 A breadth of research has also been undertaken on aspects of service delivery. This has included work on the development of tenant participation (by T.P.A.S. Cymru and the Welsh Tenants' Federation) as well as the development of tailor-made tenancy agreements, licence agreements and a 'support charter' for use in supported housing.

2.18 Various projects have looked at aspects of the housing management service including the development of good practice guidance on dealing with rent collection arrears control and debt-recovery, the analysis of voids, turnover rates and those exiting social rented housing. Other research has involved working with tenants to identify gaps in service provision. A number of studies have also looked at the use of services (e.g. the use of women's refuges and the numbers being re-housed) or the need for the future provision of services (e.g. Cardiff University's work with Taff H.A. on housing provision for black and ethnic minority groups).

Organisational Needs

2.19 A number of local authorities and housing associations are involved in studies looking at performance and Best Value. For example, a

number are part of the Arthur Anderson and Binder Hamblyn Fry cost and resource benchmarking project, whilst there are other 'Benchmarking Clubs' supported by the District Auditor and the Chartered Institute of Housing. There is also a cost benchmarking exercise going on looking at private sector renovation grants whilst the Best Value study in Wales includes evaluations of the housing service, or parts of the housing service, in a number of local authorities.

2.20 A number of other research projects fit under this heading including stock transfer feasibility studies, the use of new technology, ideas on partnering, alternative models of tendering (e.g. open book negotiating, with benefits shared between producer and purchaser), and the assessment of future borrowing (and risk) strategies, as well as assessments of new organisational structures.

Good Practice

2.21 Many of the organisations interviewed saw the production of good practice guidelines as a key outcome of research. At the national level, for example, the Welsh Office has commissioned Energy Efficiency in Housing - Guidance for local authorities in Wales, which has been issued by the D.E.T.R. as part of their Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme. Mention has already been made of the Welsh Office's guidance on Local Housing Needs Assessment (Welsh Office, 1999), produced by a working party initially involving the W.L.G.A., W.F.H.A., C.I.H. in Wales and the University as well as Welsh Office and Tai Cymru staff.

2.22 A number of other examples of research to inform good practice were identified including guidance on renewal strategies, work on tenancy agreements for supported housing, and an evaluation of best practice in tenant involvement.

Other Research

2.23 A variety of other research has been identified which does not readily fit these earlier

categories. Some of this is of a more technical nature (e.g. the need for a technical advice service within care and repair) whilst other studies perhaps fit more closely into other areas of public policy (e.g. health and social services) than they do housing. In some instances the research in local authorities involves data collection across different service departments, for example to inform Anti Poverty Strategies and Local Agenda 21.

Resources

2.24 Most of the research that has been undertaken has been done within the various organisations and the costs, which often relate to time rather than money, have not been separately identified. Few organisations were found to have designated research budgets, and any funding had to be found from existing budgets. Larger projects, such as the housing needs surveys and the stock condition surveys, have generally been funded by local authorities, by either the housing department (with contributions from other departments) or the environmental health department in the case of private sector house condition surveys. A number of the housing needs surveys have had contributions from local developing housing associations and Tai Cymru.

2.25 Some of the rough sleepers research has been supported by the Welsh Office, and other partners, whilst work on foyers has either been funded by the organisation or a partnership of local interested organisations e.g. in the Newport case by Newport County Borough Council and Charter Housing Association.

2.26 The W.L.G.A. have used 'task and finish' groups to address particular issues, with organisations paying the expenses of members. Working groups on specific tasks provide opportunities to explore ideas within a wider network. In preparing their Housing Manifesto, published in June 1997, evidence was taken from a wide range of organisations and individuals, with the final report being co-authored by a

W.L.G.A. officer and someone on secondment from a local authority. In future the W.L.G.A. may look to secure other part-time secondments from individual authorities with staff costs being met by the authority to undertake specific research projects.

2.27 Individual housing organisations have been mostly unsuccessful in obtaining funding from funders such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (H.A.C.T.), although umbrella organisations such as Age Concern and T.P.A.S. Cymru have found them very supportive. H.A.C.T. now has a ring-fenced Welsh budget. Housing associations and local authorities have either not thought of applying for external funds or have been told that they have insufficient funds. However, invitations to housing organisations to bid for grants under section 16 of the Housing and Planning Act 1986 or section 87 of the Housing Associations Act 1985 for 1999-2000 should enable central government support for projects which will encourage good practice in housing management, advance Best Value and increase tenant involvement. Whilst such projects may not of necessity involve research, there is an expectation of funded projects producing an end report for wider dissemination.

Mechanisms

2.28 Only one housing association was identified as having a dedicated research officer, whose sole role was to undertake research work. In all others, where research was undertaken, it formed part of the responsibilities of different housing staff.

2.29 Much of the rough sleepers research has been done in partnership with local authorities, the Welsh Office, and the local branch of Action for Single Homeless e.g. Newport Action for Single Homeless.

2.30 The larger projects, e.g. housing needs and house condition surveys, and those needing

expertise not found within the housing organisations (e.g. to carry out home energy efficiency surveys) have been undertaken by external consultants, with some work being commissioned from academic staff at universities such as Cardiff, Swansea and Glamorgan.

Summary

2.31 In this section of the report we have sought to classify and comment on the recent coverage of housing research in Wales. The projects are illustrative of what research has been done and by, or for, whom. There is evidence of considerable diversity in the type and scale of research which has been undertaken, although we accept that this is partly because we have deliberately taken a broad and generous definition of what counts as research. It could be argued that had we applied a more rigorous definition of what should be counted as research, and given more emphasis to those studies which were across organisational or service boundaries, then we would have produced a shorter list and one with a different emphasis.

2.32 The evidence is that housing research in Wales is being undertaken by a variety of organisations; individual local authorities and housing associations, representative bodies, pressure groups, the private sector, central government and individual researchers, including those working in universities and colleges. Much of the work undertaken by, or commissioned by, individual housing organisations is of direct relevance to policy and practice and often very localised. In terms of issues, then it seems to us that the most important areas for research of late have been concerned with housing needs, either in aggregate or for specific groups, customer satisfaction, issues of service delivery, questions of organisational structure and change (including the use of new technologies) and good practice guidance. There is also a significant amount of information gathering and monitoring not only at the local level, but also through central government. We are aware that, because of the

nature of the audit, we may have understated the extent of recent research on housing issues undertaken in the private sector and research into housing renewal and regeneration.

2.33 However, although it has not been part of our remit to examine the trends in housing research in Wales over the decade of the 1990s, we feel strongly that research undertaken and commissioned at the national level in Wales has declined significantly over this period. Whilst organisations such as the W.L.G.A., W.F.H.A. and C.I.H. are involved in research studies (as are others such as T.P.A.S. Cymru, Shelter Cymru, Age Concern, Care and Repair Cymru and Welsh Women's Aid) this is probably more limited than in the early 1990s. At the same time, whilst the National Assembly is collecting a wealth of information for monitoring purposes, there has been a serious decline in the amount of research commissioned on housing (which as we have noted has generally been very low in comparison with England and Scotland). The demise of bodies such as the H.M.A.P. and the limited amount of evaluative research has weakened Wales' position still further. Whilst there is still research ongoing in the university sector, and across a number of disciplines, the emphasis has shifted away from research which might be considered to have a direct policy and practice relevance towards work which has given more emphasis to particular methodological approaches or theoretical perspectives. In part this has been a response to the decline in resources for research funding in Wales and partly a response to the pressures of the national University Research Assessment Exercise.

2.34 Much of the research which we have identified on housing in Wales over the last two years has been small-scale, short-term and of local applicability. However, we have also noted in some cases a commonality of interest, although little evidence of any networking arrangements for sharing research.

2.35 Finally we should note that there has been no attempt to assess the quality of the research which has been undertaken and the rigour with which it has been conducted. A true evaluation of research would need to reflect on the objectives which underpinned individual projects, and it has been our purpose to report on the coverage of housing research, not assess its value or wider applicability.



