

National Assembly for Wales

Housing Research Summary

A Housing Research Audit for Wales

Before the National Assembly for Wales took power in July 1999 there was concern that it would need an adequate base of evidence to develop its National Housing Strategy and that the existing capacities and mechanisms for undertaking, commissioning and funding research and good practice in Wales may not have been appropriate for the new era. To find out more about the range of housing research being carried out in Wales, to gather housing practitioners' views on what housing research needs to be done in the future and to take advice on the best way of achieving this, the Welsh Office asked Cardiff University and the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales to carry out a housing research audit for Wales. The researchers found that:

- **There is a lack of a clear understanding of the Welsh context in which policy is being formulated and implemented and there has been a lack of evaluation of past policies and initiatives.**
- **A wide variety of housing research is taking place in Wales, carried out by many kinds of organisation, but most is small-scale and carried out in-house and little is shared.**
- **Few Welsh local authorities and housing organisations employ dedicated research staff and funding for research is very limited.**
- **Greater research activity and research evidence will be needed by the Assembly to address the cross-cutting themes of social exclusion and sustainability.**

About the Study

The Centre for Housing Management and Development at Cardiff University and the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales were commissioned to undertake a housing research audit for Wales. Its aims were to consider recent and on-going housing research in Wales; identify views on key research issues; examine key gaps in knowledge and information; explore Welsh housing research capacities and consider the extent to which the fruits of research are used by the Welsh housing policy and practice community to inform their work.

The Audit involved four stages:-

Face-to-face interviews with members of the National Consultative Forum for Housing In Wales;

Telephone interviews with senior housing officers in Welsh local authorities and registered social landlords;

A postal survey of other housing related organisations, research funders, consultants and academics;

Case studies in three local authorities to examine the research linkages between housing and other services and organisations.

The researchers used a broad definition of research and included the evaluation of policy and practice, statistical data collection and monitoring, evaluation of how projected changes may demand shifts in policy, good practice guidance and academic research.

Current Research

The audit showed that Welsh housing research is very diverse and 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. Wales is relatively well-off in terms of purely factual research, due especially to the National Assembly's annual Welsh Housing Statistics and general fact-gathering undertaken to meet performance and monitoring requirements. Much of the work undertaken or commissioned by individual housing organisations is of direct relevance to policy and practice and often very localised. The audit found that recently the most important areas for research have been to do with housing needs (in general and for specific groups), customer satisfaction, service delivery, questions of organisational structure and change (including the use of new technologies) and good practice guidance. It was found that research undertaken at national level had declined significantly during the 1990's, and despite common interests, there was little evidence of effective arrangements for sharing research findings or methods.

The capacity of Welsh local authorities and housing organisations to carry out, or to commission, research is very limited. Dedicated research officers are rare and funding is scarce, whether provided by organisations themselves or obtained through grants.

Future Priorities

Respondents were asked to identify gaps in research and mechanisms for dissemination. 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 and 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. There were also specific concerns about the need to develop a strategy for housing research over the longer term to influence 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 audit identified a significant need for future research on the housing aspects of social exclusion and sustainability and pointed to a number of under-researched topics under these themes. Detailed research will be needed on how to maintain or enhance the social sustainability of housing and to look at what factors make a home or locality sought after or rejected. With regards to social exclusion detailed monitoring and evaluative research will be needed to assess the effectiveness of area-based regeneration strategies. These policy priorities suggest a need for research that is broader based than narrowly defined 'housing research', linking closely with other subject areas, in particular health and land-use planning.

The researchers advised the Assembly to consider a number of particular research activities. Among these were the establishment of a continuous survey of Welsh households and their housing; the evaluation of recent policies including the 'Home Buy Option' and the development of foyers; research to examine the changing demand for housing, including perceptions of housing, issues of mobility and moves between tenures. The need for the Assembly to develop a programme of good practice guidance for local authorities and housing organisations, properly funded and co-ordinated, was also stressed.

The audit highlighted the need to develop a fuller awareness of housing research being undertaken elsewhere in the United Kingdom and to use the findings of such studies to feed in to reviews of policy in Wales and emphasised that if research is to be of real value it must be brought to the attention of the target audience. Current methods of dissemination were felt to be largely ad hoc and reliant on personal contacts. Suggestions were made on how to improve this situation, through wider use of research summaries and an enhanced role for short reports in housing journals, such as Welsh Housing Quarterly, Cartref and the CIH newsletters. The internet and Assembly intranet offer new opportunities for dissemination and additionally the Assembly needs to consider how it communicates with housing related organisations, not only to disseminate information but also to consult over research priorities.



Further Information is available in the full report: [A Housing Research Audit for Wales](#) by Pauline Papps, Robert Smith and Tamsin Stirling. Copies of the report and this summary can be obtained from:

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