Cartrefi Cymunedol Cymru / Community Housing Cymru

Who gets social housing in Wales?
The final report of a project to investigate the desirability of collecting and analysing data on social housing lettings and sales in Wales

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1   Introduction

1.1   CHC is the representative body for housing associations and community housing mutuals in Wales, which are all not-for-profit organisations. Our members provide over 100,000 homes and related housing services across Wales. Our members employ 4,000 people and spend over £300m in the Welsh economy every year. We are also active in community regeneration throughout Wales, including some of its most deprived communities.   Members work closely with local government, third sector organisations and the Assembly Government to provide a range of services in communities across Wales.

Our charitable objects are to:
Promote, in such manner as shall be consistent with Charity Commission published guidance from time to time and for the benefit of the public in Wales, the voluntary housing sector and the relief of financial hardship through that sector's provision of low cost social housing in particular, but not exclusively, by: providing services, education, training, information, advice and support to providers of such housing in Wales; encouraging and facilitating the provision, construction, improvement and management of such housing by Housing Associations in Wales.

1.2   This six month project has looked into the feasibility and potential value of introducing a data collection and analysis system for social housing lettings and sales in Wales. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland all have systems which generate data from the social housing sector which is used by Governments, regulators, and landlords alike. The information generated by the various systems is used in a variety of ways such as meeting performance indicators, as part of regulation, for informing investment decisions and for housing and community research purposes, for example, in the comparison of rent levels.
Funded through the Welsh Assembly Government's New Ideas Fund, this project looks at an old idea – as the systems used elsewhere in the UK all have their origins in Wales.

1.3   The project looked at the systems currently in use across the UK and the former systems used in Wales. Stakeholder opinion was collected on systems past and present and stakeholders in Wales were asked for their views on the idea of introducing a new system in the future in Wales. The project outlines what a system might look like, what its benefits would be and

what it might cost. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for the Assembly Government to consider.

2   Background

2.1   CORE systems record information on the characteristics of new social housing tenants and the homes they rent and buy, including economic status, ethnicity, primary reason for housing, source of referral and previous tenure of occupant. Launched in 1989 (in 1986/7 in Wales) following a successful pilot, it is regarded by policy makers and practitioners as a useful tool for monitoring housing costs and affordability, identifying trends in housing need and neighbourhood renewal, and measuring performance and policy development. In terms of housing association performance indicators, CORE helps provide the information on the average days taken to re-let properties and also helps in identifying the vacancy rates amongst social housing properties. With regard to the Regulatory Code for Housing Associations in Wales CORE could be used specifically for self assessment regarding rent benchmarking, informing lettings policy and collecting and updating basic stock information, monitoring needs of tenants and monitoring voids.

CORE type systems are used in all other regions of the UK. In England CORE is used by housing associations recording general needs lettings, supported housing lettings and sales of low cost home ownership homes (since 2004 local authorities have also been involved and ninety per cent now participate). Scotland has its SCORE system, which is very similar to CORE where 86% of housing associations participate and local authorities are about to join. Northern Ireland operates NICORE which only housing associations participate in. Following the pilot, a CORE system did operate in Wales until March 2000 – it was originally managed by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations and funded through the Welsh Assembly Government. Later funding was awarded to ORS which operated a much simplified version of the system - "WHATS".

2.2   When funding ended in 2000 it was no longer viable to support the continued operation of the system even in a simplified form. The shortage of robust housing data and performance information was highlighted in the report from the Essex Review "Affordable Housing in Wales: an independent report to the Minister for Housing–June 2008". The report stated that there was a '*lack of a robust evidence base in relation to the extent of the need for additional affordable housing at a national level in Wales'* and also that a lack of an up to date and robust assessment of future housing requirement, was a deficit that required '*urgent attention'*.

3   Key Project features

3.1   This project has two aims:

- To report on whether a CORE/SCORE/NICORE system is needed in Wales, and if so,
- To explore whether these systems' current form would meet the recommendations outlined in the Essex review or whether a modified version will be needed.

3.2   <u>The research has</u>:
- identified and compared the outputs from the various systems in the UK
- highlighted the outputs from these systems and their key uses
- examined how CORE/SCORE/NICORE is funded
- identified which organisations manage the operation of CORE
- identified the resources needed and timescales involved to manage the operation of these systems
- highlighted perceived system shortfalls by users and stakeholders
- led to recommendations for good practice in system use and management

3.3   <u>The methodology involved the following:</u>

- Project Inception & Project Meetings - CHC held an initial meeting with WAG to confirm the proposed methodology, clarify adjustments and reaffirm key aims and milestones. This report will provide the focus for a second meeting, and a final meeting will be held to discuss the draft report.

- Desk research - CHC has carried out literature and web-based research to: review how CORE (and later WHATS) was used in Wales; gather contact information on which organisations/institutions manage CORE in other UK regions; collate and compare information on the operation of CORE in the rest of the UK; and map the outputs from CORE reports against the requirements in the Essex Review.

- Questionnaire design for all interviews and an e-survey for stakeholders (detailed below).

- Interviews - semi-structured face-to-face interviews with managers of CORE projects in other UK regions (NIFHA in Belfast and Centre for Housing Research in St. Andrews University, St. Andrews) - to gather detailed information on the methodology they use (including what systems and processes they use to collect and analyse data) and the level of resources they need to deliver the service; to examine the match between the funding they received to operate the system and the resources they use; to ascertain what they feel are the advantages and disadvantages of the system; and to identify changes which might be made to improve the system and the outputs for end users. An interview was held with Opinion Research Services (ORS) regarding their previous involvement in the WHATS project.

- Telephone and face-to-face interviews were carried out with Performance/Policy Managers and Officers of stakeholder organisations in England (the National Housing Federation, the Tenant Services Authority,

A2 Dominion Housing Association, and Peabody Trust) to: identify what outputs they use from CORE and what for; what they feel are the advantages and disadvantages of the system; gather their views on how the system could be improved.

- Attendance at a CORE training event facilitated by RMC Consultancy.

- Telephone and e-mail contact with the Scottish Government and feedback from Lochaber Housing Association on SCORE.

- An e-survey of Welsh Stakeholders via a semi-structured questionnaire to local authorities and housing associations in Wales to identify perceptions of: the usefulness of CORE type outputs; additional data they might wish to generate from the system; the perceived disadvantages of the system; what's missing from the current logs that should be included to align with the requirements in Essex; and the capacity of HA and LA data recording systems to produce the information required. CHC consulted with the WLGA on the content of the e-Survey.

- Feedback from housing association housing managers at a meeting of CHC's Housing Services Forum on the idea of introducing a CORE type system.

- Feedback from a number of independent housing consultancies on the value of CORE type systems

4. CORE and its use in England

4.1 CORE was launched in 1989. Around 600 housing associations are now completing CORE logs which record more than 125,000 general needs lettings, 90,000 supported housing lettings and 16,000 sales per year. Local authorities were invited to join CORE from April 2004 and over ninety percent of them are now participating. CORE participation is now being included in the Audit Commission KLOEs as a measure of performance. It is mandatory for all housing associations with more than 250 units/ 250 bedspaces (part of the regulatory framework), voluntary for HAs with less than 250 units/bedspaces and voluntary for LAs. CORE logs are submitted electronically – either on-line or via the CORE digital system. Paper logs have been phased out.

4.2 The logs record a wide range of data on both the household and property each time a letting or sale is made. This means that CORE data forms a valuable source of information on a range of issues related to new lets and purchases in the social housing sector. The Centre for Housing Research (CHR) supplies datasets to the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), Communities and Local Government (CLG), National Housing Federation (NHF), researchers and organisations participating in CORE. For local Authorities and housing associations a wealth of CORE information is available to use and analyse – it is available in print, from the CORE website (www.core.ac.uk) and from CHR's CORE Digital software. The TSA and CLG make use of CORE data in a variety of ways:

- **Performance Indicators** – data on source of referral, black and minority ethnic households, statutory homelessness, reason for letting, and average re-let time, are used as performance indicators. Selected data on sales are also used. For further information on Performance Indicators for housing associations, visit www.housingpis.co.uk
- **Regulation** – CORE data is used in assessments of HA performance on issues such as effectiveness of equal opportunities policies, levels of rent and housing benefit-eligibility, service charges, and efficient management of stock. CORE is built into the Regulatory Code in England.
- **Investment** – CORE data on rents and resident incomes is considered in determining the maximum grant subsidy rates available for new development.
- **Research** – in conjunction with data from the RSR (Regulatory and Statistical Return), CORE data has been used in research analyses looking at low demand, performance benchmarking, affordability and cross tenure rent comparisons.
- **Affordability** – information from CORE on household income and housing costs is used in the assessment of housing affordability.
- **Neighbourhood renewal** – because CORE is continuously updated it can be used to construct a sensitive indicator of conditions in neighbourhood renewal areas, and in high and low demand areas.
- **Low demand** – CORE data can provide early warnings of the types and locations of properties that are in low demand. The system allows landlords to keep track of re-let times and monitor progress in relation to internal targets.

4.3   Local authorities have been able to use CORE data to inform their housing needs surveys and Supporting People strategies, to analyse the household characteristics of those accessing social housing and in mapping local lettings data using GIS to track movements within the local authority area. Regional government bodies and the Greater London Authority have used CORE to analyse economic activity among households that were homeless before taking their tenancy. CORE has also been used to provide a baseline for policy work on employment and training initiatives for households in LA temporary accommodation.

4.4   Researchers have been able to link CORE data with other demographic and socio-economic data to aid Housing Association understanding of the impact of their services on particular groups, and effects of external factors on their services. Recent analyses considered characteristics and circumstances of young tenants, next generation of older people, those experiencing domestic violence, and single black males. Researchers have also used CORE data in a major study of low demand in the East Midlands (www.goem.gov.uk) to help show patterns of HA tenancy turnover and abandonment. It has been combined with data on low house prices, tenure concentrations and property types to show how demand in the housing market is affected by interactions between tenures and areas.

4.5   There are a series of outputs: annual reports to the landlords, updates, news, digests, analysis and conference reports. Much of this material is available online.

Specific Feedback from the surveys and interviews

4.6   **Communities and Local Government (CLG)** generally provided a positive view of the uses of CORE for the department and for landlords who participate in the system. For them it is chiefly of use in a policy formulation context as it allows a breakdown of the characteristics of households in social housing. Information such as age, ethnicity, degrees of vulnerability can be fed in to policy decisions, and help inform priorities. A recent practical example of where CORE information was utilised was the work on the Housing Reform Green Paper and the impact of the economic downturn. CLG therefore highlighted the fact that without CORE, policy making decisions in social housing would lack a thorough evidence base.

4.7   The flexible nature of the CORE system was highlighted as a key benefit. The system enables users to use different combinations of variables when running reports. A practical example would be its use in calculating estimates of the reasonable preference criteria in prioritising lettings e.g. homeless, at risk of homelessness, those in overcrowded accommodation. CLG also cited the use of CORE in analysing choice-based lettings policy as an advantage.

4.8 CLG also felt that CORE enabled landlords to benchmark their performance and compare key information on the people they were housing.

Each housing association/local authority can benchmark their performance levels against other landlords using a range of variables eg. Lettings performance, levels of basic rent, service charges. CORE also provides landlords with a strategic overview of housing in their particular area.

4.9 The **Tenant Services Authority (TSA)** is the new regulator for affordable housing in England and was set up following the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. The TSA has taken over the regulatory powers of the Housing Corporation. The key value of CORE to the TSA is the understanding it gives them of the profile of tenants who are accessing social housing. For landlords, it helps each organisation to '*focus on what is happening on the ground'*, which is especially useful in terms of understanding the needs of vulnerable applicants and tenants. Landlords can, using CORE, monitor schemes and who they house, providing key data on property turnover and economic status of tenants. The formulation of lettings policy is therefore an area which the TSA believes can be informed using CORE data. The TSA added that the use made of the data produced by CORE can vary greatly between housing associations and local authorities. Some will utilise the data to form reports for board-level discussions for example whilst others will make minimal use of any outputs provided to them.

In the Review of WHATS carried out in 1999 it was suggested that reinstating the 'leavers section' on the WHATS log *'would be worthwhile, particularly in view of the increasing interest in low demand issues'*. The TSA expressed a similar view due to the fact that currently, information is being collected looking at the characteristics of people entering social housing but not for people leaving.

4.10 The **Centre for Housing Research, University of St Andrews (CHR)** has managed SCORE and CORE, since 1990 and 1999 respectively. The CHR has 19 staff (16 CORE, 3 SCORE) who co-ordinate the day-to-day work on the systems. CHR's role is to analyse the data submitted by the various landlords and formulate data outputs for all those landlords throughout the year. The CHR regards the CORE data as highly useful in terms of policy formulation and uses the data to highlight trends and themes which may be emerging in the provision of social housing. The CORE system results in the simplification over time of data collection and increased efficiency according to representatives of CHR. It also allows CHR to provide Performance Indicator information on a quarterly and annual basis to landlords.
During the final drafting of this research, the contract for delivering CORE services has been re-tendered and TNS Research International[1] will be responsible for CORE services, including data collection, from 1st April. CHR will continue to be responsible for collecting, validating and analysing all CORE data relating to the 2008/9 data year.

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[1] TNS is a custom market research company with offices in over 80 countries. Within the UK, Research International Service Measurement is a specialist in large scale, bespoke data collection projects and has built up a considerable reputation for analysis and data delivery. Their clients include the Office for National Statistics (price collection for the Consumer Prices Index), the Royal Mail (measurement of postal transit times) and Transport for London (travel patterns and revenue apportionment studies). http://www.core.ac.uk/index.cfm

4.11   In addition to the quarterly and annual publications sent to participating landlords, participating HAs and LAs have the option of requesting additional reporting on their individual organisations' data. Landlords are also able to run reports themselves using the web-based system, a feature of which is the option of presenting data in a variety of formats e.g. tables, charts.

4.12   The ability of the system to offer different outputs for different audiences is seen as a great advantage. For example, the CHR uses the CORE system to produce a specific report for Chief Executives containing more strategic level outcomes and figures.

4.13   The **National Housing Federation (NHF)** pointed out that the CORE system had its origins in the introduction of the mixed funded regime in social housing and was designed to collect information on rents and income to ensure that social housing affordability could be monitored at a time when new lettings under assured tenancies would not be subject to fair rents and appropriate rent control. Its original use has been developed and CORE is now useful for tracking the changing socio-economic characteristics of new entrants into the social housing system. The NHF had originally managed the system until CHR won the Housing Corporation tender in 1999. The benefits of CORE are self evident. The system supplies key information for the regulator but for many housing associations it also helps to profile their tenants and provide key management information on their customers. CORE is also useful for the NHF. The output reports are useful but the NHF is able to access all of the data and carries out its own bespoke analysis and reports – predominantly on allocations and lettings. Its greatest use is in helping to resolve the many disputes at a local level between housing associations and local authorities – usually around the nominations process, homelessness and allocations practice. The NHF is part of the Strategic Data and Policy Group (formerly at the Housing Corporation) and is able to be involved in the regular review of the system. It values this as there are always changes which various parties feel should be made to the system, the data it collects and various outputs – these can be debated, tested and resolved collaboratively.