Future Research

Introduction

3.1 The next section looks to the future. All the representatives of organisations interviewed as part of the study were asked to identify:

What research gaps and priorities their organisation thought existed in terms of housing or housing related research;

Which organisations might provide funding for future research in housing and/or related areas;

What future roles were seen for national organisations in relation to housing or housing related research;

What might be the best mechanisms for the dissemination of research results.

3.2 This section sets out the gaps and priorities which were identified and categorised under a number of themes, where resources might come from, options for what roles and responsibilities various organisations might have for future housing research and how dissemination of the results of research might best be achieved.

3.3 Before looking in detail at respondents' views of future housing research priorities it is worth mentioning, by way of a health warning, some of the difficulties in trying to present a comprehensive picture of the gaps in knowledge and information and the problems in seeking to set priorities.

3.4 Firstly, we have to acknowledge that our housing research audit for Wales is partial. Although we have obtained a good response rate overall, in some categories this has been less good (in particular from individual consultants and academics). At the same time the relative dominance of social sector housing organisations is such that there is a danger that private sector housing concerns may be diluted. It should not

be forgotten that four-fifths of the housing stock in Wales is privately owned and that there are specific areas of concern in relation to this sector (e.g. limited knowledge of the private rented sector, design issues, demand side information on local housing markets, market failure, links between housing and the wider economy, links between housing and planning policies as well as between health, housing and social services). In view of the resource constraints we have not been able to undertake interviews with unitary authority planning or environmental health officers, for example, who would have undoubtedly given us a different perspective on housing research from their colleagues in housing (landlord) services.

3.5 Secondly, it is important to recognise that individual research priorities are subjective, and reflect individual views, the context in which individual and specific organisations are operating, and their views of the value and purpose of research. We noted in the introduction several different types of research (information gathering, policy evaluation, the identification and promotion of best practice etc), and even allowing for the fact that the emphasis in this project has been to look at the role of research to inform policy, there are none the less different perspectives on what the purpose of research is.

3.6 Thirdly, there are some perceived problems and issues which may be either very difficult or even not feasible to research. This may be due to lack of available data, because of difficulties in conceptualising complex relationships or because of issues of sensitive and confidential information. In seeking the views of respondents it has not been part of our remit to evaluate whether or not it is feasible or practical, given likely resource constraints, to research specific topics. Nor, as we indicated at the outset has it been our intention

to produce a shopping list of housing research priorities but to report on the gaps as identified by the housing policy community in Wales and to consider how these might be organised thematically. Whilst we have sought to draw a number of conclusions based on respondents' views, and the extent to which policy concerns requiring research overlap, we are aware that our views are to a degree both partial and subjective.

3.7 We have organised the next section around ten main themes, which are not ordered in any priority. However, before considering these we set out a number of general comments made to us, which cross-cut these themes.

What needs to be researched?

3.8 Firstly, in order to construct a research agenda it is necessary to take a view about what research is for. In section 1 we outlined what we consider housing research to be, and for the purposes of this audit we have viewed housing research as having a policy orientation and relevance (rather than being concerned more widely with increasing our knowledge and understanding). However, there are differences between research which seeks to evaluate policy and research which might be more concerned with the development of policy. Our work suggests a broad consensus over a lack of research to evaluate past or on-going policies and initiatives in housing in Wales which might feed into changes in specific policies. There remains a dearth of housing research in Wales which has considered the impact of specific policies, either on individuals or communities.

3.9 Secondly, there is a need for more analysis of trends (demographic, social, economic etc...) to look at the changing shape of housing markets in Wales, nationally, regionally and locally and to use projections of identifiable trends to develop a longer term view of housing policy. Assembly Members will need better information than is generally currently available in order to make informed decisions on housing issues in the future.

3.10 Thirdly, there is a concern over the lack of a strategic view of housing research across Wales. In contrast, the Wales Office for Research and Development for Health and Social Care has recently consulted on a framework for research into issues of health and social care. This has been related directly to the aim of improving the effectiveness of the health service. The current development of a framework for a national housing strategy for Wales offers an opportunity to do something similar for housing. However, the break up of the Housing Department and its division between the Social Services and Communities Group and the Local Government Group threatens the prospect of achieving a coherent view of a research strategy. At the same time, the separation of research budgets within the National Assembly (as well as the availability of other pots of money from which research may be funded - e.g. s.16 or s.87 funding) may threaten a coherent research strategy, whilst offering the prospects of additional sources of funding, some being responsive to external research ideas. There are clear tensions between undertaking research and linking housing into other areas of public policy, and developing more 'joined up thinking' (to use the jargon of the day), which recognises the complexities of policy issues, whilst at the same time achieving a coherent research strategy which addresses agreed priorities, whilst remaining flexible enough to respond to change.

3.11 Whilst arguing the need for future housing research to consider the links between housing and other areas of public policy (for example, with health, education, planning, the environment, social welfare or the economy) we are also concerned that future housing research is not overly tenure specific. Whilst much of the research we have identified in section 2 has been concerned with social housing (again, unsurprising given the nature of the organisations undertaking it), we should not lose sight of the fact that approximately four fifths of the population lives in the private sector. There are

specific gaps in our knowledge about the private sector in Wales (e.g. the nature, characteristics and role of the private rented sector) and about the linkages between the private and social sectors in local housing markets.

3.12 There is also a need for empirical research to encompass a range of different areas and circumstances. There are dangers if research studies are overly concentrated, for example, in South Wales or the urban areas. Although it is widely recognised that housing markets are localised, there is a danger that our understanding of housing processes will be inadequate if insufficient account is taken of experiences in different localities. Issues in rural areas (for example, planning for housing or the management of dispersed stock or the operation of local partnerships) may be quite different from the difficulties experienced in more urban areas. The distinctive nature of rural housing markets in Wales, and issues of Welsh culture, may need specific examination.

3.13 Finally, there is the question of the dissemination of research and information, an issue considered in more detail later in section 3. Whilst we are concerned to identify gaps and priorities for future research, we are also keen to see improvements in access to research findings, so that they can be used more effectively by policy makers and practitioners at the local level. Let us now consider each of the broad themes in more detail.

Housing information needs

3.14 Although well-served overall, policy makers, practitioners and the academic community know little about several key areas of housing. Whilst we have considerable information about the stock, much less is known about the occupants, their mobility and aspirations. Much better information is required on migration and movements in to and out of social housing. What is the scale and nature of migration flows into and from different parts of Wales and how do

they affect local housing systems? How do people regard social housing? How can the value of housing assets be maintained? In addition to quantitative data more qualitative and attitudinal data is needed to answer these questions. There is a strong argument to be made in favour of extending the monitoring of new lettings and sales by housing associations (the W.H.A.T.S. system) to the local authority sector to get a clearer picture of who is entering this sector. There is also some regret that there is no Welsh equivalent of the annual Survey of English Housing, or that the Welsh Office did not buy in to this study at an early date.

3.15 Whilst acknowledging the volume of information gathered on housing issues in Wales, and highlighting some of the gaps, there are also questions to be raised as to the effectiveness with which available information is used. Our housing research audit has suggested that many housing organisations, certainly in the social rented sector, are concerned with similar problems and issues, but may not be aware of the range of information which is available or how to interpret and use it for their own purposes.

Linking housing and other areas of policy

3.16 Several respondents indicated that research which links housing and other areas of policy is needed at national and local levels. It was felt that such research would serve both to inform future decisions on resource allocation and to better identify the role that housing can play in achieving the wider aims of government programmes, particularly priorities such as health, education and promoting social inclusion. For example, a detailed analysis of the interaction between housing, health, and educational attainment carried out in one or more localities could inform resource allocation and targeting of initiatives at national, local authority and community levels. In particular, the connection between housing and poverty was felt to need further exploration. Respondents also felt that research which links housing with other areas of

policy is needed in order to demonstrate the benefits of 'joined-up working' rather than merely the rhetoric of 'joined-up thinking' and to achieve synergy of action across different services, either in relation to a particular locality or client group.

