Welsh Housing Conditions Survey 2017-18: Survey design summary

The sample for the WHCS 2017-18 came from the National Survey for Wales 2017-18. The National Survey for Wales also provided:

- the associated household information needed to model fuel poverty (income, housing costs, energy payment method etc.);
- respondents views on a number of housing related topics that will add social context to the housing conditions data from the WHCS.

The National Survey for Wales is a face to face survey of over 11,000 people across Wales each year. The survey covers a range of topics with a focus on well being and people’s views on public services. Each year a sample of addresses are selected at random from the Postcode Address File, the Royal Mail’s list of addresses, stratified by local authority. When interviewers make first contact with a household they select a random individual aged 16 or over to take part. Between July 2017 and March 2018, on their first visit to the address, the interviewer:

- made a basic assessment of the condition of the walls, windows and doors and the roof (if visible);
- rated each as having no, moderate or major signs of disrepair.

This information was then used to determine if the property was in good repair, moderate disrepair or major disrepair. Early in the National Survey the tenure of the property was established.

A property was deemed suitable for inspection if it was in moderate disrepair or major disrepair or if it was rented (regardless of whether this was privately or through a social landlord). A proportion of properties that were owner occupied and in no disrepair were also deemed suitable.

A property was deemed eligible for inspection if it was judged to be suitable and the selected individual, i.e. the respondent to the National Survey, was the Household Reference Person (HRP) or their Partner. In these cases consent to carry out an inspection was requested. The Household Reference Person is the person in whose name the property is owned or rented. If jointly owned or rented it is the person who earns the most. If incomes are equal it is the eldest.
In order to estimate levels of Fuel Poverty in Wales, detailed income information needed to be collected about the households living in the inspected properties. Questions on the income of the head of household, their partner and other adult household members were collected through the National Survey. Questions were also included on how the household paid for their energy bills and their housing costs. The questions used can be found in the 2017-18 National Survey questionnaire. These questions were included from July 2017 to the end of March 2018.

Fieldwork for the WHCS 2017-18 ran from August 2017 until the end of April 2018. This resulted in physical inspections of 2,549 properties across Wales, which enables National level estimates.

The property inspections were carried out by qualified surveyors, employed by the Building Research Establishment (BRE). They performed a visual, non-invasive assessment of the interior and exterior of the property. The inspections lasted around 40-50 minutes, with around 20 minutes spent inside on a room by room inspection. The surveyor also inspected the plot of the property and made an assessment of the local neighbourhood.

In addition to measurement of fuel poverty, the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), survey topics included:

- general dwelling characteristics;
- state of repair;
- disabled accessibility/adaptions;
- energy efficiency;
- off grid fuels;
- water supply/drainage;
- damp; and
- climate change resilience.

For a full list of survey topics please see the survey form available on the WHCS webpage.

An electronic data capture system (digital pens) was used to collect the survey data. This method was also used in the English Housing Survey (EHS) and Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS). This system was developed by BRE in 2007 and first used for the EHS in 2008, following a year of extensive piloting and testing. This method uses a digital pen in conjunction with a paper form printed using ‘Anoto’ technology. This enabled some validation to be carried out in the field. Once the surveyor had completed the inspection they were required to carry out further validation before submitting the survey to their supervisor. Any issues/queries with the survey were returned to the surveyor to address before being resubmitted to the supervisor. Once the supervisor was content, the survey was submitted to BRE for final validation and acceptance testing.