4.14 **A2 Dominion Housing Association** has been actively participating in the CORE system since the mid 1990s. It currently uses the data in its own publications and for informing association policy such as lettings policy, and assists in the drive to create sustainable communities. Individual landlords are able to see whether their systems are effective and fit for purpose, for example, in terms of rent levels, number of properties being let. As CORE records data on each individual involved in the letting, associations are able to monitor who is being housed and their characteristics. The outputs then allow the association to monitor progress on reaching targets, monitor benefit levels and family composition amongst its tenants and ensure a mix of tenures in areas where they have homes. For A2 Dominion, building up a profile of tenants is a key use of the system as they see it.

4.15 The importance of CORE data in identifying weaknesses in policy was also seen as an advantage. The example given referred to development

policy and demand for housing. Housing Associations in England highlighted the uses of CORE when undertaking benchmarking exercises against other associations or local authorities. The relationship between associations and the agent (CHR) is strong and A2 Dominion believes that the receptiveness of CHR to suggestions regarding the changing of logs/addition/dropping of questions ensures the system works positively. On the practical side, the inputting of log data to a digital system takes very little time (estimated 3 minutes per log). The digital nature of the system also alleviates potential for errors as the system has in-built checks to ensure that data is complete and correct before it is submitted to CHR.

Peabody is a housing association based in London that owns over 18,000 homes across the city. Peabody's Lettings Services are responsible for the association's participation in CORE for General Needs and Supported homes. Lettings Managers complete CORE logs with tenants when meeting to sign the new tenancy agreements. Approximately 80% of logs are filled out onsite and 20% in Peabody offices, depending on the customers preference for where the sign up takes place.

4.17   Peabody uses the Academy Housing database system which 'interfaces' with the CORE Digital system. The Academy system and the CORE digital system have been linked by Peabody's own IT team, to enable basic data on rents and the property to be added to each CORE log, automatically. The remaining fields in the CORE log are then populated using the data collected from the tenant. Peabody uses CORE data to generate Key Performance Indicators, to aid discussions with 26 local authorities in London regarding lettings and housing strategy and also as a source of information for Peabody's Diversity Committee who monitor BME lettings. Peabody also use the information for internal referrals, for example for Welfare Benefits advice, employment and training advice and for other support services offered.

4.18   Peabody's Lettings Services explain to tenants why CORE data is being collected and that any information is treated in confidence. The experience in Peabody is that tenants are willing to provide information as it is a national product i.e. it is not a form associated directly with the association, but seen as a national data collection exercise.

4.19   One of the key messages from Peabody was about the need to show why CORE data is of benefit to the whole organisation e.g. the identification of re-let times. Time and effort must be invested in the collection and processing side so that data being collected is accurate and can form the base of policy decisions.   The automatic interaction between Academy and CORE, developed internally by Peabody, obviously reduces the administrative time required to manage CORE. Peabody is also working with the TSA to expand the information collected through CORE.

5. SCORE and its use in Scotland

5.1   SCORE was launched in 1990. In 2007/8 the SCORE system recorded information from 20,810 lettings by housing associations and co-operatives. The SCORE system is being extended to local authorities at present. SCORE is funded by the Scottish Government and managed by the Centre for Housing Research (CHR). 86% of housing associations are currently participating (Scottish Government's guidance for the Annual Performance & Statistical Return (APSR) includes a statement that all HAs should participate in SCORE). SCORE monitors new lettings by housing associations and co-operatives in Scotland (but not supported housing lettings or sales).

5.2 Monitoring is undertaken by submission of a lettings log for each new tenancy, which is completed by the landlord together with the tenant. The lettings log records details about the tenancy, the tenant household and the property being let. Logs are submitted electronically – either on-line or via the SCORE digital system. Paper logs are being phased out. SCORE data collection, preparation and analysis is undertaken by the CHR, at the University of St Andrews. The data gathered concerns many different aspects of the lettings being made including:

- the demographic characteristics of tenant households;
- the pathway by which a household has become a RSL tenant;
- the financial profile of tenant households;
- the type and condition of the property being let;
- the financial aspects of the let being made, including rent and affordability.

5.3 SCORE data forms an invaluable source of information on a range of issues. The CHR supplies data to The Scottish Government, SFHA, CIH Scotland, researchers, and organisations participating in SCORE. For housing associations and local authorities there is a wealth of SCORE information available to use and analyse. The Scottish Government and the SFHA make use of SCORE data in a variety of ways:

- Data on source of referral, ethnicity of household, statutory homelessness, reason for letting, and average relet time, is used to assist in formulating housing policy decisions.
- SCORE data can be used in assessments of housing issues such as effectiveness of equal opportunities policies, levels of rent and housing benefit-eligible service charges, and efficient management of stock.
- SCORE data has been used in research analyses looking at low demand, performance benchmarking, affordability and cross tenure rent comparisons.
- Affordability - information from SCORE on household income and housing costs is used in the assessment of housing affordability.
- Neighbourhood renewal - because SCORE is continuously updated it can be used to construct a sensitive indicator of conditions in neighbourhood renewal areas, and in high and low demand areas.
- Low demand - SCORE data can provide early warnings of the types and locations of properties that are in low demand.

Specific Feedback from the surveys and interviews

5.4   **The Scottish Government (SG)** view is that the only other information on lettings is collected via aggregate returns, i.e. at Registered Social Landlord (Organisation) or Local Authority (Area) level. This provides only very basic information. SCORE on the other hand, being unit level, is far richer. The main benefits centre around details of the characteristics of the tenant / tenancy i.e. are they a single person, family, older person, were they previously homeless, are they working (SG reported seeing a larger number of tenancies to working households, possibly due to the cost of owning as an illustration of SCORE's use). SCORE also provides information on how the household became a tenant of the RSL. All this information can provide useful additional evidence to feed back to policy makers. SG's view is that '*Whilst it's true to say that SCORE does not shape policy by itself, it does provide a source of evidence on which to judge various interventions'*. SG receives quarterly and annual reports and sees the ability to track patterns over time a major advantage.

5.5   In SG's view the main advantage to participants is that SCORE can be used to monitor affordability (this is why SCORE started in the first place). It can also supplement existing management information systems and be used as a cross check when it comes to completing the annual mandatory Annual Performance and Statistical Return (APSR).

5.6   **Lochaber Housing Association** is a registered charity, based in Fort William in the West Highlands of Scotland. The association participates in the SCORE system in Scotland.   SCORE forms are completed as part of the lettings process and are resourced by the association as part of this. The association acknowledges that as their own lettings procedure is '*quite comprehensive',* the completion of SCORE forms does add an extra burden. However, SCORE is easily incorporated into the process thus minimising the burden on officers. If there have been time limitations or if the tenant requests, the SCORE form can be completed at the settling in visit.

5.7   Regarding the outputs of SCORE, the Association does not tend to use the data on a daily operational basis but rather for informing strategic and policy priorities. SCORE provides the association with comprehensive lettings and rents information which is presented to internal committees. The annual report provided through SCORE contains this information.

5.8   For the association the key benefit of SCORE is that it allows the association to obtain detailed demographic data about new tenants. The information on income is especially helpful in assessing the affordability of rents of association properties.

5.9   The association referred to two drawbacks of the system: the incomplete nature of the data (some tenants are unwilling to complete the forms, thus limiting the scope of the data and the uses) and the fact that some tenants find the system intrusive.

6. NICORE and its use in Northern Ireland

6.1 NICORE has been in operation since the mid 1990s in Northern Ireland but unlike the operation of systems in England and Scotland, it is undertaken directly by the membership body for housing associations in the country and not by an independent research agent. It is also still a paper-based system. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) coordinates all logs and responses, validates the data, carries out analysis and produces reports. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is a public body that took over all Council housing in 1972 and manages 90,000 properties. Housing Associations manage 30,000. Since 1988 Housing Associations have provided virtually all new build properties in the sector. All social housing is Northern Ireland is allocated from one list with lettings being made in either housing association properties or NIHE properties, according to the preferences of the applicant.

6.2 All housing associations in Northern Ireland participate in NICORE and provide information on General Needs and Supported lettings. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (the provider of all social rented housing in the public sector) does not participate in the system.

6.3 The Department for Social Development (DSD – a government Department that serves the Northern Ireland Executive) requires Registered Housing Associations in Northern Ireland to submit Annual Regulatory Returns (ARR) by 30th June every year. The DSD also requires quarterly lettings analysis of temporary lettings in housing association properties. The completion of NICORE logs assists associations with the collection of the data required for the ARR as there is an estimated cross over of around 25% between the data required on NICORE forms and that required by the ARR.

6.4 For **NIFHA**, NICORE is seen as a strategic tool that can be used in a variety of ways. It allows the membership body to promote the sector, through the use of statistics in PR material. It also allows NIFHA to brief the media and politicians and contribute to political discussions at Stormont. NICORE data has also been used to counter ill-informed criticism that the sector has received in the past, regarding housing allocation and religious background.

6.5 Representatives of NIFHA felt that the benefits for **housing associations** in Northern Ireland themselves are numerous. These include:
- Assisting housing associations in their own organisation and policy management;
- Helping associations understand the general characteristics of their tenants/clients. NIFHA produces reports for individual associations upon request and these have been used in supporting the development of financial inclusion strategies, for example. Associations need to understand tenants and monitor trends e.g. why people are staying in homes/leaving them, changing demography, where different ethnic groups are housed;
- Allows Benchmarking and performance measurement against other associations – useful for Management Committees;

- Assists associations in completing Annual Regulatory Return (ARR);
- Data collected can be used to ensure associations are complying with strict equalities legislation (sections 74 and 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998). NICORE gathers information on 7 of the 9 categories of person specified by the equality legislation.
- NICORE helps associations to demonstrate accountability and ensures information is collected systematically and accurately. NIFHA state that even if NICORE wasn't operating, information would still have to be collected and NICORE ensures all associations are using the same system.
- NICORE permits analysis of the affordability of the rent of individual households in relation to the household's source and level of income. Then the individual results can be aggregated to monitor overall trends in affordability. NIFHA believes this methodology is superior to those depending on "top down" measures of affordability but it is more resource-intensive.

6.6 Along with the ARR, NICORE data is used by the inspection regime to ensure Housing Associations are operating effective policies e.g. in equalities, or making the best use of their stock through the control of voids.

6.7 NIFHA is however well aware of the **disadvantages** of the system currently operating and these are outlined below:

- The system operating in Northern Ireland remains paper-based and can be inefficient and a large burden on the person inputting data in NIFHA;
- NIFHA and members do not make best use of all the data collected by NICORE and could do much more with it;
- NICORE only collects data from housing associations;
- Only around 60% of logs are returned on time with an estimated 12 days of staff work spent 'chasing' responses;
- There is no detailed formal feedback or evaluation mechanism operating as such, although NIFHA do hold annual seminars with members where feedback is received;
- Data is never 100% complete or accurate;
- Collecting data can be an additional administrative burden on housing officers;
- A small minority of new tenants are not convinced by the confidentiality assurances built into the NICORE system and decline to provide sensitive information such as income and religious affiliation. Overall, however, the response rate is good.

6.8 The **Department for Social Development (DSD)** is a department of the Northern Ireland Executive. It has strategic responsibility for urban regeneration, community and voluntary sector development, social legislation, housing, social security benefits, pensions and child support. The Housing Division within the Department has overall control and responsibility for social housing policy and has regulatory powers over Housing Associations and the

Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The DSD finds the information provided by NICORE 'invaluable' when associations are completing the Annual Returns required by the Northern Ireland Executive. The Department also uses NICORE information to answer information requests it receives. NICORE information is provided to the DSD, by the NIFHA, to answer specific housing-related questions in the Northern Ireland Assembly also. Requests for information from the Minister will also be answered using NICORE data. This illustrates the fact that the DSD use the information when required, rather than on a day-to-day basis.

7. Limitations to the existing systems

7.1 There are clearly disadvantages and drawbacks to the CORE/SCORE and NICORE systems which have been identified by all stakeholders. These include:

- **Incomplete data** - because the systems are relatively new in terms of local authority involvement, data is incomplete. There are data gaps, despite increasing local authority participation, although a weighting method developed by the University of Cambridge calculates estimates for this data. Not all housing associations participate in the systems which can lead to discrepancies with other data sources such the annual statistical returns of each regulator. Not all questions on the log are mandatory which can lead to gaps in the data and subsequent analysis. The systems provide a picture of new lettings, but not all lettings, therefore it can take time to build up a picture using the data.
- **Costs to users** - landlords need to invest in resources to provide data if they are not already collecting such information. The systems are perceived as costly in terms of log completion, training and liaison with the managing agent. There are additional costs for those landlords using electronic Housing Management systems as additional facilities need to capture the data. All of these costs are often seen as a '*regulatory burden'*.
- **Data cleansing** - some questions can prove difficult to answer for some landlords as they will not have the systems in place to collect the data. Significant errors exist in the systems and a significant part of the data analysis process involves identifying and correcting/eliminating data. The systems need to produce reliable and robust data sets.
- **Consistency with other data sets** – CORE and RSR statistics do not always correspond as methodology of collection is sometimes different
- **Staffing** – systems require training at all levels – HA, LA, Quality Assessors in the managing agent. It takes time to build relationships and these will not be in place at the outset of any system. The staff members collecting the information may not necessarily see the benefit of the data collection and may see it as another chore. Information may also be being collected in an alternative format and so the need for a system may be questioned - creating an interest in the system was cited as one of the major issues in implementation.
- **Bureaucracy** – systems can be seen as a chore by housing officers/lettings officers who will have a number of forms/questions to go through with incoming tenants.

- **Supported housing** – difficulties can arise in supported housing schemes, where the landlord may not necessarily manage the property. In such cases it can be difficult to get logs returned or even filled out when a letting is made if the letting officer does not support the goals of the landlord. Problems with filling out logs can also arise when the length of lettings is very short and turnover is high. Clients in such accommodation may also have difficulties providing much of the information required.
- **Changing the logs** – consistency is the key to effective analysis of trends. The temptation is to change or add/delete questions to logs over time. This produces an obvious tension.
- **Voluntary or mandatory** – there is a feeling that landlords should not be compelled to use the systems. It is felt that the systems are valuable and useful but that they should be voluntary.
- **Unused data** – there is a perception that better use could be made of these systems and that only some of the data is used to benefit landlords, the regulator and policy makers.

8. The value of these systems

8.1 Acknowledging that many stakeholders have highlighted limitations and shortcomings in the various systems, all of the respondents have pointed to significant value in having systems like these in place. Whether as regulator, funder or landlord, the systems provide key information which it would be very difficult to generate or access in any other way. Whether systems are paper-based or electronic they provide data which is essential for the effective management of the lettings process, understanding the characteristics of people in social housing, informing policy in such areas as affordability, rent setting, sustainable communities, letting times, etc. It is a key analytical tool for measuring trends in these key areas over time, which is essential for the meaningful assessment of policy, the measurement of performance and for the management of landlords business. CHC's view is that despite the limitations, respondents are overwhelmingly positive about the value of CORE type systems.

9.   CORE and WHATS in Wales

9.1   The **CO**ntinuous **RE**cording of information about lettings (and sales) of housing association properties was initiated in Wales in 1986 – before any of the other UK countries. Fundamentally a research project, it was part funded by Tai Cymru (the body set up to fund and regulate housing associations in Wales) from 1989 and carried out by WFHA, now Community Housing Cymru. It involved housing association staff interviewing tenants at or near the start of their tenancy to record information about the property and the household. This was recorded in a CORE log which allowed information to become part of an extensive database managed by WFHA staff. After checking the data from the log was entered into the SPSS software package. Tenants provided the information voluntarily and the system was confidential.