3.17 A number of respondents identified gaps in the housing research agenda at the interface between housing and land-use planning. At the macro level there are issues about whether the housing objectives of planning policy are in tune or in conflict with the objectives of housing policy. More specifically there were concerns about the need to assess and monitor the availability and type of 'brownfield' sites if meaningful targets are to be set for the proportion of new homes to be provided in such locations. Of related interest is the need to monitor housing development in relation to local plan policies. Views were also expressed about the desirability of more guidance as to how the need for affordable housing in rural areas could best be met.

3.18 A need is perceived also to look at the links between housing and health. For example, what might be the impact of the work of Local Health Groups on housing, or the re-organisation of health authorities? The options for the elderly with long term health care needs would also cross boundaries between housing, health and social services. Merthyr Tydfil C.B.C. would like to do a baseline study of health conditions, in order to evaluate the impact of regeneration work on the health of residents.

The changing nature of need and demand: getting a better understanding of housing markets

3.19 A majority of respondents identified the changing nature of housing needs and demands as a priority for research. A better understanding of the housing market across all tenures was felt to be desirable. A range of questions were raised which are divided here into national and local

issues. However, it is clear that some of the issues will be highly relevant at both levels.

3.20 There is felt to be a need to build upon the latest trend based population and household projections for Wales (Welsh Office, 1997(b), 1997(c)) and the earlier research of Holmans (1996) to look at future housing requirements. This will need to analyse the changing nature of needs and demands by looking at demographic and economic trends, but at the same time make links with information about the condition of the Welsh housing stock, the need for repair and improvement, and the prospects for demolition. The issue of future housing needs and demands also should be linked to questions of support needs and the implications for community care.

3.21 On the broad question of changing needs and demands there was thought to be an inadequate level of knowledge as to the relationships between housing markets and the wider economy. For example, does the housing market encourage or inhibit household mobility or economic development?

3.22 The housing requirements of specific groups including the homeless, rough sleepers, concealed households, young people, black and minority ethnic groups and the elderly were also seen as important areas for research. What are the housing choices which exist for these groups? What are their housing (and support) needs? Gwynedd, for example, wishes to look at services provided by housing and social services to the elderly, and how these can be delivered to best effect. There is also a need for research on the current provision of accommodation and support for survivors of domestic violence and guidance on different service approaches.

3.23 A widespread concern exists about the issue of changing demand for housing in many parts of Wales at a very local level. The issue of low demand was recognised as a problem in parts of the private sector as well as for social rented

housing, and that there is a need to explore in detail the paradox of low demand in the wider context of unmet housing needs. It was felt that this issue linked to broader questions about the changing role of social housing, its image and the perceptions of tenants and the wider community. Do we know enough about what is important to people in terms of their choice of housing; its tenure, size, cost, location or other factors? There are also specific issues about the changing demand for particular types of property (e.g. sheltered housing).

3.24 Of related interest to many social landlords is to explain how and why turnover and void rates in the social rented sector are increasing, why people are leaving social housing and where they are going. There is only anecdotal evidence that these shifts are in part to the private rented market, as well as to home ownership. Even at a national level we have very little information about tenure shifts, unlike in England which has benefited from the annual findings of the Survey of English Housing.

3.25 There is also very little information available about the private rented sector in Wales. Information is needed on the characteristics of both properties and occupants, the relationship between incomes and rent levels, issues of supply and demand, and whether housing benefit has been an effective subsidy in this sector. Given the development of a framework for a national housing strategy in Wales what is the role of the private rented sector in housing policy?

3.26 A number of the issues we have considered above are priorities for research not only at a national level but also at a local authority (and even sub local authority) level. For example, the issue about the requirement for additional housing (and where this should be developed) is of concern for Wales as a whole, for individual local authorities and for specific communities. Whilst the recent guidance on local housing needs assessment (Welsh Office, 1999) has been

welcomed, the techniques for assessing needs, demands and preferences may have to be tailored to suit particular local areas. The application of general guidance may need to be adapted according to the context of local study. Likewise the issue of low demand for parts of the housing market may need to be analysed and explained in terms of processes occurring at the national, regional and local levels, and the way that they interact.

Housing investment and finance

3.27 Given the pace of change in the ways in which housing is being financed and subsidised, it is unsurprising that research in the area of housing investment and finance featured as a relatively high priority amongst respondents, particularly local authorities.

3.28 Firstly, there is scope for research which links housing finance to specific policies in order to evaluate the outcomes (and achievements) of past housing investment. For example, what has been achieved in terms of improvements in the quality of the housing stock (and demand for that stock) by capital investment in this housing, in both private and social sectors?

3.29 Secondly, there are a series of questions around the transfer of local authority stock, given the Welsh context and differential rents levels in the RSL and private sectors. There is a view that many local authorities are duplicating basic work; in the words of one respondent, 'there is a whole bank of information which each of the unitary authorities are wading through - we need more accessible information'. Clearly each Welsh authority considering stock transfer will need its own financial information. Views were expressed about the need for a more general piece of work at a national level to consider the practicalities of transfer in different contexts (high and low value stock, high and low maintenance costs). However, given the very limited extent of stock transfer to date in Wales, there may be a case for desk based research which looks at transfers in

England and seeks to relate this to different sets of circumstances in Wales.

3.30 The introduction of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) has also drawn a demand from social landlords for information about the operation of different models of PFI options for funding social housing. What are the resource costs and financial effects of different means of funding social housing? However, again there may be a case for looking more closely at what has been achieved in England and considering this in relation to Wales in order to provide clearer guidelines for the National Assembly, local authorities and RSLs. Once again, this highlights the importance of Wales continuing to look closely at what is happening elsewhere in the UK and to use (or commission) research which evaluates what has happened in other localities and to apply this to Wales. It suggests both a need to be fully aware of research underway outside of Wales and the potential for desk based work which examines existing published research in a Welsh context. In the last case this may be particularly appropriate where the implementation of specific housing policies (eg stock transfer) is more advanced outside of Wales than within.

3.31 In relation to the owner-occupied market, despite the work of Bramley et al (1995), or perhaps because this was not widely known to respondents, there is a perceived need for fuller research on the market for low cost home ownership in Wales. There is also a need for work on the potential for equity release to fund repairs and improvement in the home ownership market, particularly for the elderly. Given the high incidence of low income households in relatively low value properties in parts of Wales it is of particular interest as to how such schemes might (or might not) work.

3.32 The other major area for research identified under this heading relates to rents and benefits. This encompasses the need for work on trends in

rent levels in the social rented sector, and the implications both for investment in the stock and the management service, as well as issues around rent setting policies and the role of benefits in determining affordability. However, in the light of an expected review of Housing Benefit it may be appropriate for this to be held in abeyance. The issue of how the courts treat rent arrears, and their attitudes to possession orders (and suspended possession orders) for both arrears and anti-social behaviour was also seen as a fruitful area for research.

Evaluating policy and practice

3.33 Various respondents identified the need to review policy and evaluate impacts, collecting information (both qualitative and quantitative) in order to inform policy change or to introduce new policies. A number of specific areas for this type of research were identified.

3.34 There was a view that those foyers which already exist in Wales (in Swansea and Wrexham) need to be evaluated in terms of their successes and failures and the extent to which this model is capable of replication in different types of (smaller) communities. Such work might be part of a wider evaluation of the housing options available for young people.

3.35 A number of other types of specialist housing provision was thought to warrant evaluation. This included a range of existing supported housing projects, refuge provision, and the provision of housing and support for those with learning difficulties. In each case it might be appropriate to ask whether the services offered are what are needed, who is assisted (and which groups may be excluded) or what differences exist regionally and locally.

3.36 There is also a need to understand the impact of the Housing Act 1996 on housing allocations and homelessness, and to look at the use of exclusions and responses to anti social behaviour on public housing estates in Wales.

Research in this area would need to reflect the diversity of need and demand for access to social housing in different localities.

3.37 In relation to the home ownership market whilst there was a general recognition that the 'Home Buy' option had been successful there has been no systematic evaluation of its impact in different localities, how it may have impacted upon local housing markets, and what might be the implications for future policy. Are there ways of extending the 'Homebuy' option to owner-occupiers whose circumstances change, and if so what impact might this have upon, for example, mortgage repossessions?

Housing organisations and change

3.38 Almost all respondents were aware of the rapid pace of change affecting their organisations and how the changing external environment was impacting upon them. In this vein a number of potential research issues were identified.

3.39 At one level there is a concern as to what impacts the Modernising Local Government agenda may have on housing services. How will it affect housing's position within the local government service and the housing service's links both with other external agencies (R.S.L.s, voluntary organisations, statutory services, the private sector) and its customers?

3.40 The introduction of Best Value will bring with it additional requirements to collate and report the performance of housing services. In addition to practical guidance on preparing for Best Value (for Registered Social Landlords as well as local authorities) there is also a need to develop an agreed set of performance indicators across the rented sector which will allow for better comparisons between local authorities and R.S.L.s on a range of issues.

3.41 Suggestions were also forthcoming on the need to assess not only the effectiveness of the housing management service provided by social

landlords in Wales, but more specifically to consider the extent to which the organisation of the service impacts on its effectiveness. There may be a case for an updating of the Welsh Office's Relative Effectiveness of Different Forms of Housing Management study (Clinton et al, 1989), given the change in context and response over the last decade. Views were also put forward of the need to examine the impact of Information Technology on service delivery, as well as considering how the potential of new technologies could be developed.

Sustainability

3.42 The National Assembly for Wales has a statutory responsibility to produce a scheme setting out how it proposes to promote sustainable development and to monitor progress. It is likely that housing will have a very significant role to play. However, there is a lack of clarity as to how to define sustainability and what constitutes a sustainable community. There are questions about how sustainability can be achieved in different types of location. In considering sustainability there is a need to look at the relationship between social and economic regeneration and the need for environmental management and conservation. How can different social landlords manage change in different contexts? What is the relationship between social landlords and other agencies and organisations in developing sustainable communities?

3.43 There is also important research to be undertaken which might identify the main drivers of neighbourhood decline, what factors might inhibit decline, and whether it would be possible to identify the point at which neighbourhoods have ceased to be sustainable.

Regeneration

3.44 We noted in section 2 (current and recent research) a number of studies concerned with the physical, economic and social regeneration of often relatively disadvantaged areas or

communities. Whilst our audit may have under represented the views of those engaged in regeneration, we consider this is likely to be an important area for further work.

3.45 In particular it may be appropriate to evaluate the effectiveness of local regeneration strategies in different types of area, to look at the rôle of housing associations in regeneration, to consider the extent to which regeneration projects effectively involve the community, and to look at the linkages between regeneration programmes and mainstream programmes.

3.46 Merthyr Tydfil C.B.C. is looking to commission a detailed study in the Merthyr Vale area to include a comprehensive picture of the condition of private sector housing. Selective demolition is being considered, but much more analysis is needed before this can go ahead. There may also be a case for undertaking research which looks at the long term value of improvement activity. What, for example, is the impact of intervention through renewal area declaration on the willingness of private owners to carry out normal maintenance?

Service Users

3.47 The role of service users is becoming increasingly important in ensuring that services delivered are actually what are required in any given location. This trend is likely to continue given that the Best Value framework puts service users at its heart. A number of areas for further research were suggested. There is a need to develop a stronger user perspective on housing in the social sector. What are the needs and aspirations of tenants and how can housing organisations work to meet them to minimise exits from the sector? We need to know a great deal more about tenants' perceptions of the housing service, as well as about wider views of social housing.

3.48 Secondly, there may be value in increasing our knowledge of the degree of customer

satisfaction with different aspects of the housing service and in trying to develop more sophisticated measures of satisfaction. Carrying out social audits of current tenants would give policy makers and practitioners a better understanding of the social and economic circumstances of their tenants, what it is like to live on estates, and a wider appreciation of tenants' expectations. In the light of Best Value and the development of tenant compacts a better understanding of the relationships between landlords and tenants would also be helpful.

Good Practice

3.49 A range of issues were identified where there was a need for information on good practice. These included:

Identifying good practice in tenant participation with a strong tenant perspective. What do tenants see as good practice? How might they be involved in identifying and verifying good practice?

Good practice guidance on dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Good practice guidance on the use and effectiveness of introductory tenancies.

Good practice guidance on dealing with unpopular or low demand estates.

The need for local authority wide databases of different types of housing provision, in particular for people with disabilities, possibly of building upon the adapted housing databases being developed in Flintshire and operating in Cardiff.

Good practice guidance on approaches to dealing with relationship breakdown.

Questions were also raised about the dissemination of information on the Best Value pilots. This does not appear to be feeding back to organisations.

Resources

3.50 All organisations which responded to the audit were asked to identify which organisations might provide funding for future research in housing and related areas. Before going on to consider the various categories into which the responses could be divided, some overall points need to be made.

Firstly, co-ordination is needed at all levels to ensure that maximum benefit accrues from any funding which is provided. Future funding needs to be clearly focused.

Secondly, there is a question as to how much funding housing can draw in. The current emphasis on the interaction of housing with health may be very beneficial as much research is being carried out on health e.g. the recent research strategy consulted on by the Wales Office for Research and Development on Health and Social Care.

Thirdly, there is greater scope for co-operation between agencies on research which could be done via steering committees for individual projects. In addition, when organisations are carrying out their own work, there is greater scope for co-operation.

Finally, there is a need to look at who can effectively fill the information or knowledge gaps; it is not as simple as who provides the funding. We are concerned that there is very limited capacity both to specify research and to undertake work of high quality within limited time periods. Whilst there are some areas of housing policy where there are considerable research capacities within Wales, in other areas these are deficient. It will be important to continue to learn from elsewhere in the U.K., and to draw in research capacity from England, Scotland or Northern Ireland, but there is also a need to enhance housing research capacities within Wales.

3.51 A question also remains as to whether all sources of funding currently available are being fully utilised. There may also be scope for the joint commissioning of research between the Housing and Community Renewal Division and other Divisions (e.g. Health or Planning) of the National Assembly. In addition, in some instances there may be opportunities for the National Assembly to participate in wider studies (e.g. those commissioned or undertaken by D.E.T.R.), where they may represent good value for money. Whilst devolution offers considerable opportunities to develop policies to address problems and issues specific to Wales, and to do so in an 'inclusive' manner (involving a wide range of agencies), Wales does not have the resources to develop a Welsh dimension for every aspect of policy. Given the resource constraints there will be a need to sustain relationships with other parts of the U.K. (and Europe), which in housing research terms suggests the desirability of maintaining and enhancing the links with D.E.T.R. Research Analysis and Evaluation Division, as well as other bodies such as the Housing Corporation, the Scottish Executive, and Scottish Homes. The same arguments apply not only at a governmental level but also to bodies such as the W.F.H.A., W.L.G.A., C.I.H. in Wales, T.P.A.S. Cymru, Shelter Cymru and the Welsh Tenants' Federation. In neither research nor policy can Wales afford to exclude itself from developments elsewhere in the U.K. and beyond.

Government funding

3.52 There was a strongly held view that within the resources available to the National Assembly, there should be a specific budget for housing and housing related research. The availability of a nationally held resource could encourage co-operation on research. The following types of research were thought to be appropriate for central funding.

3.53 Firstly, research and information that Assembly Members will need to order to make informed decisions on housing issues.