9.2 The CORE system used in Wales between 1986 and 1995 entailed a series of questions to tenants at the point of letting which allowed a CORE log to be filled in with information about the letting process, the accommodation provided, the tenant household and income and benefits available to the tenant household. There was also a section on the log for information about the leaver from the accommodation that has made the letting possible (in the case of a relet). CORE also included information about transfers when an existing tenant moved to another of the association's properties, and about mutual exchanges between existing tenants of different social landlords. Regular CORE bulletins were produced which helped associations to monitor performance in key areas and in noticing trends in property size, letting types, rent levels and incomes.

9.3 Tai Cymru sponsored the CORE survey as it felt it was a useful way of collecting information on new tenants and buyers, and measuring rents, affordability, local authority nominations and ethnic mix of incoming households to social housing. Tai Cymru's performance standards made it mandatory for all housing associations of a certain size to participate in the CORE system. CORE forms were completed by each association and returned to WFHA who then processed the forms.

9.4 A system of Performance Indicators was set up by Tai Cymru in the early 1990s and WFHA and housing associations were encouraged to use the CORE system to help provide information required by the indicators. Tai Cymru's contract with WFHA required the supply of summary six monthly and yearly reports on lettings and sales, ad hoc additional analyses and the supply of data to individual housing associations to help them complete their performance indicator return. The CORE system became linked to '*an evolving series of Performance Indicators, the reporting of which was made mandatory'*.

9.5 In 1995 Tai Cymru invited 11 organisations to tender for work designed to build up information on incoming occupants of housing association properties and also to gather detailed information on lettings times and voids. Opinion Research Services (ORS) was awarded a 3 year contract. WHATS began in April 1996 and was an evolution of CORE. The decision was taken in late 1998 by Tai Cymru to defer a planned review of WHATS and extend the contract by 1 year to May 2000. A review of the WHATS survey was carried out in 1999 by the National Assembly.

9.6 WHATS included: Half yearly and yearly summary reports for Tai Cymru; an analysis of each Housing Association's lettings and sales – which would help them complete a Performance Indicator return for Tai Cymru; Validation procedures to minimise errors; a helpline for HAs and the provision of bi-lingual services. ORS collated raw data, verified it, provided relevant PIs to each HA (for onward transmission to Tai Cymru) and provided information in table forms on such aspects as rents, household income, housing benefit eligibility and ethnic status of household members. The WHATS survey included 33 housing associations initially with an average of 10,000 lettings logs analysed each year.

9.7   The 1999 Review's conclusions and recommendations were:
- the survey operated efficiently and gathered accurate data.
- the survey is a useful mechanism for collecting performance information and monitoring trends.
- the data was an under-used source for informing policy development and monitoring and was under-used in housing associations.
- the survey was contravening National Assembly for Wales '*Arrangements for the control of statistical surveys'* in its failure to offer respondents the choice of participating in English and Welsh and was contravening the '*Arrangements*' as it failed to offer respondents the choice of participating in the survey.
- that urgent consideration be given to whether the survey should continue.

(Further detail on the WHATS Survey review is provided in Appendix ?)

The Review also noted that the main use of WHATS was in the performance indicator system. The review quoted feedback from an employee of the National Assembly Housing Performance and Finance Division stating *'(WHATS) is invaluable for that (Performance Indicator) purpose, since if it did not exist it would be harder to be sure figures compiled purely from association's own sources were reliable....Much more time and effort would be necessary without WHATS. If the system did not exist each association would have to set up its own recording system and each would need to be validated independently'.*

9.8   The WHATS survey ended in 2000. Since then housing associations have been collecting a limited amount of data at each letting in order to provide information for the regular returns of performance information to the regulator.

10. Key Stakeholder views on introducing a CORE system to Wales

10.1   As part of this project a number of key stakeholders were asked for their opinions about the introduction (or reintroduction) of a CORE type system in Wales. An electronic survey was carried out with local authorities and housing associations in Wales and a number of other relevant stakeholders. It provided background information on the CORE system, a copy of the CORE log used in England in 2009/10 and requested comments and feedback from each organisation.

E-Survey Analysis

10.2 Any system that records new social housing lettings is of direct relevance to both housing associations and local authorities. As a result, CHC produced an E-Survey (Appendix 1) aimed at social landlords in Wales, which sought to investigate the following:

- Previous knowledge and experience of the CORE system;
- Suggestions for data that would/would not be useful to collect in a CORE-type system;
- Information currently being collected by social landlords;
- Potential drawbacks/disadvantages of a CORE-type system in Wales

10.3 The E-Survey was circulated in Mid February 2009 to members of the Community Housing Cymru Housing Services Forum and to Heads of Housing Services in the 22 Local Authorities.

10.4 The E-Survey and associated background information was also circulated to other stakeholder organisation who were requested to provide feedback on the CORE system. These included Shelter Cymru, Cymorth Cymru, Tai Pawb, Welsh Tenants Federation, TPAS and the Wales Audit Office.

10.5 The response rate to the E-Survey from housing associations and local authorities was disappointing with only 12 completed E-Surveys received, but the feedback was still extremely valuable as these associations and authorities are the potential users of any CORE-type system. 10 housing associations responded, and 2 local authorities.

Analysis of the results

10.6 The results of the E-Survey were analysed using Microsoft Excel. A question-by-question breakdown of results is provided below. Percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest figure.

Question 1 - Have you had any previous experience with CORE or any similar data collection systems?

- 83 % of respondents (individually or their organisation) had previous experience of CORE/WHATS.
- 8 % had no previous experience.
- 8 % did not provide an answer.

Question 2 - How useful do you think a recording system for social housing lettings and sales in Wales would be for the following (please tick):

Question 2 used a likert scale with respondents asked to indicate how useful or not a recording system would be for the following:

- Performance Indicators,
- Completing annual returns,
- Policy Development,
- Benchmarking,
- Business Planning.

	1 (Least Useful)	2	3	4	5 (Most useful)
Performance Indicators	2	1	3	4	2
Completing annual returns	1	1	1	6	3
Policy Development	1	1	3	2	5
Benchmarking	1		3	4	4
Business Planning		2	3	3	4

Question 3 a)- The CORE system can provide a range of information relating to tenants and their circumstances. Which of the following information would you find useful?

Six topics of information collected by the CORE system were listed and respondents were asked to state whether or not they would find these useful and also to provide a comment.

Topic 1 - Economic Status of tenant
- 83% of respondents said they would find it useful to have information on the economic status of incoming tenants.
- 8% felt it would not be of any use
- 8% did not provide an answer

Topic 2 - Ethnicity of tenant
- 66% of respondents said they would find it useful to collect information on the ethnicity of incoming tenants.

- 17% said this information was already being collected
- 17% did not provide an answer

Topic 3 - Primary reason for housing
- 83% of respondents said they would find it useful to collect information on the primary reason for housing
- 17% did not provide an answer

Topic 4 - Affordability
- 66% of respondents said they would find it useful to collect information on Affordability
- 17% said they would not find it useful. One respondent commented that '*social landlord rents are affordable'*. Another respondent commented that rents are benchmarked by WAG and such data is collected on the RSL annual return
- 17% did not provide an answer

Topic 5 - Source of Referral
- 66% of respondents said they would find it useful to collect information on the Source of referrals
- 17% said they would not find it useful
- 17% did not provide an answer

Topic 6 - Previous Tenure
- 75% of respondents said they would find it useful to collect information on the previous tenure of the incoming tenant. One of these did say that such information would possibly be of use for research purposes but added that overall use would be limited
- 25% did not provide an answer

Question 3 b) - Is there any additional information not currently being collected which you would find useful? (please provide details)

Respondents provided a range of suggestions for information that could be collected in any CORE-type system. These included:
- number of landlords an applicant has applied to;
- sexual orientation of the tenant;
- Ethnicity information for joint tenants;
- More detailed stock information

A full list of responses is supplied in Appendix 3.

Question 4 a) What would you see as the potential drawbacks to such a system?

A variety of potential drawbacks to the system were highlighted by E-Survey respondents. 33% referred to the additional administrative burden on the landlord as being the major drawback of the system. 8% stated that the fact

only new lettings were collected was a potential negative aspect of the system, as it would take time to see trends developing in the data.

The potential for duplication was highlighted by respondents as a possible drawback of CORE. One respondent stated that much of the information required by CORE would be held by RSLs on their own in-house databases, having been collected through application forms and resident profile exercise.

The possible reluctance of tenants to provide some aspects of the information, in particular the information relating to income, was also seen as a drawback by 25% of respondents.

One respondent drew attention to the fact that many associations are currently looking to 'streamline' their processes and an additional administrative form could be contrary to such aims.

Question 4 b) If you have any experience of the CORE/WHATS system, what disadvantages/problems have you encountered?

Those with experience of CORE supported the view that obtaining information from tenants can be a problem with CORE. 25% of respondents highlighted this issue. 25% also recalled problems with the previous paper-based system in that it was found to be cumbersome and time consuming. The previous system relied on associations sending batches of CORE paper logs to ORS on a monthly basis. This issue would seem to have been largely addressed given the technological advances since the previous system operated in Wales. In England and Scotland the systems are online with associations sending digital 'batches' of logs to the managing company, on a monthly basis. Experience from Northern Ireland, where a paper-based system still operates, suggests that if any system were to be reintroduced in Wales, it would need to be online/digital.

Question 5 a) What kind of data do you currently collect on lettings and sales?

Respondents are collecting a wide range of information relating to lettings and sales, with different landlords collecting varying amounts of information. One respondent said that lettings data being collected by their organisation is limited to household composition, ethnic origin, disability.

Another stated that they are collecting: '*All CORE information plus vanguard measures around sustainability and prevention, rent sync time, recharges/rent arrears at end of tenancy'.* This demonstrates the varied nature of information being collected across the sector.

See appendix 3 for full results.

Question 5 b) How would a recording system, along the lines of CORE, fit in with the data collection systems you currently operate?

Responses to this question were largely positive about a CORE-type system and the potential for such a system to either replace all current data collections relating to lettings information or enhance current collections being run by landlords. Of the 11 answers provided, 8 of them could be classed as positive towards a system, provided Assembly Government equality requirements and local authority homelessness requirements were covered. A web-based system was felt to be a necessity, where the landlord could run their own reports and supply information 'easier and faster'.

One respondent expressed doubts as to whether a CORE system could fit in with current systems in operation, but did not elaborate. Another believes that CORE would not add to any routinely used internal management information, but would add to the policy picture at national level.

Question 6 – Current data collection/management methods

The survey results show that a majority (66%) of respondents are using Housing Management Systems to collect and manage relevant data. Examples of systems used can be found in appendix 3. Others are using a combination of housing management system and a manual, in house system.

The interaction between housing management systems, in-house data management tools and CORE systems is a crucial element. Experience from England has shown that how the CORE system and the landlords internal system interacts is a crucial element in ensuring data is managed and utilised effectively. Some associations, such as the Peabody Trust, have organised their own IT system in such a way that it effectively 'pushes' data onto the CORE system each time a letting is made. Such interaction will require further investigation, should the Assembly Government wish to take forward any CORE system.

Question 7. Should a system such as CORE be mandatory or voluntary for all social landlords? Why?

91% of respondents believe such a system should be mandatory for all social landlords. The Essex review recommendations, the need for comparable national data and the potential use in comparing RSLs and local Authorities were all cited as reasons for a mandatory system.

One respondent did make the point that some social landlords may lack the capacity, either in staff resources or systems used, to collect all the desired information. This would suggest that full engagement with all landlords during the planning stage of a CORE system will be of fundamental importance. This would include consultation on the questions being asked, how data is to be managed and how the system is updated and consulted on.

Question 8. Would you see any potential difficulties in obtaining information from tenants? At what stage do you think such data should be collected?

41% of respondents stated specifically that tenants may be reluctant to provide certain information requested in current CORE systems with income-related data thought to be most sensitive. Of the respondents who highlighted this issue, half of them added the caveat that if tenants knew exactly what the data was being collected for, they would be more willing to provide information. This is supported by evidence from the Peabody Trust and A2 Dominion, who have found that as long as the housing officer explains the confidential nature of the data and the reasons for collection, tenants are more likely to be forthcoming with data. Peabody have also found that as CORE is a national system, rather than one associated with the association itself, people are more responsive.

The fact that much information required in CORE is collected during the application phase was also seen as a reason why the collection could be relatively straightforward

The accuracy of financial information could be a potential difficulty, with one respondent suggesting that without necessary paperwork the information provided could be an estimate at best.

On the issue of when data should be collected data from tenants, 33% suggested the sign up process would be the preferred option, with one stating that tenants may be more willing to provide information at this time. 25% suggested that data should be collected from the application process. One respondent said that the majority of CORE information would be contained on written applications with the tenant giving consent for such information to be used for monitoring purposes.

The induction and verification stages were also suggested as points at which data could be collected.

Question 9. Do you think such a system should collect information relating to Supported Housing Provision? How would this be of benefit to your organisation?

The CORE and SCORE logs cover both General needs and Supported Housing lettings. In Northern Ireland there is a separate Supported Housing log.

Housing associations and Local Authorities in Wales were asked whether they felt Supported Housing information should be collected.

58% said that supported housing lettings should be collected. Main reasons given were that trends could be identified and the information could help local authorities plan for future needs/development projects. On response referred to an increasing need to monitor supported lettings:

'*increasingly we are housing people with support needs in general needs units and we need to get a better understanding of why this is and what the potential impact might be*'.

One respondent felt that the benefit of collecting SP data would primarily be seen at a national level, through the improvement of national data sets, rather than at an individual housing organisation level.

8% disagreed with this view, saying that this is a complex area which should remain outside the CORE process. One added that Details of the characteristics of households going into supported accommodation would be readily available anyway as they would have gone through an assessment process, meaning such a collection would not be too onerous.

Another respondent focused on the collection of supported lettings information and the potential difficulties in collecting data in short stay homeless hostels.

The sharing of such information could also be improved with a new data collection system according to one respondent, as supporting people information is not always distributed as it currently stands.

Views of Key Stakeholders

10.7 **Face to Face meeting with a Welsh Housing Association**
CHC held a face to face meeting with a Welsh housing association in early March 2009. During the meeting CORE was discussed using a semi structured interview format. CHC spoke to a Policy Officer and a Housing Director.

The association were broadly supportive of the aims of a CORE-system to improve data collection regarding lettings and the association referred to potential benefits for national policy making. However it was vital to the association that such systems closely match the information currently being collected to avoid duplication and time wasting at a time when some associations are looking to stream line and improve delivery processes.

Memories of the WHATS system were that it was onerous and time consuming for associations. It was thought to have been administratively cumbersome but with developments in information technology the provision of data could in theory be simplified today according the association. A 'spreadsheet-type' online system was seen as preferable to the filling out of individual forms.

The key value was felt to be at national policy level with a system potentially enabling evaluation of housing policies and funding priorities, thereby facilitating the most effective use of public resources. It is possible that such evaluation could involve analysis of re-let times, helping to monitor the length of time homes remain empty and leading to policies looking to tackle such issues.
For housing associations, it was felt that the size of the associations (and numbers of lettings) would determine how much work was needed to participate in such a system with the suggestion that the bigger the association, the greater the potential upheaval and workload.
The key benefit was thought to be the potential for monitoring household characteristics and the possible implications for developing mixed communities, a view shared by English housing associations.

The need to take into account Common housing registers was also mentioned when considering a collection system on lettings. It would be important to avoid any duplication of data collection as with common registers, the danger could be that the housing association, who would be letting the property, could be collecting information that the local authority previously collected during the process.