3.54 Secondly, national pieces of work including studies such as the Welsh House Condition Survey and other Wales wide studies which generate comparable data for each of the unitary authorities. The issue of a periodic national housing survey which incorporated an assessment of housing requirements and needs as well as information about stock condition was considered to be worth exploring. The absence of a Welsh equivalent of the D.E.T.R.'s Survey of English Housing (D.E.T.R., 1999b) is a weakness, leading to gaps in knowledge about household and tenure change, mobility, housing costs and people's attitudes to their homes and the neighbourhood in which they live.

3.55 Thirdly, there was a view that the National Assembly should be funding, undertaking and commissioning an annual rolling programme of housing research on issues which are of concern locally but have wider applicability (e.g. changes in the nature and pattern of housing needs and demand). We have already indicated where respondents see the major policy related gaps in our housing knowledge, which might be appropriate priorities for research.

3.56 Fourthly, there are issues which arise through changes in legislation, policy or guidance at a national level which need to be researched. The impact of such changes needs to be evaluated.

3.57 Finally, views were expressed that central funding should be made available by the National Assembly to support research and innovation within individual organisations where it is judged that this might have wider applicability and benefits for others. This issue is one we shall return to later, highlighting the need for such research to be part of a broader strategy and to be co-ordinated and monitored if it is to genuinely be of wider value.

3.58 Many of those responding to the Audit raised issues about how a housing research

programme funded through the National Assembly might be drawn-up and implemented. For example, will it reflect the Assembly's own housing agenda, or that of the wider housing community? How might other organisations influence a housing research agenda on an on-going basis? Will there be a focus on the social housing sector, or even a particular form of public housing, at the expense of the private housing market? To what extent will centrally funded research be conducted in-house and to what extent externally commissioned, and to whom? How will the fruits of research be communicated to the appropriate users? Finally, there are major questions about how housing research conducted or commissioned by the National Assembly will interact with research being undertaken outside Wales and how it should link to research developed from other perspectives. Examining issues from a housing viewpoint which impact upon wider questions of sustainability and social exclusion creates difficult problems in setting defined parameters and almost inevitably is going to involve crossing disciplinary, professional, organisational and service boundaries. This merely reinforces the importance of not seeing housing research (or policy and practice) in isolation. Many of the issues are cross-cutting. Policy responses increasingly need to be similarly responsive, and so do the diagnostic tools.

Local housing organisations

3.59 A variety of views was expressed about the potential for individual housing organisations themselves to provide funding for research. The following types of research were thought to be appropriate for organisations to fund themselves:

Where the research needed is to enable a local authority to plan strategically;

If an organisation wants a specific piece of local research carried out; and

Individual items of research specific to a particular geographical area in which the organisation operates.

3.60 We consider that each individual housing organisation should establish an annual research budget and determine how it intends to spend it. However, we believe there is great scope for research partnerships and collaboration at the local level, where there are issues and problems of common concern. There may also be opportunities for the development of more formal partnerships through bodies such as the W.L.G.A., the W.F.H.A. or the Social Landlords' Forum, either to create a research and information capacity to inform policy and practice at the local level or to commission specific pieces of research. At the unitary authority level there is also more scope for research which crosses departmental (and perhaps organisational) boundaries to examine broader questions of community safety, neighbourhood regeneration and social exclusion. Again, these are questions we shall return to in the next section.

Other sources of funding

3.61 A number of other potential sources of funding for housing research were identified by respondents to the Audit. It was felt that representative bodies and pressure groups such as the C.I.H. in Wales, W.L.G.A., W.F.H.A., All-Wales Chief Housing Officers Panel and Shelter Cymru should themselves be setting aside funds to support research (Shelter Cymru stated they would be doing this). Individually such organisations may have some limited capacity for 'in-house' research or they may be able to raise money to support external research. These organisations might raise money for research from their members or alternatively they may seek funding from other sources including the National Assembly and the research foundations who support housing research.

3.62 Private sector organisations such as the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the House Builders' Federation may also have some limited scope to fund research, whilst their members have some 'in house' capacity. Voluntary sector organisations may also be capable of supporting

small-scale housing research in Wales. However, there may also be opportunities to raise the profile of housing research with key players in the business community in Wales (eg Hyder, British Telecom and the T.S.B.; the last two of which have specific monies set aside for Wales).

3.63 Access to European funding was also raised by the audit. The National Housing Federation in England has obtained funding from the Housing Corporation to develop a database which will provide an up-to-date, comprehensive and systematic source of information on European policies, funding and operational issues. We are encouraged that the National Assembly intends to use some of its own funds to extend this facility to Wales.

3.64 Respondents also broached the issue of research funded by the charitable trusts, and in particular the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It was felt that such funders need to re-think their relationships with organisations and policy making in Wales, perhaps establishing a designated Welsh research budget. This issue is explored in more detail in section 3. The National Lottery Charities Board is also a potential source of funding for research, although the bidding process is considered highly competitive and very resource intensive.

3.65 Finally, we would highlight the role of higher education in Wales and the research councils, and in particular the Economic and Social Research Council, (E.S.R.C.). Whilst there is some possibility (and even expectation) for those employed in higher education to undertake research, individuals may wish to exercise a degree of academic freedom. There are pressures on academic institutions to raise money through externally funded research, and some may wish to contribute to policy making and professional practice. However, the 'drivers' of university research are by no means the same as those of government or the policy world.

3.66 At the time of writing there are prospects for a U.K. programme of research to develop a greater understanding of how the processes of devolution and constitutional change may impact upon public policy. In addition, the E.S.R.C. are seeking proposals from academic institutions to develop closer links between evidence based social science research and policy development. It is to be hoped that the National Assembly will work with higher education institutions in Wales to develop initiatives such as these, with a view to securing additional and longer-term funding for more fundamental research, designed to increase our understanding of economic, social and political processes, which in turn might have implications for policy.

Roles and responsibilities

3.67 The establishment of an effective housing research programme depends upon a range of organisations taking on various roles and responsibilities. However, there is also a need to make more effective use of research findings and information. In section 2 we identified a range of housing research undertaken in Wales over the last two years, but despite a number of common housing policy concerns and similar studies, there appears to us to be very little sharing of information between housing organisations. We suspect that, in general, housing practitioners and policy makers are often not aware of recently completed or on-going research studies. Even for those of us engaged in research on a day-to-day basis we are aware of the problems of keeping up-to-date with the wealth of housing and housing related research and information produced, and so we have considerable sympathy with the hard-pressed policymaker or practitioner. However, it does suggest that there is a need to improve access to information, as well as plugging gaps in our knowledge and information. This in turn raises the question as to how information is to be disseminated.

Government

3.68 We have already argued that the National Assembly should have a major role in funding housing and housing related research. At the same time the National Assembly must have central responsibility for the provision of information about housing in Wales. It will be seen as a principal source of information and, as we noted in section 2, the Assembly's predecessor undertook a number of regular surveys and, through the Statistical Directorate, has collected and published a number of key housing data sets, often on a regular basis. An expansion in its housing research function will call for further publications to disseminate findings and good practice guidance.

3.69 Our study suggests that there is a widely held view that the Assembly will need to take both a holistic and a strategic approach to housing, and to decisions about investing in housing. It needs to recognise that research has an important role to play in informing housing policy, that it needs to consult with providers of services across all sectors of housing and, where appropriate, to use the fruits of research to argue the case for additional resources.

3.70 It is also assumed that the Assembly will want to use research to assess the impact of recent and current policies, to evaluate options, to inform official guidance, to promote good practice and to use research findings to inform resource allocation decisions. All of this suggests that the National Assembly needs to ensure that there are appropriate resources for research, that it develops a research strategy for housing, and that funds are then allocated to support identified research needs.