10.8 Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
During this research CHC consulted with WLGA and its members to ensure a representative view from local authorities. All 22 local authorities were provided with the E-Survey (Appendix 5) and background information with 2 responding, along with a generic WLGA view.

The WLGA stated that the housing evidence base in Wales has for some time contained serious gaps. The ending of CORE/WHATS in Wales reduced the availability of social housing data in Wales and has had a direct impact on the ability to plan and develop policy at both a national and local level due to the lack of detailed national data on those accessing social housing in Wales.

In principle the WLGA supports the reintroduction of a CORE-type system for registered social landlords but believes it is essential that collection of data does not increase the burden on Local Authorities. The cost at a national level should also be born by the Assembly Government. It will also be important that a CORE type data collection is compatible with currently existing data collection and add to the evidence base rather than duplicate. Any consideration of a reintroduction of CORE is an integral part of the wider discussions about increasing the housing evidence base in Wales.

A CORE-type system only would only collect data on new lettings and therefore it will take some considerable time for a comprehensive picture to be developed. CORE has the potential to provide local authorities with valuable local data to assist with their strategic planning for general needs housing and supported housing. It also has the potential to assist Authorities with the evaluation of a wide range of policies, as well as performance management and benchmarking activity.

It will be important that any CORE type collection takes the opportunity to gather data that will allow the evaluation of the housing policy aspiration of the National Housing Strategy to develop a more flexible housing market. Ideally the CORE system in Wales should have the ability to record purchases and sales of Homebuy properties as well as staircasing up and down in properties let on a flexible tenure basis.

10.9 Cymorth Cymru
Cymorth Cymru are the representative body for providers of housing related support, homelessness and supported living services in Wales.
Cymorth Cymru surveyed its members at the request of CHC, for their views on the CORE system. The overall perception of those who responded was that they didn't believe the information collected from a CORE-type system would be of great use to support providers. Issues were raised around the collection of sensitive information, as requested by CORE, which could prove problematic for some types of services. Respondents also highlighted concerns around passing on sensitive information to a third party, especially in cases where service users were unable to provide informed consent.

10.10 Shelter Cymru
Shelter Cymru is a housing and homelessness charity with offices all over Wales. On CORE, Shelter would see great value in monitoring the characteristics of new social housing tenants. Shelter has said that given the increasing role of social housing as a safety net for people at risk of homelessness it is important for policymakers to fully understand exactly who is utilising the resource and in what circumstances.

Shelter believes that a CORE log in Wales could be altered from the standard 2009/10 log operating in England (Appendix 7) and some suggestions were put forward regarding possible questions:

- The CORE log could be a useful method of establishing whether new tenants were care leavers, prison leavers, refugees or migrant workers.
- CORE represents an opportunity to capture information relating to repeat homelessness. If the letting being entered into is a consequence of homelessness or threatened homelessness, it could be possible to including a question to record whether the new tenant had experienced another separate incidence of homelessness/threatened homelessness on a previous occasion.
- CORE would also be an opportunity of monitoring such issues as sexuality of tenants and how this could impact on their housing status. Shelter would suggest adding 'Sexuality' as an option in Question 10 for example, which looks at the reason for leaving the last settled home.
- The CORE system could also, in Shelter's view, facilitate early intervention with regard to homelessness if landlords could highlight tenants who may be, by their own admission or by the judgement of the landlord, 'at risk of homelessness'.
- Shelter have suggested that the use of National Insurance Numbers within a CORE system could help track repeated rehousing.

Tai Pawb

Tai Pawb promotes race equality and social justice in housing in Wales. Tai Pawb see the collection of CORE data as beneficial in a number of ways. The monitoring of tenants ethnicity is an action point in the Welsh Assembly Government's Race Equality Housing Action Plan for Wales and the collection of detailed information landlords will assist landlords in providing inclusive services which are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Informing letting policy and identifying possible support needs are also seen as potential benefits.

The additional workload for staff was seen a potential drawback as was the potential for inconsistency regarding completion of forms by landlords. The previous paper system in Wales was seen as problematic but the move to an online system would improve the situation. The reluctance of tenants to provide information was cited as a possible problem, with sensitive data such as income seen as a potential difficulty.

10.11 Independent Housing Consultants
One independent housing consultant with experience of the previous CORE / WHATS system provided their views on the system. The point was made that the success of any system does rely heavily on the diligence of housing/lettings officers, a view supported by the Peabody Trust and other social housing providers.

With regard to the information being collected, one consultant was of the view that information required by CORE was generally able to be provided from the data collected on the housing application form with the tenant providing any additional information directly.

Discussing the coverage of any potential CORE system in Wales, it was felt that the system would need to be mandatory for housing associations and local authorities, in order that the best possible information was being collected on who is accessing housing and what their characteristics are. It was however suggested that if made mandatory, the participation in CORE would need to be an Assembly Government regulatory requirement and in the post-Essex review era such a move may not be in keeping with current thinking.

Another independent consultant expressed the view that the absence of CORE data in Wales made the exercise of undertaking research in key areas much more difficult and cited recent work on social housing rents and choice based letting as examples. This highlights the potential for the lack of a CORE system to be a *hidden cost* with other research being denied the opportunity to consider such valuable information.

10.12 HouseMark
A UK provider of housing benchmarking systems was consulted for their views and experiences of CORE. In England, Housemark utilises CORE data for Housing Management & Maintenance Benchmarking submissions. In terms of the potential usefulness of a recording system for social housing lettings and sales in Wales, Housemark provided a breakdown of their views with regard to each area specified in CHC's E-Survey.

A recording system was seen to be of most value potentially in two areas: Policy Development and Business Planning. There is definite potential, according to Housemark, for any recorded information to inform specific policy goals, provided some basic rules on evidence-based policy are followed. In terms of Business Planning, a recording system could prove of value in determining private finance investment in the sector.

Examining key areas where CORE can generate information, Housemark made the following comments:

- Economic status of tenants – There is a potential use for national information on levels of worklessness / benefit dependency.

- Ethnicity – Collection of this information would be useful in examining population demographics and identifying need and demand amongst different ethnic groups.

- Primary reason for housing – Useful to record the main reasons for renting/buying a social housing unit but potential for duplication with waiting list forms and right-to-buy applications. This would also be true in terms of collecting information on the previous tenure of tenant.

- Source of referral – collecting this data could allow landlords to view organisations which are visible to tenants and are reaching them.

There must be a clearly defined value to collecting the range of information contained in CORE, such as delivering housing units that are more appropriate and suitable to the needs of the individual/community. Housemark emphasised, as others have, the need to avoid duplication and double counting with other existing collections.

On the scope of CORE, Housemark acknowledges the limited nature of CORE in that only new lettings and sales are recorded. The suggestion from the organisation is that CORE could potentially be one measure in the drive to understand and monitor how the social housing sector is meeting the needs and aspirations of communities.

Housemark's views on potential drawbacks of a CORE-type system broadly support the views of the E-Survey respondents:

- The data is fairly limited and would need to support other data resources. Making best use of the data, within associations, local authorities and at Government level remains an issue, as referred to in the Review of WHATS produced 10 years ago.
- Duplication is a potential issue, as E-Survey respondents again pointed out, with landlords collecting a range of data for their own purposes and to meet regulatory requirements.
- Wider policy objectives will also not be solved through the use of a CORE system, with the weaknesses identified by the Essex review requiring a range of actions to ensure they are tackled effectively. The question of who will validate the data is also one that would need addressing, and this is no small task. CHC's feedback from the Peabody Trust highlights the level of work CORE can entail for the association staff.

Housemark stressed that it will be important consider the context of data collected and its use/value if conclusions regarding performance are drawn from the results. For example, the different supply issues in rural and urban areas need to be understood when looking at the relative performance of rural and urban housing associations.

A further issue to consider is around validation of the data. The system would need to be clear about who validates the data, what gets validated and what does not.
CHC would suggest that an external audit of the validation procedure may be necessary if a CORE system were reintroduced in Wales, to ensure procedures are effective and fit for purpose.

Housemark supported the majority view that any system would need to be mandatory as without 100% coverage information is of limited use for organisations or nationally for benchmarking and/or policy development.

10.13 CORE/WHATS in a Research context
For the purposes of this research CHC examined several reports, produced for the National assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government, within which reference was made to the CORE and WHATS systems.

A Housing Research Audit for Wales[2], produced in 1999, states that Tai Cymru sponsored WHATS, as well as its predecessor CORE, which has '*provided a regular analysis of households being housed by RSLs in Wales'*. The paper also mentions that Welsh Housing Statistics provides a range of housing-related data in Wales, including lettings. It is worth noting however that the lettings information being provided is confined to numbers of lets and offers little comprehensive detail on these lettings.

A separate research paper entitled 'Applying for Social Housing in Newport'[3] produced by conducted by Cardiff University , Tamsin Stirling and ORS in 2000/2001, also makes use of WHATS data in a wider examination of the views and perceptions of landlords and households in Newport and experiences around social housing within the local authority area. The research refers to WHATS lettings information and highlights an example of the information provided:
'*According to WHATS (Welsh Housing Associations' Tenancies and Sales), during 1999-2000, Charter made 330 lettings in Newport. The vast majority of these (89%) were relets, with the remainder as first lettings (all of which were general needs accommodation). Of the total lettings, some 37% were one bedroom properties, 25% two bedrooms, 30% three bedrooms, just under 4% four bedroom properties and 3% bedsit accommodation.*

This represents an example of WHATS data being used as part of a wider housing study.

10.14 Data Unit
The Data Unit was sceptical about the value of data on lettings to the regulator and to Government more generally. Its view was that as CORE only provides new tenant information rather than general information on all occupants in social housing this has limited value for statisticians. With only a 40% turnover in 5 years this means that data on 60% of occupiers would not be collected. As CORE was not constantly updating information on individual occupiers the data would not be available for the changing circumstances of occupiers. There was a more urgent need for data on house building starts and completions for example and projections on future housing need would not be right unless such issues were sorted out. There was also very little information on Low Cost Home Ownership and the options people had to access.

There was a concession that if the information was of genuine benefit to the housing association, then a case for CORE can be built. There would however need to be a strong policy case by Government for CORE. Without a national perspective it would be far less persuasive. But there was a view that housing policy interest in data was at a low level. Importantly the view was expressed that the Government didn't really use the information at all – this was a cultural issue. Wales does not have the same kind of policy driven and dynamic data hungry culture – unlike England, where there is a much greater

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[2] A Housing Research Audit for Wales, National Assembly for Wales. December 1999.
[3] The Welsh Assembly Government – Applying for Social Housing in Newport. Cardiff University, ORS.

capacity. CLG can make the best use of data in dedicated teams to run scenarios and look in detail at data. Wales has neither the culture nor capacity.

10.15 Welsh Assembly Government

The views of a senior statistician in the Environment, Sustainability and Housing Department were sought. A key point in their view was that it should be the users of the data who decide whether or not information on lettings and sales should be collected. This usually means having a good idea and being able to identify a clear purpose and need for data. The need to avoid duplication, if the information is already being collected was obvious. There was also the potential for linking the collection for letting and sales data under a CORE system to NROSH – more on this in a following section.

In addition to contact with statisticians from the Statistical Directorate, brief discussion has been held with senior policy staff but unfortunately it's not been possible to arrange for a detailed discussion. As this project nears its completion the Housing Directorate's future structure, plans and priorities are being developed, in line with the post Essex agenda of work which the Deputy Housing Minister has begun to put in place. Part of this agenda includes a consideration of the kind and amount of data which is required to meet the needs of the Assembly in terms of determining appropriate housing policy, responding to the housing needs of Welsh communities and mapping out the kind of investment required to improve existing homes and provide for need and demand. The particular purpose of this project is to determine the feasibility of introducing one particular approach to data collection and analysis of social housing lettings and sales. It's clear that this needs to be considered as part of this broad consideration of data collection and analysis by the Assembly Government.

11. Details of a CORE system

There are a number of detailed elements to the CORE system, specifically the set up and maintenance costs and the information technology considerations. Below is an overview of responses received by CHC on these issues.

11.1 Costs

The Tenant Services Authority has advised that the cost of the current CORE contract is £2.5m for 5 years – approx £500k per year for 230,000 HA lettings and sales - or £2.17 per letting. The TSA has however pointed out that the cost of introducing a system will vary depending upon the range of services required - i.e. just straight data collection, or the 'fuller' service of analysis, reporting, communicating with providers, offering a helpdesk, disseminating outputs etc. The TSA has also pointed out that the level of competition for such a contract would influence price.

The Scottish Government has advised that the annual costs of SCORE are currently £135k. 20,810 lettings were recorded in 2007/8 - £6.49 per letting. The comparison of costs per letting between the systems in England and Scotland are quite stark. In an explanation the Scottish Government confirmed that: *'A system such as SCORE requires a certain minimum amount of staff type resource to operate i.e. a portion of a senior manager for oversight, resources to look after the day-to-day contact with the landlords (provide assistance, correct errors etc) and project development, resource to look after and develop the IT systems / website etc. Staffing resource accounts for the bulk of the costs. As the number of lettings increases, the amount of resource required increases at a disproportionate level i.e. significant numbers of additional lets can be absorbed without increasing costs (provided that submission is via Electronic Data Collection). Our cost per unit is currently quite excessive due to development work including re-building of systems, working with the landlords to drop paper submission plus a component to bring Local Authorities on board. Once the development work is complete, the current arrangement allow for the system to exceed 50k lets without significant cost increases which would give a theoretical cost per unit of about £2.70'.*

Costs for NICORE are largely based on approximate figures. Annual running costs (excluding staffing) were estimated to be £2,000 covering printing, postage, telephone calls, training events, SPSS subscription and ICT support. Costs increased significantly when staff costs were included, with totals estimated at around £29,000. Figures relating to the cost of setting up the system in Northern Ireland, were judged to be too old to be of relevance. Rough calculations regarding staff time spent on administering the system, produced a figure of 208 working days annually spent on NICORE, between the two staff members involved.

For the purposes of this research, CHC asked ORS, which previously managed the WHATS system, to produce some approximate calculations around the potential cost of any system if it were reintroduced. Assuming a baseline of 20,000 annual lettings with 34 housing associations and 22 local

authorities involved in the data collection ORS estimated costs for an up-to-date electronic web-based system and/or electronic data submission system as £70-85k for the first year and £35k for the second and subsequent years. This estimate acknowledges that it would be relatively expensive for the initial set-up in year one, but this would yield considerable savings in each of the following years. These costs would include a Helpline to assist landlords but exclude training costs. The final year of the WHATS system (April 1999-May 2000) cost £23.5k. In 1998/99 the number of lettings was 9,509. So the cost per letting was approximately £2.47. Two feedback seminars in 1996/97 cost an additional £2,200.

11.2 CORE systems and NROSH

A number of landlords have raised the issue of NROSH and the extent to which it may provide the kind of data a CORE type system would generate. NROSH is the National Register of Social Housing. It is a central property database containing details of social housing properties in England. It does not currently cover Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, but the Deputy Minister for Housing has agreed in principle to the inclusion of Wales on the NROSH system and discussions are currently ongoing between WAG and CLG about the feasibility and value of introducing the system.