3.71 Of course, there are issues for the National Assembly to consider as to the balance of any housing research programme, and the extent to which this is conducted within Assembly Divisions as opposed to contracted to external agencies. As well as being a major funder of housing research

in Wales, the National Assembly is likely to be a major customer, contracting out research work to universities, colleges and private consultants. However, we have already noted what we believe to be a limited housing research capacity within Wales, which might suggest a need to invest in research training for the longer term future.

3.72 It has also been suggested that the National Assembly might have a wider role in promoting research through other organisations, for example by encouraging local authorities to fund or undertake research. The part funding of approved local housing needs studies through the Housing and Community Renewal Division, following the earlier support by Tai Cymru, is an example of how individual housing organisations might be encouraged to fund research at the local level. At the same time, invitations to bid for financial assistance to support projects under Section 16 of the Housing and Planning Act 1986 ('improving housing management') or under Section 87 of the Housing Associations Act 1985 ('innovation and good practice') provide opportunities to respond to the priorities of housing organisations and the wider housing community. However, these programmes need to be co-ordinated and monitored and linked to any mainstream research programmes.

Representative and Professional Bodies

3.73 Bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association, T.P.A.S. Cymru, the Welsh Tenants' Federation, Welsh Women's Aid, Shelter Cymru and the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations were seen as having a number of roles, several of which are dependent upon research and information. These roles include raising the profile of housing with government, lobbying for additional public investment in housing, informing debates on housing and related policy issues, representing the concerns and interests of their members and using their own resources to further debates about key housing issues.

3.74 A number of these organisations are facilitating the exchange of information and keeping people informed of key developments in housing policy and practice through their journals, information to members, seminars and conferences. Some of these organisations also have the potential to commission or carry out research into issues of concern to themselves and their members. The same is true in the private sector with organisations such as the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the House Builders' Federation, as well as some of the larger individual lenders and housing developers.

Universities and Colleges

3.75 Whilst the response of those working in higher education to our research audit was poor, we are aware of a range of housing related research going on in academic institutions in Wales. Whilst some of this may not be perceived as having direct and immediate policy application, there has been a reasonable amount of housing policy related research conducted in Wales, and there is scope for more.

3.76 A number of respondents suggested that Welsh academic institutions should be carrying out a wide range of housing research, from the theoretical and historical to the more directly policy relevant. Since they are seen as 'independent' it can be argued that universities and colleges can be more critical in their analysis. However, from an 'insider's' perspective this appears to us somewhat optimistic. Contract based research, the increasing emphasis on short-term studies, often conducted by staff on fixed term contracts, and the growing central direction of research programmes is limiting the scope for longer-term critical research. He or she who pays the piper calls the tune.

3.77 In addition, whilst it is clear that housing research within higher education is not purely 'academic', it must be recognised that different factors may drive research in universities and colleges. Academic research may be concerned

more with examining the conceptual basis of policy rather than monitoring the outcomes of policies themselves. At the same time, academic researchers may be more interested in conducting studies which seek to innovate, perhaps theoretically or methodologically, or which seek to tackle fresh topics. They may be less interested in similar studies in different localities (although there is a potential for bringing together results from such individual studies), although this may not be what is needed by local authorities, who may want a better understanding of common issues (e.g. housing needs and demands) in their own local area.

3.78 Whilst universities and colleges may have a range of appropriate research skills and experience, which could be used to guide research and advise on methodologies, develop the research skills of others and conduct research on issues which cross local authority boundaries, there is not a direct overlap with the research requirements of individual housing organisations. What may drive research in universities and colleges may not coincide with what drives research in individual housing organisations. However, where a number of housing organisations have similar needs, in terms of information, research and analysis, there may be scope for others, such as the National Assembly or a representative body, to broker a research partnership.

Others

3.79 A number of other organisations are seen as having a role in housing research in Wales. Individual local authorities, housing associations, building societies, other lending institutions and specialist consultants and individual researchers all undertake different types of housing research, as we have shown in section 2. Much of this work is of direct relevance to policy and practice, and concerned with the quality of housing services delivered and/or the organisation's performance.

3.80 In many cases individual housing organisations work with specific consultants to carry out research, where they do not have the capacity themselves. Some of the representative bodies, voluntary organisations and pressure groups might also work together, and with academic institutions and consultants, to carry out agreed programmes of research. However, it should be recognised that many local housing organisations have similar concerns and information and research needs. As a result, there is a degree of overlap and repetition in terms of what individual agencies have to do in gathering information to understand housing market processes and evaluate policies. This raises questions as to how far this duplication is inevitable, and to what extent it could be reduced by more central guidance (e.g. in respect of local housing needs assessment or on issues of common housing policy and practice). It also suggests a need for a high quality up-to-date research and statistical information service to support in particular local authorities and housing associations. How this might be achieved, whether for example through the National Assembly or the W.L.G.A., W.F.H.A. or the Social Landlords' Forum, or at a more local level, across services (housing, planning, social services etc), into which housing associations might plug, is a matter for further exploration. There would also, of course, be questions as to how such services might be funded. Nevertheless, we feel there is more work to be done to enhance local research capacities within Wales and to improve co-ordination between different organisations.

3.81 Finally, in this section we would highlight the important contribution which the charitable foundations might make to housing research in Wales. Over recent years a number of these have funded housing research, most particularly of course the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Whilst Rowntree have funded a number of individual research projects specific to Wales, and others which have either included coverage of Wales or were of direct relevance to Wales, devolution

raises issues as to whether the charitable foundations should be urged to target a proportion of their research funding to Wales and Scotland. This might be in recognition of the specific problems and issues faced and the ways in which over time policies may diverge from that in England. We would hope that the National Assembly for Wales, after establishing its research priorities, would ensure that these are known to other potential funders.

Dissemination

3.82 If it is to be of real value research must be both of high quality and brought to the attention of the intended target audience, in order that it might inform strategy and policy, and the implementation process. The Research Audit has sought to identify gaps in the research and information field in relation to housing in Wales. The sources of housing information and research findings are extremely diverse, but sometimes the specific information required is not available. However, at other times the problem is how to make information more readily accessible and widely available to policy makers and practitioners. How can we make key research findings more easily understood and how can we ensure the housing policy and practice world is aware of on-going and completed research which may be applicable to them?

3.83 Research findings need to be disseminated effectively. Written material needs to be concise, accessible and produced in an attractive format, with research summaries produced as well as full reports of studies. Findings need to be published widely, and made available in both hard copy and electronically. Different methods of dissemination are considered below.

3.84 Respondents were generally critical of the current arrangements for dissemination of research findings, good practice and what research is being carried out. These were felt to be largely ad hoc and rely on personal contacts. A number of suggestions were made as to how

to improve this situation, and again we have considered these in terms of the possible future roles of existing organisations, as well as the potential for developing new structures.

Written forms of dissemination

3.85 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'Findings' style of output was thought to be very useful and accessible, particularly because of the summary bullet points on the front page. There was a view that any project should produce a J.R.F. Findings-type output rather than producing long reports and that this should be a requirement of National Assembly funding. We would wish to take account of this comment in relation to the Housing Research Audit report.

3.86 An enhanced role for Welsh Housing Quarterly was suggested. This might include information on recent research projects and details of contact points, one page summaries of projects, or a whole section of magazine specifically for this purpose. An enhanced role was also seen for Cartref and the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales newsletters. The Welsh Federation of Housing Association briefings were thought to be useful and could include information on research projects.

3.87 The production of briefing notes by the National Assembly, including perhaps a periodic publication giving a précis of research, both ongoing projects and findings, might be useful to inform people of what is going on. Homepoint, produced by Scottish Homes, was mentioned as a possible model. Specifically in relation to good practice, the Chartered Institute of Housing's Housing Management Standards Manual was mentioned as being very useful, although it was felt that more detailed information on examples and contact points would be helpful. It remains important that the Housing Management Standards Manual continues to reflect policy and experience in Wales.