The aim of the property database is to provide neighbourhood level information for the whole country which will be accessible by central, regional and local governments, registered social landlords and other interested parties. Ultimately it is claimed that it will reduce the burden of reporting for housing providers. However, before this aim is achieved landlords will need to understand the requirement of the NROSH database and implement software systems that streamline the process of gathering and transferring data into the new central database system. (The NROSH property database is defined using XML schema and is fully described at the ODPM web site). This site aims to unravel the technical jargon and help users understand the requirements in plain English to aid in software product selection.

As at January 2009 NROSH holds information on 2.25 million dwellings or 56% of the English social housing stock. There is an average of 38 data fields held for each property and 25% of the large registered social landlords and 65% of local authorities are now submitting data to NROSH. In England all RSLs that own or manage 1,000+ properties and any RSLs that are in a group structure are expected to be supplying the NROSH Mandatory Fields by the end of March 2009. These RSLs should be providing all Priority Fields by April 2010. RSLs that own or manage less than 1,000 properties and are not in a group structure are expected to be supplying all Mandatory and Priority Fields by April 2010. CHC experience, from the current research, suggests some associations in England are far more aware than others of the NROSH system and requirements.

NROSH is intended to reduce the time and effort required to produce regulatory and performance monitoring data. For RSLs, NROSH replaces the collection of most of the property information required by the RSR. For LAs, and in some cases Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs),

NROSH replaces the collection of property information required for the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA), the BPSA-AM, the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Claim Form (HRASC) and the Housing Flows Reconciliation form (HFR). A significant benefit is that NROSH eliminates the need for LAs to collect data from RSLs for completion of the HSSA. According to the TSA, *'In the foreseeable future, NROSH will further reduce the burden for both RSLs and LAs in providing the housing stock elements required for the Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales (CORE).'*

We are also aware of discussions which have taken place in the Essex Work-streams regarding these systems and believe that there is some apparent confusion. NROSH and CORE/SCORE/NICORE are different data collection systems. Fundamentally NROSH collects information about bricks and mortar with some additional information about people. CORE/SCORE/NICORE systems collect information about people and have some additional information about the bricks and mortar. The capacity to link the two systems exists. NROSH is a property database to record details of each individual unit of social housing in England. Every property has a UPRN (National Land and Property Gazetteer Unique Property Reference Number), which can be used to identify the property in NROSH and the CORE/SCORE/NICORE system. The potential to look at data spatially and map it is enormously useful. There have been examples of projects where it's been possible to identify a spatial element to complex data which has helped service providers and policy makers to understand the spatial interaction and impact of policy and practice.

We take the view that whatever the merits of extending NROSH to Wales (and there are many), this system will not provide the continuous recording of information on lettings and will therefore not present any of the advantages offered by a CORE/SCORE/NICORE system.

11.3 Information Technology Issues

Many social landlords now use off-the-shelf and bespoke software packages to record and analyse information as part of their business management. In relation to housing management and maintenance information many use systems to record and analyse information on their stock and tenants and to provide appropriate reports. There are a number of commercial housing management software packages available that incorporate the facility to enter/export CORE data. These packages use the e-CORE specifications, provided by the CORE office at the Centre for Housing Research at St Andrews University, to format data to be exported as text files. The resulting files may then be emailed to the CORE office, or imported into the current version of CORE Digital for further editing, validation etc. In some cases, software may be linked directly to the current version of CORE Digital. The Centre's CORE website includes details of a number of software suppliers and their software, including a brief description of the product, contact details and their current compliance status with the 2008/09 e-core specifications.

Telephone discussions took place with Northgate and Aareon – two of these software suppliers. They were asked about their software packages and the

extent to which they could provide social housing clients with the information they would need to enter/export data if a CORE type system existed in Wales. It's clear that the technology suppliers would need to adapt what they already provide their clients in other parts of the UK. Ideally they would require a lead-in time of 6 months in order to provide a fully tested module for use. If the completion of CORE returns became a mandatory requirement of the Assembly Government then as part of their customer support contracts, some suppliers would have to fund the development and testing. Others may wish to pass the cost of developing and testing on to their clients. Aareon in particular made a plea that it would be useful if there was a co-ordinated approach to the collection and analysis of data in housing along with a clear sense of the purpose for its use.

12. Findings and overall conclusions

12.1 Findings and overall conclusions

We feel that the arguments for introducing a CORE type system for Wales are strong. A robust and reliable evidence base should be fundamental to the development and management of effective policy in social housing. It helps inform decisions about the effectiveness of policy, where gaps might exist in provision, how social housing activity on the ground is meeting wider policy agendas and whether the level and intensity of provision is right. Wales has lacked such an evidence base for a decade. It is important to note, that experiences around the previous system in Wales should tell us that a system is only as good as the use made of it by Government, landlords and other bodies and such systems must strike a balance to ensure that information collected is useful and subsequently, can be used effectively.

12.2 The fact that Wales has no national system for collecting and analysing data on social housing lettings and sales points to an inconsistent, and poorer social housing data landscape overall. Some landlords are evidently collecting substantial amounts of information on lettings, whilst others are collecting only limited data. Policy makers therefore have some broad numbers on overall lettings, but little else of great detail. CHC is firmly of the opinion that creating a system for the comprehensive recording and monitoring of lettings and sales in social housing in Wales would offer significant benefits. The evidence gathered from users of CORE type systems across the UK is overwhelmingly positive about the value of having this information, whether they are regulators or landlords. Indeed one housing association expressed the view that the information was so useful they would happily pay for it if Government wasn't paying for a service to provide it. Users of similar systems across the UK did acknowledge the limitations of CORE-type systems and the additional burden it can create, but ultimately the benefits of such systems were found to outweigh the costs.

12.3 When landlords and other stakeholders were asked for their views about the idea of introducing a system in Wales, whilst reasonably positive there was more scepticism of its value, a fear about duplication and concerns about meshing these systems with existing electronic systems which collect different/similar data sets. Importantly there was a view that the Assembly

Government itself needs to be certain about the value and likely use of data produced from a CORE system as in recent years there appears to have been little interest in generating data like this to inform the development of policy.

12.4 The collection of housing related data and ensuring such collections are worthwhile, streamlined and fit for purpose is a key part of the current developments in wider Welsh housing policy. The Essex review and its recommendations have fed into and helped drive existing consultations relating to Affordable Housing Statistics and Housing Management data, along with the ongoing work of the Housing Technical Working Group. CHC believes that the most sensible arena in which the idea of a CORE system should be considered is the Technical Working Group and sub-groups. It is important that an Assembly Government view on its likely value is obtained as part of that consideration.

12.5 Landlords in Wales overall can see a value in CORE systems but need to be reassured that their introduction would replace and not duplicate the existing burden of data collection. They would need to be reassured that a CORE system for Wales would enable them to generate the relevant returns for the Assembly Government in order to satisfy the broad requirements of annual returns and performance indicator information. Landlords would also want to know that relevant IT suppliers would be given sufficient time and information in order to devise appropriate changes to software products to enable a CORE system to complement their existing use of technology. Landlords already collect some of the information a CORE system would require. That's because they have to collect some information as it is a requirement.   Some collect more information which they feed into the decisions they make as businesses. So it's clear that use of data is diverse. It's also clear that with every landlord 'doing their own thing' the opportunities to make comparisons and benchmark across landlords in all parts of Wales is not available and that is the one key advantage of a national system. CHC takes the view that for such a system to be effective it needs to be mandatory.

12.6 The Essex Review referred to the '*lack of a robust evidence base in relation to the extent of the need for additional affordable housing at a national level in Wales'.* A CORE type system could assist in developing the overall picture relating to affordable housing and need in Wales whilst assisting landlords and regulators by creating a uniform system of data collection relating to lettings and sales in social housing. This information could be fed into the process of devising housing strategy at local, regional and national level to help policy makers identify the characteristics of people entering (or re-entering) social housing, the kind of housing backgrounds they have prior to entering social housing, the affordability of social housing, relationships between housing types and lettings, the movement between renting and home-ownership in the sector and many more useful factors. The capacity to generate information from CORE systems on people leaving social housing is also possible.

12.7 The Essex Review called for the Assembly to:

'give *immediate consideration to how an adequate, up-to-date and dynamic information base on housing needs, demand and supply could be developed covering different spatial scales in Wales; and*
'to consider commissioning an up-to-date and ongoing national/regional assessment of current and future housing requirements in Wales;

12.8 CHC believes that this kind of information use will help to provide essential tools for the analysis of where need and supply ought to meet but is only likely to be able to help ensure that sufficient housing of the right type and price is offered in the places where it is most wanted. Without knowing all about who is accessing this housing once it is provided would seem to fail to identify whether provision is truly meeting the needs of a community, beyond putting a roof over someone's head. A CORE system would provide the people information to marry with the information on bricks and mortar and help all stakeholders move beyond the rather sterile arguments about numbers of starts and completions and whether it's enough. This does however require all stakeholders to agree that the generation of this data would lead to its use.

12.9 The information generated by a CORE system could also feed contribute to the capacity building and agenda of work identified by the Essex Report for a '*specific unit within the Assembly Government to:*
- *develop authoritative assessments of affordable housing need*
- *support and work with local authorities' strategic housing fora across Wales.*
- *provide and publish advice on developing methodologies for assessing local housing markets, measuring the local need for affordable housing and the translation of needs in to the delivery of additional affordable housing.*

12.10 This project has stopped short of prescribing a specification for producing a CORE system for Wales. We feel that this will in a way be presumptuous. It would assume that arguments for establishing a system will be accepted by the Assembly Government and also that a CORE system would be given priority in consideration of other data needs at this time. We would suggest however that a CORE system for Wales would have the following characteristics:

- System design and management – something which isn't very different to the present CORE system in England – mandatory for local authorities and housing associations, capturing information on-line on lettings in general needs and supported housing, as well as sales information from Homebuy or other Low Cost Home Ownership initiatives.
- Procurement process – we would recommend that the Assembly Government seeks competitive tenders from suitably qualified contractors to design and manage a system
- Contract content – the offer of assistance from CLG has been made and we are certain that it would be possible for the Assembly Government to have sight of relevant contract documentation from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland

- System set-up – this would represent the most costly part of establishing a system as it would involve familiarising all the users with the system's design, use and operation. This would probably include the establishment of help desks and staff able to offer significant support in the first year as well as training for users.
- Data collection and analysis – the greatest ongoing cost but one which can be minimised through the use of electronic systems, an on-line system and on-line verification to improve the quality of data generated by the system.

- Support for participants – continuing training, on-line and phone support etc.
- A Manual for system users – an on-line and paper manual to help users through the system on a step by step basis
- Link to existing housing management software – this is where existing software suppliers need to be engaged so they are able to produce modules for existing systems to prevent duplication.
- Steering Group membership and role – a group to guide the design, development, implementation, monitoring and review of a system such as CORE – again there would be assistance available from staff in the other UK countries.

12.11 Costs for the creation of such a system are difficult to estimate with any precision. Initially, say for the first year, it may be the case that costs in Wales would be akin to those faced by the Scottish Government are at the scale - £135,000. For 20,000 lettings this is a cost over £6 per letting. However it is acknowledged that these costs fall as set up costs are usually just that, systems bed down in time and users become more familiar with the system and require less support and training (although a training need will always be required), and errors are reduced. Then it might be possible to see costs closer to those in England of £2.49 per letting.

12.13 CORE type systems are fundamentally about people and properties. The development of NROSH (the National Register of Social Housing) provides more potential for a CORE type system to link to a system which links information on tenants with information on property. The potential for spatial analysis of data collected from such systems would be a valuable tool for policy makers and analysts. If the Assembly Government does introduce NROSH to Wales we would encourage linking any CORE type system to NROSH through its unique property referencing code.

In conclusion, this report has set out to satisfy the key research objectives:

- To report on whether a CORE system is needed in Wales, and if so,
- To explore whether CORE in its current form would meet the recommendations outlined in the Essex review or whether a modified version will be needed.

12.14 Whether a CORE system is needed in Wales will ultimately be for Government to decide. Feedback from other areas where such systems are operating has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of the uses of the outputs, to landlords, regulators and other stakeholders. There remains a

presence in the sector in Wales of people with experience of the former CORE and WHATS system and added to this, is the UK-wide background provided by this report, along with the vital feedback from housing associations and local authorities operating at this current time. As stated earlier, the housing policy situation in Wales is changing and all innovations will need to ensure they add value and reduce wastage to ensure that all housing policy is improving the housing situation of people in Wales. Collecting data for the sake of it is pointless; collecting data to improve what we do, is of benefit.

Peter Evans
David Hedges
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March 2009

Appendix 1

E-Survey

Detailed breakdown of answers

The comments below represent the answers provided by E-Survey respondents. Some respondents have made more than one point in their answers. All responses have been anonymised where necessary.

Question 1 - Any previous experience with CORE or similar system?

See main report for results

Question 2

See main report for results

Question 3 a) Which of following would you find useful from CORE?

See main report for results

Question 3 b) - Is there any additional information not currently being collected which you would find useful? (please provide details below)

Answers received:
- The recording of lettings made in, and applications received from, Communities First areas would be useful.
- Support needs.
- Stock and lettings information – reference to NROSH system.
- Length of time that the applicant had waited on waiting list for social housing.
- No. of other landlords that applicant had applied to.
- Need for home to be adapted to suit applicants household needs.
- Need for support in place to help sustain tenancy.
- Sexual orientation – Equality monitoring.
- Religion or Faith-based questions.
- Needs that exist in the house around language, visual or hearing impairment.
- How will data be collated – regional basis is too broad for Wales – should be by county or Local Authority area for example?
- Ethnicity information for any joint tenants – 'Person 1' (main householder) could be British and any BME joint tenant will not be identified.
- In Section 6 of the Lettings Log – leave space by 'any other country' to be completed in free text.
- Ethnicity information for any joint tenants – 'Person 1' (main householder) could be British and any BME joint tenant will not be identified.
- In Section 6 of the Lettings Log – leave space by 'any other country' to be completed in free text
- It is all encompassing.
- More details info on housing benefit – e.g. what level of housing benefit will the tenant qualify for? Full, part etc.
- Employment details / Access to health provision / Medical / disabilities issues.
  - Languages. Which is the tenant's first language? This is particularly relevant in Wales, where the tenant's first language may be Welsh. Also, knowing this will ensure that RSL's communicate with tenants in their first language, which may not be English.

- Visual or Hearing Impairment

Question 4 a) What would you see as the potential drawbacks to such a system?

A number of potential drawbacks were suggested by respondents.

- The additional administrative burden.
- Time and expense of collecting data, verses benefits that accrue.
- Time consuming for staff to complete.
- Restriction of the system to examining new lettings only.
- Data should be accessible and used to develop services or else it may not be a worthwhile process.
- There could be some resistance from some organisations who do not identify the benefits of analysing this information.
- Time in collecting information that we do not use ourselves.
- Need system that enables single entry to our housing system and method of transfer of information that avoids any duplication of inputting.
- Potential data protection issues.
- Reluctance of some tenants to provide the information.
- Tenants' reluctance to provide personal information would mean incomplete information being provided.   Meaningful comparison needs to be made.
- Consider the cost (including subscription to the system) of operation to Local Authority – could be prohibitive.
- It would be useful to know that the info will indeed be used. What are the Objectives for collecting the information?
- There is a lot of duplication when providing this data. Most RSLs will already have the data held on their database from application forms or from resident profile exercises. For example X housing association has info on 70% of its residents from ethnicity, disability to support. Info on rents and offers of accommodation are held in-house.
- Most RSLs carry out a census on their residents every three years so much of the economic status info can be obtained from this information.
- Data is already collected on new residents on the RSL form which is being revised in 2009.
- Many new residents will find the info collected on the return intrusive and would seek reassurance about the confidentiality and security of the data.
- Many Associations are seeking to streamline their processes and tailor their service to what matters to the customer. Completing a long form asking detailed personal info would add further waste to the process
- Lack of access rights to the data once forms submitted. We would like to know what access we could have to the data throughout the year to retrieve statistics.
- Possible duplication of information currently returned to WAG.
- It will increase the workload for staff. In my opinion, the introduction of CORE will not be welcomed by front line staff members who already have busy lives! It is important for all staff to understand the link between the collection of data and how it can be used to inform and influence the development of strategies and plans.
- there is inconsistency as regards the completion of the forms

Question 4 b) If you have any experience of the CORE/WHATS system, what disadvantages/problems have you encountered?

- The systems seemed to work very well, although there were sometimes some difficulties in reconciling the year end figures to the returned forms. This was overcome in the later years when the WHATS system became web based.
- The old systems were paper based. Electronic returns required.

- Tenants not willing to provide certain information/staff not completing at sign up or with tenants so information not always reliable.
- Tenants willingness to provide information particularly about income.
- Staff time.
- Previously, data was collected solely for CORE/WHATS and was not used for any other purpose and occasionally issues around consistency were identified.
- The previous system was a form based system and not electronic which made the task of form filling quite long and complicated.
- Need to ensure that all RSLs and LAs operating in the area are completing the forms, otherwise data incomplete.   It would also be useful to obtain information about an RSL in an LA area so we can compare RSL information.
- As detailed previously, the system was very onerous and difficult to manage. The data Unit has recently spent a great deal of time rationalising the statutory returns and removing duplication. This return seems to take everything back a number of stages.
- Accuracy and inputting of the information and time consuming checks being needed.
- It would also be easier to manage if there was an 'online' form that could be accessed by the Housing Officers with the tenant present to enter data directly onto a form which then flows directly to a database.

Question 5 a) What kind of data do you currently collect on lettings and sales?

- Lettings data is limited to household composition, ethnic origin, disability.
- What is needed for KPIs and equality monitoring
- Numbers of lettings/source of letting/homeless status and ethnicity of new tenant
- Similar to the old WHATS data
- All CORE information plus vanguard measures around sustainability and prevention, rent sync time, recharges/rent arrears at end of tenancy.
- The information we already collect identifies family size, age, income type. ethnicity, special adaptation requirements.
- Housing need.
- Age.
- Family makeup.
- Ethnicity.
- Disability.
- Communication issues (language, large print, etc).
- Number of lettings via transfer/waiting lists, turnaround times, ethnicity, void reason, key dates, rents, tenancy and property details.
- Right to Buy – sale costs and numbers of Sales.
- All data statutorily required
- Very basic, we have some local indicators and complete the relevant forms for the LGDU (WHO 2 and RSL sales)
- Types of allocation, Ethnicity, Type of allocation e.g. Homeless,
- Transfer, General Waiting list, types of properties allocated.
- Allocations by Area

Question 5 b) How would a recording system, along the lines of CORE, fit in with the data collection systems you currently operate?

- I would hope that the new CORE system would be all encompassing, so that it could replace current systems. It would be particularly useful if it was web based and able to produce summary reports with parameters set by myself.
- It probably wouldn't.
- There would be no problem in adopting the CORE system as the main method of data collection so long as it fully covered all of the requirements (both current and future) of LA partners in terms of homeless status and WAG in terms of ethnicity etc.
- We would still have to collect other data, but our existing form would be cut down somewhat.

- It would not add to any routinely used internal management information. However it would provide context in a national picture.
- It would require an additional process.
- If the CORE system is to be web based then this would make supplying the information easier and faster.
- Depends on what is required and how it can be transmitted.
- This could enhance the information that can be gathered from our current system.
- If the CORE system can be adapted to suite what data RSLs currently collect and requires no major changes in terms of collecting very detailed and onerous information then there should not be a problem. It would be useful if a document was produced to outline the base data needed for the exercise so that all RSLS could check that they meet a minimum requirement.
- I feel that it would compliment our current systems.

Question 7. Should a system such as CORE be mandatory or voluntary for all social landlords? Why?

- Should be mandatory, since aggregated statistics would be available to WAG and CHC for policy formulation.
- Mandatory, given the Essex review identified a lack of national data on housing needs etc. No real benefit in collecting partial data
- Mandatory – if it isn't mandatory and some landlords choose not to use the system then you lose the benefit of all Wales comparative data and the ability to undertake regional comparisons effectively.
- Mandatory – this will result in meaningful statistics
- Such information systems are only useful if mandatory
- If information collated is useful for national policy issues/housing agenda then clearly mandatory. Otherwise, voluntary as additional work may be required to collect and collate the information
- If a system is to be re-introduced then this should be mandatory for all RSLs to complete, otherwise the information would be meaningless as it would only provide part of the picture.
- Any system should be as simple as possible and it should very clear what the information would be used for. We would not support adoption on the system used in England – it is far too complex, requires information that is not needed for tenancy management, will take 20 to 30 extra minutes in the selection/letting processes.
- If a system is introduced it should be mandatory and the recipients of the information should demonstrate the uses made of it. If there is a prospect of being forced to participate then more landlords will participate in the design of the system and hopefully we will end up with a realistic / practical solution.
- Mandatory is preferable for consistency of information (as in 4b) but, in practice, some Social Landlords may not have the capacity – system/staff resources – to collect such information.
- In the past the info and the value RSLs got from taking part in this exercise was limited. If a good enough case and robust feedback mechanism was implemented and the future use of the data established then RSLs may be more likely to be interested in using this type of data.
- Mandatory – to ensure we get a true comparison across Wales.
- Mandatory – Then we would have data collected in the same way and would really able to compare Local Authorities, Housing Associations.
- (non Landlord) I think it should be mandatory because information collected from the core data (e.g. household details and housing/communication needs) would:

  o Better inform and influence national and local housing strategy.
  o Enable RSL's to provide more effective customer services.
  o Enable RSL's to know their customers better and adapt and review their services more strategically.

Question 8. Would you see any potential difficulties in obtaining information from tenants? At what stage do you think such data should be collected?

- Most information would be contained on written applications, with the applicant already consenting to information of this type being used for monitoring purposes. The data should be collected at the new tenant induction stage, so that the information is reported as up to date.
- Yes, personal economic status data because it is not needed to measure housing need so it would be new data. Size of household, ages, ethnicity data tends to be collected when a person registers for housing, and regularly updated.
- Some tenant may be unwilling to provide certain information, as is the case now, but if it is undertaken as part of an allocation or sign up process then generally tenants are more willing to assist as they see it as part of the process they have to go through in order to get their home
- Prior to and at sign up.
- We collect this data at verification stage and it has not been a problem for us to date
- The Information is already gathered at the application stage and reconfirmed before an offer of accommodation is made.
- Yes – if the English system is adopted.
- If the information is that used any way for selection / allocation decisions, plus that obtained for tenancy management purposes – then it can be collected during the application, allocation and lettings contacts with tenants.
- Possible difficulty with tenant engagement in answering personal questions and if access is available. Relies on the tenant being present at interview.   Accurate financial information can be difficult to obtain unless tenant has paperwork – otherwise may be an estimate.
- Information could be collected at sign up stage or during first month at new tenancy visit.
- Residents will no doubt question ask why the info is being collected as it asks for such detailed personal information which is not anonymous. It would be useful to ask RSLs what info they already hold about their residents. The norm would be to collate this information at the start of the tenancy, however it would depend on what type of outcomes were expected from the data analysis, ie info on existing tenants or new ones.
- No – as long as there are boxes in the final version to note a tenants choice not to answer some questions. The information should be collected as part of the sign up interview.
- Much of Data is currently collected. Data should be collected at the point of application and thereafter updated annually.
- (non Landlord) Some tenants may be reluctant to provide the information, but I think most would cooperate if they knew why you are collecting the data.

Question 9. Do you think such a system should collect information relating to Supported Housing Provision? How would this be of benefit to your organisation?

- No views on this.
- Yes - the benefit lies primarily with national data capture, not individual housing organisations
- Yes – increasingly we are housing people with support needs in general needs units and we need to get a better understanding of why this is and what the potential impact might be. Part of developing this understanding is knowing what supported housing provision is available and who it is housing and what potential unmet need there is on a national, regional and local basis.
- Yes but would be quite onerous in temporary accommodation such as short stay homeless hostels.
- Yes

- Details of the characteristics of households going into supported accommodation would be readily available anyway as they would have gone through an assessment process, so this shouldn't be onerous. Potentially useful for business planning purposes and for discussions around availability of SPRG/SPG.
- If such a system would collect information relating to Supported Housing provision, again it should be mandatory for all RSLs, for the reasons outlined in 7. We are implementing an internal SP monitoring system that provides this information to us. If the system is mandatory there could be a benefit in benchmarking affordability of Supported Housing.
- Do not know
- Would be useful to identify trends about the people being housed, Also could inform policy/strategy and help LA plan for future needs/develop projects.
- No. This is a complex area which should remain outside this process
- Yes – we should collect information about all of our tenants to get a true picture of all our lettings.
- Yes – This information appears to currently be held by Supporting People but rarely disseminated to "Housing" colleagues

Appendix – 2
Tender Advertisement

Name: User

tion: Organisa

Email:

Please click on the link below to tie this notice to a Response List using the Management suite.

Relate to Tender

Services Restricted Procedure Notice

SECTION I: CONTRACTING AUTHORITY

I.1) NAME, ADDRESSES AND CONTACT POINT(S) Official name: The Housing Corporation, Postal Address: 149 Tottenham Court Road, Town: London, Telephone: 0845 230 7000, E-mail: finance.procurement@housingcorp.gsx.gov.uk, Contact Point(s): , For the attention of: Patrick Nugent, Postal Code: W1T 7BN, Country: UNITED KINGDOM, Fax: 020 7393 2111, General address of the contracting authority (URL): www.housingcorp.gov.uk, Address of the Buyer Profile (URL): ,
I.1.1) Further information can be obtained at As in I.1.
I.1.2) Specifications and additional documents (including documents for a Dynamic Purchasing System) can be obtained at As in I.1.
I.1.3) Tenders or requests to participate must be sent to As in I.1.
I.2.1) Type of contracting authority Body governed by public law
If 'other' please specify
I.2.2) Main activity or activities
General Public Services
Housing and community amenities
If 'other' please specify

I.2.2) The contracting authority is purchasing on behalf of other contracting authorities? No

SECTION II: OBJECT OF THE CONTRACT

II.1) DESCRIPTION
II.1.1) Title attributed to the contract by the contracting authority UK-London: CORE (Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales)
II.1.2) Service Category 10.
II.1.2.1) Main place of performance Data is collected from registered social landlords and local authorities across England
NUTS Code
II.1.3) The notice involves A public contract
II.1.4) Information on framework agreement (if appropriate)

Number
OR, if applicable, maximum number of participants to the framework agreement envisaged
II.1.4.1) Duration of the framework agreement (if appropriate)
Period in year(s)
OR month(s)
Justification for a framework agreement the duration of which exceeds four years
II.1.4.2) Estimated total value of purchases for the entire duration of the framework agreement (give figures only)
Estimated value excluding VAT
OR range: between
and
Currency
Frequency and value of the contracts to be awarded (if possible)
II.1.5) Short Description of the contract or purchase(s) The project name for the data collection system that is being tendered by the Housing Corporation is "CORE", standing for the COntinuous REcording of Lettings and Sales. The Housing Corporation (HC) is a Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Government department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and is the national Government agency that funds new affordable housing and regulates the work of around 2,000 housing associations managing more than two million homes across England. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) jointly funds the CORE contract and uses the information it provides to shape and inform government and national policy for social housing. As a key stakeholder, CLG have a particular interest in local authority provision of social housing as well as wanting to understand the sector overall. The HC is inviting tenders to provide a suite of services to manage and deliver data and information on the majority of social housing lettings and sales in England relating to around 4 million properties that are managed by registered social landlords and local authorities. In 2006/07 around 400,000 lettings were made by local authority and registered social landlords, and around 17,000 sales of social housing property were made by registered social landlords. CORE data form an invaluable source of information on the characteristics of social tenants and purchasers, and the nature of lettings and sales. CORE is used to inform decisions on the regulation and investment of social housing, as well as informing broader policy issues such as affordability of housing, homelessness, worklessness and low cost home ownership schemes. The principal users of CORE data are the HC, CLG, the National Housing Federation (the body representing registered social landlords), and the Audit Commission. RSLs and local authorities use the data to provide internal management information and monitor, benchmark and improve business performance. Research organisations and academic institutions also use CORE data for research into social housing issues. CORE data on rents is used in calculating the nation's Retail Price Index (RPI). Delivering the project involves working with individual local authorities and registered social landlords to obtain good quality, timely and fit for purpose data; and subsequently validating, analysing and reporting on that data at local, regional and national level. The scope of CORE - in terms of both data requirements and data providers - evolves over time to ensure alignment with policy and operational needs. Data collection and collation services. Data analysis services. Market research services. Survey services. Computer and related services.
II.1.6) Common Procurement Vocabulary (CPV)
Main Object: 72314000-9.
Additional Object: 74131100-7.
Additional Object: 72316000-3.
Additional Object: 74131000-6.
Additional Object: 72000000-5.
II.1.7) Contract covered by the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA)? Yes
II.1.8) Division into lots No
If yes, tenders should be submitted for
Lot No
II.1.9) Variants will be accepted Yes
II.2) QUANTITY OR SCOPE OF THE CONTRACT
II.2.1) Total quantity or scope (including all lots and options, if applicable) The Continuous Recording of Lettings & Sales system (CORE) collects information on the majority of registered social landlord (RSL) lettings and sales; and on local authority (LA) lettings; across England. Lettings information is requested for two types of designated properties: "supported housing" (broadly defined as targeted for specific client group, or with special design features) or "general needs housing". Sales information is currently only collected for registered social landlords and could be extended to

Local Authorities (to include for example sales from Low Cost Home Ownership, or Arms Length Management Organisations engaging in shared ownership. Transfers of stock between local authorities, and from local authorities to RSLs, affect ownership of stock and consequently sales and lettings figures over time. Whilst the scope of CORE includes local authorities, at the time of writing, not all local authorities provide data to CORE, and of those that do, not all provide complete data on all lettings. Over 85% (159) of stockholding local authorities (187) are providing some data on their lettings. The remaining local authorities are working towards participation and improving completeness. With increased participation in CORE, it is anticipated that CORE will increase in scope to cover the 400,000 lettings per year in the future. The scope of the services required to fulfil the CORE contract fall into two main areas: (a) standard overlapping 30 month work cycles to specify, collect, validate, report on and analyse data; and (b) development cycles to maintain fit-for-purpose, efficient and effective systems, processes and outputs. The services required from suppliers to fulfil this contract include: project management, specification of data items and the methodological design for collecting data, systems to collect data, data validation, reporting and dissemination of information, analysis of data, and support services for data providers and data consumers. In addition, a continual process of development and improvement of CORE requires suppliers to contribute to reviewing data collections, enhancing data quality, and developing the value and use of CORE. The scope of data collection for CORE may vary during the period that the contract is in force. Data requirements for CORE may vary to keep in line with policy and regulatory requirements which are likely change over the life of the contract. In particular, changes are anticipated in response to requirements of the new social housing regulator. In addition, requirements may vary as a result of the development of a project to create a national register of social housing (the project is known by the acronym "NROSH"), which is set to create a database containing details of each of the 4 million social housing properties in England. For example, some of the (property) data collected by CORE may be collected via NROSH, and there may be a more general need to work closely with the NROSH project. The current scope of data providers for CORE may also change to include for example, privately owned social housing. Changes in the requirements led by any of these drivers may increase or decrease the scope of CORE. We anticipate that the financial value of this contract over the full potential period of 5 work cycles plus a further 2 optional work cycles, will be between GBP4 million and GBP8 million. A new social housing regulator is expected to come into existance from December 2008. It will take over the regulation functions that the Housing Corporation currently own and the Housing Corporation will be wound up. The contracting authority will be whichever of the HC or new regulator is in force at the time the contract is to be signed.