Using new technology

3.88 A number of respondents suggested that new technology offered opportunities to improve research dissemination. It is hoped that the National Assembly website will, over time, be developed to provide information about housing research, including on-line access to summary findings. In addition, various databases might be made available via the internet. However, we recognise that such developments are a wider responsibility than merely housing and will require co-ordination across various Assembly Groups and Divisions. The issue of internet access to the National Assembly library was also seen as a desirable future development

Other contacts

3.89 In some instances it may be appropriate for research findings to be launched through a conference or seminar to promote awareness. The National Assembly also needs to give attention to how it liaises with social housing organisations, private and voluntary sector bodies, not only to disseminate research and information but also to consult over research priorities.

Role of existing organisations

3.90 There were mixed views as to whether there should be one body, or several, charged with developing and implementing research agendas to inform housing policy and practice in Wales, and where a number of bodies are involved how they should best be co-ordinated.

3.91 We argued earlier in this section that the National Assembly should have a major role in providing information and funding research, particularly at a strategic level. As such it will be responsible for formulating new research programmes, some of which may be conducted 'in-house', whilst other work may be externally commissioned.

3.92 However, there are clear expectations that the National Assembly will liaise with other organisations over its research programme. If the

N.C.F.H. is to be retained, which we believe is the intention, then this body might have a role to play in shaping future research agendas for housing. We understand that, to support the taking forward of a National Housing Strategy for Wales, a number of official level working groups are to be established to develop the issues and options set out in the draft framework document (National Assembly, 1999). No doubt these groups will identify gaps in information and knowledge and, in their reporting back to the Forum, areas for research. We believe the work of these groups is to be completed by April 2000. It may also be appropriate that these groups might commission small scale desk based research which could help to inform their deliberations.

3.93 In considering the role of existing bodies we have also pointed to the potential offered by organisations such as the W.L.G.A., W.F.H.A. and the Social Landlords' Forum to set their own housing research agendas on behalf of their members, and to undertake and commission specific pieces of work. It is our view that housing research in Wales cannot simply be left to the National Assembly. Whilst it should be central to the provision of information and the evaluation of National policy, other bodies will need to undertake and fund research to address their own priorities and to help make their own case for resources. We have also argued that individual housing organisations may need to carry out their own research, either individually or in partnership. However, whilst arguing for a variety of bodies undertaking and funding research, we would once again stress the need for improving communication about housing research activities and co-ordinating housing research in its broadest sense.

New structures

3.94 In addition to existing arrangements there may be a case for establishing a new group representing housing and related research interests, which could help to maintain an awareness of research developments and

priorities, not only across Wales but beyond. Such a group should have representation from local policy makers and practitioners, as well as the national bodies, Assembly civil servants and the academic community. Of course, any new structure would have to link to existing fora and again we would see this as best done through the N.C.F.H.. Such a group might also have an important role to play in improving the dissemination of research findings and good practice.

3.95 As part of the research audit we sought views on the former Welsh Office H.M.A.P. This was generally viewed to have been a valuable and effective group, and that there was still an important role for such a group in providing very practical advice to housing organisations. However, it was felt that if any such panel were to be reconvened it would need to have a broader remit (not just housing management

practice or the social housing sector) and its membership would need to be wider than was that of H.M.A.P. Such a group was seen as having potentially a wider research agenda than the National Assembly itself, and would be independent of the Assembly. It would also specifically need to take account of the views of the users of housing services. However, as with the former H.M.A.P., it was recognised that such a grouping would need some central government funding to support its administration and to provide a research function. It would also need to ensure that its research findings were properly disseminated as widely as possible. This was seen as particularly important, given the wider agendas in which housing organisations are becoming involved. Such a body (the name of the Housing Innovations Panel was suggested) could be linked both to an advisory board for housing research in Wales, or could be one and the same, and to the N.C.F.H..

Concluding Remarks

Introduction

4.1 We have sought to show throughout this report that housing research has been and is conducted for a number of reasons; to gather factual information, to inform policy developments, both nationally and locally, to evaluate the outcomes of policy initiatives and to provide evidence of how projected or anticipated change may impact upon housing and households. Finally, it may be about identifying and promoting 'good practice'.

4.2 We were pleasantly surprised at the amount of housing related research which has recently been undertaken in Wales at a local level, much of it of direct relevance to local policies and practices. Whilst it was not part of our remit to examine and evaluate this research, the indications from the responses that we received from individual organisations suggests that many are confronting similar policy issues and questions in somewhat of a vacuum. However, the extent to which each organisation is aware of what is going on elsewhere suggests a need for a central research database. In addition there may be a need for an advisory service to the housing community to offer methodological guidance on how research should be conducted.

4.3 At the same time, through the case study element of our audit, we have sought to examine the extent to which there is evidence of an integration of research at a local level. Whilst it has long been recognised that many of the challenges are not just housing problems, but much more complex in terms of both their causation and policy solution, and require integrated responses across local government and from a range of organisations, we have found little evidence of integrated analysis. Whilst there is a shared concern of common issues (needs, social exclusion, sustainability, regeneration etc)

our case study research found little evidence of shared information, research or analysis across departments or organisations. Research and information still seems to be geared towards the needs of particular departments or organisations, rather than developing shared conceptions of problems and solutions. In part this may be explained by cross-departmental and cross-professional differences, but to an extent the pace of change in housing policy may also be inhibiting the integration of research and analysis.

4.4 Throughout the report we have sought to stress not only the importance of information and research to inform policy formulation, implementation and development, but also not to seeing housing in isolation. Many of the problems faced by households and housing organisations are not housing problems or issues per se; they are challenges which cut across policy areas as well as organisational, departmental, and professional boundaries. Increasingly the language is of policy integration. The challenges for housing research will also be to cut across such artificial boundaries to achieve a greater understanding of what is happening in different communities and parts of Wales. We can illustrate this in relation to a number of broad cross-cutting issues.

Sustainability

4.5 The drive for sustainability, seen as a balance between environmental, social and economic interests, is at the heart of Government policy making. In Opportunities for Change (D.E.T.R., 1998) four broad objectives were set out to underpin sustainable development. These were:-

- The maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment;
- Social progress which recognises the needs

of everyone;

Effective protection of the environment;

Prudent use of natural resources.

4.6 Housing research is needed in relation to each of these issues; housing can facilitate successful economic activity and employment, it is a key determinant of the quality of people's lives and it has major impacts upon the use of natural resources and the quality of the wider environment. Most policies concerned with sustainable development will have a housing dimension. However, there are a number of key policy related areas where research should be a priority. How can the social sustainability of housing be maintained or enhanced? What factors make a home and a locality sought after? Conversely, what factors contribute to the decline of localities and which are particularly important either in triggering decline or in preventing that decline. There are key questions as to why particular localities which appear similar respond differently to economic, social and environmental changes. In part the explanation may be related to an examination of how various actors manage change within local housing markets. Evaluations of particular communities should look at the complex inter-relationships between different agendas, economic, social and environmental.

4.7 Research is also needed on how the environmental impact of housing can be minimised, for example, by minimising the use of energy in its production or use or by minimising the effects of housing development. Given the policy emphasis on the re-use of previously developed land for housing then the potential for such land use and the extent to which it could be encouraged by various incentives needs to be considered.

Social Exclusion

4.8 Linked to the issue of sustainability is the question of social exclusion. The Social Exclusion Unit (1998) has noted that 'over the last

generation...whilst most areas have benefited from rising living standards, the poorest neighbourhoods have tended to become more rundown, more prone to crime and more cut off from the labour market. The national picture conceals pockets of intense deprivation where the problems of unemployment and crime are acute and hopelessly tangled up with poor health, housing and education. They have become no go areas for some and no exit zones for others' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, p.9).

4.9 Detailed research is needed to provide a baseline picture and regular updates of the socio-economic conditions within particular localities (wards, neighbourhoods, communities etc) which may be the focus for additional resources or specific policy initiatives to address exclusion. Some of this information will be quantitative, some qualitative, including gathering information about the views of excluded groups themselves as to what is needed in their areas, and what structural changes are needed, as well as how local communities can be helped to participate in addressing the problems.