If known, estimated value excluding VAT (give figures only)
OR range: between 4000000
and 8000000
Currency GBP
II.2.2) Options (if applicable) Yes
If yes, description of these options The contract will be let for a period of 5 overlapping work cycles (the first lasting 24 months, the others each lasting 30 months) with an option to extend for up to two further work cycles as detailed in the invitation to tender pack.
If known, provisional timetable for recourse to these options: Period in month(s)
or day(s)
Number of possible renewals (if any):
or Range: between
and
If known, in the case of renewable contracts, estimated time-frame for subsequent contracts: in month(s)
and/or days (from the award of the contract)
II.3) DURATION OF THE CONTRACT OR TIME PERIOD FOR COMPLETION
Either: Period in months 96
And / or days
Or: Starting
And/or ending

SECTION III: LEGAL, ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION

III.1) CONDITIONS RELATING TO THE CONTRACT
III.1.1) Deposits and guarantees required (if applicable) Applicants to tender will be notified
III.1.2) Main financing conditions and payment arrangements and/or reference to the relevant provisions regulating them
III.1.3) Legal form to be taken by the grouping of economic operators to whom the contract is to be awarded (if applicable)

Any bidding consortium or group will be required to nominate a lead partner with whom the Authority can contract, or form itself into a single, distinct, legal entity, before the contract can be awarded.
III.1.4) Other particular conditions to which performance of the contract is subject (if applicable)
If yes, description of particular conditions
III.2) CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION
III.2.1) Personal situation of economic operators, including requirements relating to enrolment on professional or trade registers
Information and formalities necessary for evaluating if requirements are met

(a) is bankrupt or is being wound up, where his affairs are being administered by the court, where he has entered into an arrangement with creditors, where he has suspended business activities or is in any analogous situation arising from

a similar procedure under national laws and regulations;

(b) is the subject of proceedings for a declaration of bankruptcy, for an order for compulsory winding up or administration by the court or of an arrangement with creditors or of any other similar proceedings under national laws and regulations;

(c) has been convicted by a judgment which has the force of res judicata in accordance with the legal provisions of the country of any offence concerning his professional conduct;

(d) has been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authorities can demonstrate;

(e) has not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which he is established or with those of the country of the contracting authority;

(f) has not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which he is established or with those of the country of the contracting authority;

(g) is guilty of serious misrepresentation in supplying the information required under this Section or has not supplied such information;

(h) has been the subject of a conviction for participation in a criminal organisation, as defined in Article 2(1) of Council Joint Action 98/733/JHA;

(i) has been the subject of a conviction for corruption, as defined in Article 3 of the Council Act of 26 May 1972 and Article 3(1) of Council Joint Action 98/742/JHA3 respectively;

(j) has been the subject of a conviction for fraud within the meaning of Article 1 of the Convention relating to the protection of the financial interests of the European Communities;

(k) has been the subject of a conviction for money laundering, as defined in Article 1 of Council Directive 91/308/EEC of 10 June 1991 on prevention of the use of the financial system for the purpose of money laundering.

Information and formalities necessary for evaluating if requirements are met Will be assessed by a pre-qualification questionnaire

III.2.2) Economic and financial capacity

Information and formalities necessary for evaluating if requirements are met (If applicable) Will be assessed by a pre-qualification questionnaire

Minimum level(s) of standards possibly required (if applicable)

III.2.3) Technical capacity

Information and formalities necessary for evaluating if requirements are met (If applicable) Will be assessed by a pre-qualification questionnaire

Minimum level(s) of standards possibly required (if applicable)

III.2.4) Reserved Contracts (if applicable) No

III.3) CONDITIONS SPECIFIC TO SERVICES CONTRACTS

III.3.1) Execution of the service is reserved to a particular profession No

If yes, reference of the relevant law, regulation or administrative provision

III.3.2) Legal entities should indicate the names and professional qualifications of the staff responsible for the execution of the service No

SECTION IV: PROCEDURE

IV.1) TYPE OF PROCEDURE Restricted procedure.

IV.1.2) Limitations on the number of operators that will be invited to tender or to participate (when applicable) Envisaged number of operators

Or Envisaged minimum number 5

and, if appropriate, maximum number 10

Objective criteria for choosing the limited number of candidates: Will be assessed by a pre-qualification questionnaire

IV.2) AWARD CRITERIA

IV.2.1) Award criteria (please tick the relevant box(es)) B) The most economically advantageous tender in terms of: B2) the criteria as stated in the specifications, in the invitation to tender or to negotiate or in the descriptive document.

IV.2.2) An electronic auction will be used

If yes, additional information about electronic auction (if appropriate)

IV.3) ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

IV.3.1 File reference number attributed by the contracting entity (if applicable)

IV.3.2) Previous publication concerning the same contract No

If yes:

IV.3.2.1) Notice number in OJ:

Of

IV.3.2.2) Other previous publications

Notice number in OJ:

Of

IV.3.3) Conditions for obtaining specifications and additional documents (except for a DPS)

Time-limit for receipt of requests for documents or for accessing documents

Time:

Payable documents

If yes, Price (give figures only):

Currency

Terms and method of payment
IV.3.4) Time limit for receipt of tenders or requests to participate
Date 04/08/2008
Time 12:00
IV.3.5) Date of dispatch of invitations to tender or to participate to selected candidates 18/08/2008
IV.3.6) Language(s) in which tenders or requests to participate may be drawn up English
Other - third country
IV.3.8) Conditions for opening tenders
IV.3.8.1) Date, time and place
Date
Time
Place (if applicable)
IV.3.8.2) Persons authorised to be present at the opening of tenders (if applicable)
If yes, authorised persons

SECTION VI: COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

VI.1) THIS IS A RECURRENT PROCUREMENT (if applicable)
If yes, estimated timing for further notices to be published:
VI.2) CONTRACT(S) RELATED TO A PROJECT AND / OR PROGRAMME FINANCED BY EU FUNDS No
If yes, reference to project(s) and / or programme(s)
VI.3) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (if applicable) Respondents to this notice will be provided with a pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) pack containing the questionnaire and further information about the CORE project. Respondents will be required to complete the PQQ to demonstrate their financial standing, capability, track record and capacity to fulfil the requirements of the contract. In addition, examples of specific experience relevant to this contract will be required. The PQQ pack is available on request from finance.procurement@housingcorp.gsx.gov.uk or by writing to the address above.
VI.4) PROCEDURES FOR APPEAL
VI.4.1) Body responsible for appeal procedures
Body responsible for mediation procedures (if applicable)
VI.4.2) Lodging of appeals (please fill heading VI.4.2 OR if need be, heading VI.4.3)
Precise information on deadline(s) for lodging appeals: The authority will incorporate a minimum 10 calendar day standstill period at the point information on the award of the contract is communicated to tenderers. This period allows unsuccessful tenderers to seek further debriefing from the contracting authority before the contract is entered into. Applicants have 2 working days from the notification of the award decision to request additional debriefing and that information has to be provided by the public authority a minimum of 3 working days before the expiry of the standstill period. The Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (SI 2006 No 5) provide for aggrieved parties who have been harmed or are at risk of harm by a breach of the rules to take action in the High Court (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)or Court of Session. Any such action must be brought promptly and, in the event, within 3 months of the grounds of action first arising. Where a contract has not been entered into the Court may order the setting aside of the award decision or order the authority to amend any document and may award damages. If the contract has been entered into the only remedy available to the court is damages. The purpose of the standstill period referred to above is to allow parties to apply to the Courts to set aside the disputed award decision before the contract is entered into.
VI.4.3) Service from which information about the lodging of appeals may be obtained
VI.5) DATE OF DISPATCH OF THIS NOTICE 27/06/2008

END OF NOTICE

Appendix 3
Review of the WHATS Survey – July 1999

A review of the WHATS survey was published in July 1999. It was undertaken by the Housing and Community Renewal division in the National Assembly and involved taped interviews with 10 of the housing associations involved in the survey, ORS, Officials in the National assembly Statistical Directorate, the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations and staff from the National Assembly Housing Performance and Finance Division.

WHATS was set up in April 1996 by Tai Cymru. It evolved from the CORE survey carried out by the WFHA.
WHATS was established on the basis that an external contractor would set up and administer the survey for a 3 year contract period (April 96-May 99). The decision was taken in late 1998 by Tai Cymru to defer a planned review of WHATS and extend the contract by 1 year to May 2000 – the review would be completed during this extension period.

CORE in Wales – Background information
WHATS had its origins in the CORE system, introduced in Wales by the WFHA in late 1980s.
Tai Cymru sponsored the CORE survey as they felt it was a useful way of collecting information on new tenants and buyers, and measuring rents, affordability, local authority nominations and ethnic mix of incoming households to social housing.
Tai Cymru's performance standards made it mandatory for all housing associations of a certain size to participate in the CORE system. CORE forms were completed by each association and returned to WFHA who then processed the forms.

A system of Performance Indicators was set up by Tai Cymru in the early 1990s and the WFHA and housing associations were encouraged to use the CORE system to help provide information required by the indicators.

Tai Cymru's contract with the WFHA required the supply of summary six monthly and yearly reports on lettings and sales, ad hoc additional analyses and the supply of data to individual housing associations to help them complete their performance indicator return.

CORE system became linked to '*an evolving series of Performance Indicators, the reporting of which was made mandatory'.*
1995 - Tai Cymru invited 11 organisations to tender for work designed to build up information on incoming occupants of housing association properties and also to gather detailed information on lettings times and voids.
11 organisations were invited, 6 submitted, and Opinion Research Services submitted the most satisfactory bid.

Contract requirements
WHATS:
- Half yearly and yearly summary reports delivered to Tai Cymru.
- Each Housing Association to be sent an analysis of their lettings and sales – would help them complete PI return for Tai Cymru.
- Validation procedures were to be included to minimise errors.

- Helpline for HAs set up.
- Contractor was to provide bi-lingual services.

ORS would collate raw data, verify it, provide relevant PIs to each HA, for onward transmission to Tai Cymru (now National Assembly). They provided information in table forms on such aspects as rents, household income, housing benefit eligibility and ethnic status of household members.

- Coverage – 33 participating associations initially. These were associations with an active general needs development programme with 2 with no active development programme. Number of logs processed was 10,918 in 1996/97, 10,345 in 1997/98 and 9,509 in 1998/99. Number of sales logs processed was 361 in 1996/97213 in 1997/98 and 38 in 1998/99.
- Administration – WHATS was administered on behalf of National Assembly by ORS.
- Performance Indicators – CORE was seen as a convenient route for associations to gather several of the required performance indicators. '*Although CORE could be used as the basis for an association's indicators, this did not preclude it using its own internal records if it felt that these presented a truer picture'*.

How the system evolved
The Review of WHATS states that ORS had only a short time scale to design the lettings and sales logs before the system *'went live'* in April 1996. A manual was produced (not a contractual requirement) to assist associations when completing the log and similar guidance is produced in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland with their current systems.

Seminars were held to obtain feedback from associations, with the report stating that associations were '*generally complimentary'* about the log and manual. Seminars of this nature are currently run in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and they provide an opportunity for associations and authorities to suggest changes e.g. new questions, to the logs. ORS carried out all data entry.

Errors – it was suggested that problems with the PI figures, which were sent back to all associations at the end of the year, were the result of faulty data being submitted by the association, logs failing to be returned or key values missing from logs. The online system has checks built in to prevent such errors: Logs can only be submitted once all fields have been completed and 'alerts' will flash when the system detects information has been entered which is out of the ordinary and requires checking. In Wales, the review of WHATS refers to the fact that ORS did develop a prototype computer-based input system that associations could use, which would '*incorporate a wide range of validity checks which bar the inputter from making logical errors and highlighting questionable values'.* At the time of WHATS this system was still problematic but it was stated that '*it was possible the programme could be perfected and employed in the future*'. In 2009, such a system is used in England and Scotland although in Northern Ireland the paper logs are sent to the coordinator (NIFHA). For 1999/2000 ORS offered the option of submitting WHATS data as fixed width ASCII files on disc or by email.

How the Survey was used
Review of WHATS refers to that fact that the Performance Indicator return was tied closely to the WHATS system and that there would remain a need to collect information on a number of indicators, '*whether or not WHATS existed'.*

The review states that WHATS was also developed to encourage housing associations to gather and make use of good quality management information to '*help them run their organisations more effectively and efficiently'*. Referring to the success around this aim, the review suggests that at the time of writing there was widespread recognition that accurate, timely and comparative information on incoming tenants and on lettings times and ethnic monitoring '*is essential to good management'*.

For Tai Cymru and the National Assembly, WHATS data was highlighted as being useful for audit purposes including the monitoring of benchmark rent figures and the monitoring of the ethnic mix of tenants. The survey was also highlighted as the sole source of data on matters most asked about in Parliamentary questions referring to housing association tenants.

Views of Respondents

Housing Associations
Generally the information generated by WHATS was thought to be very accurate, with accuracy of data being checked against internal records. It was reported that in general, tenants had few objections to providing information as such data had often been previously provided on the housing application form.

Burden and Costs of the system
The review states that feedback received from associations suggested that in many cases logs were completed from administrative records rather than with tenants. It was suggested that in these cases there is no burden on respondents. Also, even when the majority of the log is filled out with the tenant providing the information, a maximum of ten minutes is required. This concurs with the view of the Peabody Trust.

For Housing Associations, the Review suggested that the burden could be split into two categories:
1. Time spent completing log with the tenant or from applicant records and;
2. Further administrative work needed to photocopy forms, correct missing values, validate data and liaise with the managing agent.

Using estimates obtained from associations who participated in the WHATS system, it was estimated that in 1998/99 for 9,547 logs, the total time expended would be 1,600 hours across all participants. (9,547 logs at 10 minutes per log).

Conclusions and Recommendations of the review
- Survey operating efficiently and gathering accurate data
- Survey is a useful mechanism for collecting performance info. and monitoring trends.
- WHATS data is an under-used source for informing policy development and monitoring. It is under-used in Housing Associations.
- Survey is contravening National Assembly for Wales '*Arrangements for the control of statistical surveys'* in its failure to offer respondents the choice of participating in English and Welsh. Also contravening the '*Arrangements*' as it failed to offer respondents the choice of participating in the survey. Also did not inform them of purposes and uses of the survey.
- That urgent consideration be given to whether the survey should continue.