4.10 More research is needed to evaluate how individual policies designed to address social exclusion impact in different areas, how different policies, interact with each other and how cross departmental and cross-organisational working can be achieved. This suggests a need for research which links across policy areas.

4.11 As our case studies well illustrate there are a number of other cross-cutting issues which at a local level impact upon housing and vice-versa. These include regeneration and community safety, as well as issues which affect particular groups within the community such as young people or the elderly. Although each is in itself a broad issue, they also inter-connect and if we are to address them then we not only need to develop policies which connect but also research which goes beyond a narrow housing focus.

Future Priorities for a Research Agenda

4.12 Moving on from the general, it is perhaps helpful to end with what has emerged, in our view, as the key priorities for a housing research agenda in Wales. These reflect what seem to us to be the priorities of those in the housing community who responded to our audit and are not necessarily the priorities of the authors. We have not sought to cover all of the areas identified in section 3 but to highlight what we see as the key priorities, given resource and time-scale limitations, for a research agenda to inform housing policy in Wales.

Housing Information Needs

4.13 Whilst recognising the value of the information already available, the Audit has highlighted some significant gaps (household movement, tenure change, perceptions of social housing etc). There is a strong argument to be made for a continuous survey of a sample of households in Wales to develop a clearer profile of housing needs and demands, along similar lines to the Survey of English Housing. Alternatively, this might be developed as a multi-purpose Welsh social survey. However, the key is to improve the quality of information on key housing and household trends. Policy development needs to reflect anticipated changes as well as to respond to current issues. We have also argued for good quality information already available for some parts of the housing system (e.g. housing association lettings) being extended to other sectors.

Linking Housing and Other Areas of Policy

4.14 Research is needed to evaluate the best ways to achieve effective co-operation between different tiers of administration (central and local), between different sectors (social, public, private, voluntary) and between different local authority departments (housing, planning, environmental health, education, economic development, etc). Linkages may operate in terms of strategies, programmes, or particular services.

They may also operate at different levels; for example the national (i.e. the development of national housing strategy), the regional, the local authority or the sub local authority (ward, neighbourhood, community) level. We need to understand how these linkages work at different levels and in different contexts and how they can be made more effective.

4.15 In particular we would highlight the need to examine the re-use of 'brownfield' land for housing development. In addition, research is needed which examines the relationships between housing and care in terms of meeting the needs of the elderly.

The Changing Nature of Needs and Demands

4.16 There has been a growing debate in the U.K. about the need and demand for additional housing arising from increased household formation, population growth and migration. However, alongside this has been growing evidence of the changing demand for housing in different sectors and locations. In particular there is growing concern about falling demand for parts of the social rented sector, with pronounced difficulties of letting some types of property in some areas. Although we are aware of research, both recently completed and on-going in England, we believe there is a very strong case for research in Wales on this issue. Whilst the explanation of changing demand may reflect national processes of economic change, we believe there are particular regional and local factors which also impact upon patterns of demand at a local level, and these need to be more fully understood in relation to different parts of Wales.

4.17 We understand that the National Assembly are proposing to commission work which will examine tenants' perceptions of social rented housing in different locations and with different landlords. However, we consider it would be worth investing in further research on housing

demand, household mobility and choice. In particular, what movement is taking place at the lower end of local housing markets (within the social and private sectors) and what are the aspirations and expectations of younger and newly forming households?

Evaluating Policy and Practice

4.18 There will be continuing pressures, both from the National Assembly and Whitehall, to achieve more for any given sum of public expenditure, through improved productivity within administrative structures, by devising new or better ways of delivering policy and in more soundly based policy and strategy formulation and review.

4.19 We have already remarked on what we regard as a serious lack of forward thinking research into those socio-economic, demographic and environmental trends which are likely to impact upon Welsh housing and which will demand a policy response. The long planning horizon and long life of housing means that change needs to be anticipated and, insofar as it is possible, planned for. For example, what will be the effects of greater longevity and declining marriage and birth rates? How should housing policy in Wales respond to continuing trends in counter-urbanisation, developments in Information Technology and changes in the labour market? Research is needed which breaks away from a purely reactive response to predicted change in Welsh society.

4.20 However, there is also a case for evaluating the outcomes of policies, as well as the processes by which they have been implemented. How far have particular policies met their intended objectives? Have they had any unintended consequences? In particular, it may be appropriate for the National Assembly to commission studies which look at the outcomes of its low cost homeownership HomeBuy Option and the development of foyers.

Good Practice Guidance

4.21 Some good practice guidance logically flows from the research priorities outlined above. However, there is a strong case for dedicated research to underpin a reconstituted H.M.A.P.. Their output was generally seen as high quality, cost-effective, influential and welcomed by practitioners, though any reconstituted body should have a wider remit than simply housing management; perhaps a Housing Advisory Panel linked to, and reporting to, a body such as the N.C.F.H.. The research audit has noted a number of areas where good practice guidance would be helpful. This would include work on addressing anti-social behaviour, the use and effectiveness of introductory tenancies and guidance on responding to changing demand for social housing.

4.22 In developing a research agenda for housing in Wales we would make two further points. Firstly, we see it as crucial that the National Assembly develops its awareness of on-going housing research elsewhere in the UK, so that this can be used, where appropriate, for the benefit of Wales. Secondly, and linked to this, is the case for undertaking and commissioning small scale desk-based research which reviews studies undertaken elsewhere in relation to key policy issues and priorities and seeks to consider their relevance in a Welsh context.

4.23 Finally in the report we have examined issues around the organisation of housing research, funding, the roles of different organisations, and the need for better communication and co-ordination. We have also highlighted the need to improve the dissemination and use of housing information and research findings and suggested possible new structures which may help to achieve this.

Appendix 1

Study respondents

Local authorities

Bridgend County Borough Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Carmarthenshire County Council, Ceredigion County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire Council, Flintshire Council, Gwynedd Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Monmouthshire County Borough Council, Newport County Borough Council, Pembrokeshire County Council, Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council, Swansea County Council, Torfaen County Borough Council, Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council, Wrexham County Borough Council

Registered social landlords

Aelwyd Housing Association, Cadarn Housing Group, Cadwyn Housing Association, Cymdeithas Tai Cantref, Cardiff Community Housing Association, Charter Housing Association, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association, Cynon Taf Housing Association, Cymdeithas Tai Dewi Sant, Eastern Valley Housing Association, Cymdeithas Tai Eryri, Family Housing Association, First Choice Housing Association, Glamorgan and Gwent Housing Association, Gwerin Housing Association, Hafod Housing Association, Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association, Mid-Wales Housing Association, North Wales Housing Association, Rhondda Housing Association, Swansea Housing Association, Taff Housing Association, Trothwy Housing Association, United Welsh Housing Association, Wales & West Housing Association

Other housing organisations

Age Concern Cymru, All Wales Chief Housing Officers' Panel, Beazer Partnership Homes, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Council of Mortgage Lenders, Care and Repair

Cymru, Halifax Building Society, House Builders Federation, Institute of Rent Officers (now part of the Chartered Institute of Housing), National House Building Council, Shelter Cymru, Tenant Participation and Advisory Service Cymru, Welsh Development Agency, Welsh Federation of Housing Associations, Welsh Local Government Association, Welsh Office – Housing Department, Welsh Office – Planning Division, Welsh Women's Aid

Other organisations

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Snowdonia National Park Authority, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Wales Office of Research and Development for Health and Social Care

Consultants and individuals

Dome Consultants, Rosalind Dean, Malcolm Fisk, HACAS, Local Government Benchmarking Reference Centre, Monica Keeble, Graham Moody, John Parker, Runnett Consultancy, Steve Wilcox

Academic institutions: individual respondents

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