Other Key Information from WHATS review:
- WHATS is underused for informing policy development and monitoring, and also underused within HAs.
- Housing performance and Finance Division should put pressure on HAs to return sales logs. Should also ensure that associations make it clear to respondents how information will be used and why it is being collected.
- ORS – obtained the contract to provide the information –a 3 year contract from 1996-99. ORS collated raw info, verified it, provided relevant Performance Indicators to each HA for onward transmission to Tai Cymru.
- WHATS administered on behalf of the National Assembly by ORS. HAs were responsible for completing logs with each incoming tenant and buyer, and for sending these to ORS for processing. ORS supplied a model letter for HAs to use to ask respondents to supply info. outlining how it is used, confidentiality issues etc. The logs and manual were produced and distributed by ORS.

Performance Indicators
CORE was seen as a key way for Welsh HAs to gather some of their performance indicators. WHATS became a data source for PIs:
1. Average time taken to re-let general needs and sheltered units;
2. Average assured rents by Local Authority for houses and flats;
3. Average time between handover and start of tenancy for new-build units;
4. Percentage of new-lets and re-lets made to local authority nominees
5. Percentage of lettings made to priority homeless and non priority homeless tenants.

ORS had to supply half-yearly and yearly reports to Tai Cymru which included tables on rents, income, benefit eligibility, economic status, ethnic status. ORS also produced a 6 monthly and yearly summary analysis made available to HAs.

Seminars were held in 1996/97 to obtain feedback from HAs regarding their experiences.

Outputs from WHATS
- The report states that HAs make little use of summary tabulations. Information is 'only scanned' by HA workers. Some feedback suggested that figures are hard to make sense of while others claim that their own data sources are so good that 'they do not need the ORS reports'.
- Associations do have faith in the indicators. – the Performance Indicator report sent annually is of greater interest that the summary tabulations.
- There was an ignorance of how data was used by the National Assembly and a feeling that if information is not used then it should not be collected.

Possible Improvements
- WHATS is seen as well-designed and much improved compared to CORE system. It is also quick and easy to complete.
- Views on transmitting data electronically varied according to size of association and completeness of their internal records. In general, larger associations welcomed this but it would hold no advantage to small associations which make few lettings or sales each year – this point would seem irrelevant now as the electronic transfer of information is widespread and used by all associations and authorities?

- Most felt that an extension to Local Authority lettings would be useful. It would 'put authorities under similar scrutiny to HAs'.
- Items that could be removed from the log – steps in the housing benefit eligibility calculation do not help associations and could be dropped; Leavers section could be re-introduced to show reasons tenancies were ending; 'date previous tenancy ended' could be added to give more insight into voids.

Continuing WHATS with essential changes – these were:
- All respondents to be fully informed about the survey before being asked to participate – aims, uses, confidentiality, right to refuse to supply info.
- All respondents to be offered choice or participating in survey in Welsh or English.

Other recommended changes were:
- To ask for postcode on all logs;
- Encourage development of a data entry programme and forms of electronic data transmission to improve delivery and processing of data and its accuracy;
- Colour code future years logs;
- WAG departments to put pressure on HAs to return sales logs.
- Give detailed consideration to extension of WHATS to local authority lettings – but with a separate sales log;
- WAG department to take over management responsibility for WHATS
- To run regular seminars with HAs to gather views on way system is operating.

Appendix 4
Questionnaire – Managing Agents

CORE (COntinuous REcording) / SCORE / NICORE Research
Questionnaire – Managing Agents

The questions below cover the range of information Community Housing Cymru is seeking to obtain in order to gain an overview of how CORE/SCORE/NICORE operates across the UK.

All information will be collated and anonymised as far as practicable (no individuals will be named). If you would like a copy of the report upon completion please contact Peter Evans at CHC.

Literature

CHC would be grateful to obtain copies of:

- Return forms;
- Output reports;
- Contracts including tender information;
- Copies of spreadsheet used for data entry depending on system used.

Background information

1. Which organisation(s) have commissioned you to deliver the service?

2. What is the length of the contract? Dates of the contract?

3. Why did you decide to bid for the work?

4. What are the key requirements you are expected to deliver on and how much contact are you required to have with the commissioning body?

5. How long have you operated the system for? Has the contract been renewed?

6. How much funding do you receive to operate CORE/SCORE?

7. What approximately would you estimate the running costs of core are annually:

- excluding staff costs
- including staffing costs
- Costs of system set up? Is there any breakdown of costs available?

8. How many days would you say you devote to running the system, including data collection, analysis, report writing and dissemination.
9. How many staff are involved in delivering the service in your organisation and what are their responsibilities?

Data Collection Process
It would be extremely useful if you provide a **brief outline** of how the system works, step-by-step for tenants, Housing Associations/Local Authorities, TSA/DCLG & Scottish Government.
10. Does the data collection cover local authorities and housing associations? Accredited Support Providers?

    If yes:

    What do you believe are the advantages of this?
    What do you feel are the disadvantages?

11. How much additional resources (time and money) would you say is involved with data processing analysis, report writing and dissemination for the LA sector?

12. When during the year do you issue the return forms (logs) and how long do LAs/RSLs have to complete and return them?

13. Can you complete the return forms on line (internet or email)?
    a) Assuming yes do you have requests for hard copies of the form?

14. a) Is it difficult to get forms returned?
    b) What percentage of forms are returned? Housing Association / Local Authority breakdown?
    c) What percentage of forms are returned on time?
    d) How much time is spent chasing questionnaires?

15. Are respondents offered the choice of participating in the CORE survey? Is it voluntary to participate and if so is this made clear at the outset?

16. Is there a system/procedure to allow respondents to pursue any complaints/issues they may have with the survey?

17. How willing are tenants to provide information for CORE?

System

18. What system do you use to input and analysis the data? (Excel, SPSS, bespoke)
19. How long approximately does it take to input all the data?
20. What statistical methods do you use as part of the data analysis?
21. How long does data analysis take?
22. What validation methods do you use? How effective are they in picking up any anomalies?

Reports

23. What outputs/reports are generated from the system?
24. How much time is spent by staff generating these?
25. a) How are the reports used by:
    - Central government/stakeholders
    - HAs/RSLs

    b) Have the reports produced changed over time?
    c) Do you think that all the data collected is used?

27. How accurate do you think CORE information is / is perceived to be by HAs/LAs/ yourselves?

General feedback

28. What do you feel are the advantages/value of the system for:
    - End users (HAs/LAs)
    - Central Government and other stakeholders

29. Do you have feedback/evaluation mechanisms in operation?
30. What do you feel are the disadvantages of the system for:
    - End users
    - Central government and stakeholders
    - Yourselves as service providers
    - Collecting data on all lettings

31. How do you think the CORE system could be improved for:
    - End users
    - Central Government
    - Service providers (yourselves)

32. Is this system useful in terms of helping provide performance indicators for Housing Associations / Local Authorities?

33. Has the system changed over time? In what ways?

34. What is your opinion on the option of making the system mandatory for landlords?

NROSH and Other Data Systems

35. Are you aware of the NROSH being developed by CLG?
36. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of NROSH compared to core for:
    - End users

- Central government/stakeholder organisations (CIH, LGA, Nat Fed)

37. How does NROSH compare to CORE in your view?

38. Are you aware of any other data systems you think would complement the use of CORE in Wales or maybe a better model to use in Wales to generate similar information?

39. Do you have any other comments you think may help with this study?

Thank you very much for your time and assistance. If you require a copy of the report upon completion we will gladly provide you with one.
Many thanks,
Community Housing Cymru

Appendix 5
CORE Research
E-Survey – Draft

Dear Colleague

RE: CORE Research Project

Community Housing Cymru, the membership body for housing associations and mutuals in Wales, has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to investigate the viability of having a CORE (Continuous Recording) system in Wales. CORE is a national information source that records information on the characteristics of both housing association and local authority new social housing tenants and the homes they rent and buy.

As part of our research we would be extremely interested in the views of your organisation on such a system with particular reference to the data collected, the outputs of such a system and the advantages and disadvantages of it. Any suggestions regarding the data which should be collected and the capacity of housing associations/local authorities (delete as applicable) to produce information would be welcomed. A CORE system (followed by WHATS – Welsh Housing Associations Tenancies and Sales) was in operation in relation to HA lettings and sales in Wales until March 2000 – and we're keen to capture the thoughts of anyone who remembers using the previous system.

We hope you will be able to fill out the attached E-Survey which will be used to help formulate the final report, a copy of which will be sent to you. The report is expected to be submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government by April 2009.

Yours Sincerely,

Peter Evans
David Hedges

Enclosed: Background information, E-Survey, Appendix.

E- Survey

Research Background
Community Housing Cymru, the membership body for housing associations and mutuals in Wales, has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a research project designed to explore the desirability of having a CORE (COntinuous REcording) system in Wales. CORE is a system which records information on the characteristics of both housing association and local authority new social housing tenants and the homes they rent and buy – gathered at the point of letting/sale. England has a CORE system, Scotland has SCORE and Northern Ireland has NICORE – they are all slightly different but essentially gather similar information on the characteristics of the people being housed in social housing.

COntinuous REcording (CORE)
CORE is a national information source that records information on the characteristics of new housing association and local authority tenants and the homes they rent and buy. The system collects a wide range of information on new lets, sales and tenants which can be utilized by practioners and policymakers at all levels. Information collected includes:

- The demographic characteristics of the household being let to;
- The path by which a household has become a tenant;
- Financial profile of the household being let to;
- The type and condition of the property being let to;
- The financial aspects of the let being made, including the affordability of the letting.

Currently, versions of the system operate in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. CORE and latterly WHATs (a simplified version of the system) was used in Wales until 2000. However the removal of funding to support the system meant it ceased to operate after this time.

Information is collected from tenants using CORE logs which are filled out by the Housing Association/Local Authority each time a letting or sale is made. These logs are then sent to a central agency where data is collated and validated.

Information from CORE is used in a variety of ways including Performance Indicators, informing policy and regulation, completing regulatory/annual returns, and benchmarking.

The Essex Review
The recording of data relating to housing and tenants has received much attention following recent policy developments in Wales, notably the publication of the 'Essex Review'. In October 2007 the Deputy Minister for Housing Jocelyn Davies established a working group to examine barriers and opportunities presented by the Assembly Government's priority to deliver more affordable homes by 2011.The Affordable Housing Task and Finish group, led by former Government Minister Sue Essex, published its report (known as the Essex Review) in June 2008, which highlighted the lack of a robust evidence base to support housing policy in Wales. The report made several recommendations around the need for reliable evidence on which to develop housing policy in Wales and recommended that the data deficit receives 'urgent attention'.

Methodology
CHC will be seeking the views of a wide range of stakeholders and agencies, with varying experience of the CORE system. It must be stressed that there are other information recording systems for housing is use and the report will highlight any views expressed regarding these alternative systems.
A final report will be produced by April 2009.

To help inform the report CHC have/will be engaging with the following:

- Housing Associations in Wales and England
- Local Authorities and the WLGA
- Welsh Assembly Government
- National Housing Federation
- Tenants Services Authority
- Communities and Local Government;
- Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
- Centre for Housing Research (St. Andrews University)

E-Survey

Name:	
Organisation:	
Email:	
Telephone:	

1. **Have you had any previous experience with CORE or any similar data collection systems?**

2. **How useful do you think a recording system for social housing lettings and sales in Wales would be for the following (please tick):**

	1 (not useful)	2	3	4	5 (very useful)
Performance indicators					
Completing annual returns					
Policy development					
Benchmarking					
Business planning					

3. **a) The CORE system can provide a range of information relating to tenants and their circumstances. Which of the following information would you find useful?**

Information collected	Please tick or provide a comment
Economic status of tenants	
Ethnicity	
Primary reason for housing	
Affordability	
Source of referral	
The previous tenure of the tenant	

b) Is there any additional information not currently being collected which you would find useful? (please provide details below)

4. **a) What would you see as the potential drawbacks to such a system?**

b) If you have any experience of the CORE/WHATS system, what disadvantages/problems have you encountered?

5. a) What kind of data do you currently collect on lettings and sales?

    b) How would a recording system, along the lines of CORE, fit in with the data collection systems you currently operate?

6.   Do you collect this data electronically via:

	YES	NO
A housing management system		
A bespoke system		
Manual system		
Other (please specify)		

Please provide details:

7. Should a system such as CORE be mandatory or voluntary for all social landlords? Why?

8. Would you see any potential difficulties in obtaining information from tenants? At what stage do you think such data should be collected?

9. Do you think such a system should collect information relating to Supported Housing Provision? How would this be of benefit to your organisation?

Please return to peter-evans@chcymru.org.uk by Wednesday 18th February.

CHC
January 2009

Appendix 6
Questionnaire – Housing associations UK

CORE (COntinuous REcording) Research
Questionnaire

CHC Background
Community Housing Cymru is the representative body for housing associations and community housing mutuals in Wales, which are all not-for-profit organisations. Our members provide over 95,000 homes and related housing services across Wales. Our members employ 4,000 people and spend over £400m in the Welsh economy every year. We are also active in community regeneration throughout Wales, including some of its most deprived communities. We aim to enable members to work effectively and flourish in Wales by:

- Positively promoting housing associations as non-statutory, non-profit, ethical providers of affordable housing, support and community regeneration services
- Seeking to develop a political, regulatory and financial framework that supports housing association activities
- Developing, supporting and disseminating good practice
- Encouraging and enabling members to provide accessible homes in sustainable communities throughout Wales
- Working in partnership with key bodies in Wales.

Research Background
CHC has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a research project designed to explore the desirability of having a CORE (COntinuous REcording) system in Wales.
CORE is a national information source used in all other UK regions, apart from Wales, that records information on the characteristics of both housing association and local authority new social housing tenants. CORE and latterly WHATs (a simplified version of the system) was used in Wales until 2000; however, the removal of funding to support the system meant it ceased to operate after this time.

The 'Essex' Review, a recent review of housing in Wales, has highlighted the lack of a robust evidence base to support housing policy in Wales, and there is a strong view that CORE or a system that performs a similar function should be reintroduced. This research has very much been commissioned with the Essex Review in mind.

The aims of this project are therefore twofold:
- To report on whether a CORE system is needed in Wales, and if so;
- To explore whether CORE in its current form would meet the recommendations outlined in the Essex review or whether a modified version will be needed.

More specifically the research will:
- identify and compare the outputs from the CORE system in each UK region;
- highlight what organisations/ institutions are using the outputs from the system and what for;
- examine how CORE is funded in the other regions in the UK;
- identify which organisations manage the operation of CORE in each region;
- identify the resources needed and timescales involved to manage the effective operation of the system i.e. the management of data collection, preparation, analysis, reporting, publications/dissemination;
- highlight any perceived shortfalls of the system by system users and stakeholders;
- make recommendations and highlight good practice in the use and management of CORE systems.

Questions
The questions below cover the range of information CHC is seeking to obtain in order to gain an overview of how organisations use and engage with CORE. All information will be collated and anonymised as far as practicable (no individuals will be named). If you would like a copy of the report upon completion please contact Peter Evans at CHC. We are extremely grateful for your assistance.

1. **What are the benefits / drawbacks of CORE for your organisation?**

2. **How does your organisation use CORE on a day-to-day basis?**

3. **How much time, energy, commitment to CORE is required? How is it managed in terms of staff resources?**

4. **Does the CORE system assist your organisation with annual returns / management information / benchmarking?**

5. **How much use is made of quarterly / annual reports by your organisation?**

6. **Is the information provided to your organisation presented in a useful format? What elements are most/least useful? Could you suggest any improvements?**

7. **Do you have feedback about any errors/anomalies in the data you submit? Do you have systems in place to deal with these errors/anomalies?**

8. **Do you use housing management systems? Do these assist you with CORE?**

CHC
January 2009

Appendix 7
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