



Stevenage Borough Council:

Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2023

Report of Findings

April 2024



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Executive Summary

Summary of Key Findings and Conclusions

Introduction

- ¹ Opinion Research Services (ORS) was commissioned by Stevenage Borough Council (the Council) to prepare a Private Housing Stock Condition Survey. Local authorities have an obligation under the Housing Act 2004 to keep housing conditions in their area under review for all tenures, including private sector housing.

1. Introducing the Study

Background to the project

Introduction

- 1.1 Opinion Research Services (ORS) was commissioned by Stevenage Borough Council to prepare a Private Housing Stock Condition Survey. Local authorities have an obligation under the Housing Act 2004 to keep housing conditions in their area under review for all tenures, including private sector housing.
- 1.2 While the central focus of this study is on the private sector stock; we have also included many instances of data relating to the affordable sector for purposes of completeness.

The Council's Obligations and Powers

- 1.3 Councils have an obligation to enforce certain statutory minimum standards in housing and have powers that they can use to do this; while further non-mandatory powers are available to the Authority under a range of legislation including the Housing Act 2004.
- 1.4 Local authorities are also required by Government to complete certain returns indicating the distribution of their housing stock by tenure and the condition of certain aspects of the stock.

Guidance regarding House Condition Surveys

- 1.5 Guidance on how to conduct surveys has evolved over time:
 - » Local House Conditions Survey Guidance (1993; updated 2000): the Department of the Environment issued a Guidance Manual setting out how Local House Condition Surveys should be conducted, including a detailed survey form in a modular format, and a step-by-step guide to implementing a survey;
 - » Housing Health and Safety Rating System Guidance (HHSRS): this guidance was issued in 2004 and updated in 2006.
- 1.6 Local authorities are encouraged by both sets of guidance to make full use of information gathered from house condition surveys in conjunction with data from other sources.

2024 Stevenage HSCS

- 1.7 While the old town of Stevenage has a long history, in 1946 Stevenage was chosen as the site of a new town, one of eight in the Greater London area. Each new town would provide housing for 60,000 people. This led to the rapid development of Stevenage, with a large part of the current housing stock having been built between the 1950s and the 1970s. Much of the stock was built as social rented; and remained so until many properties changed to owner occupation under Right to Buy policies in the 1980s.

- ^{1.8} In recent years, the modelling of housing stock condition has evolved considerably. Much more secondary data has been published, including access to all Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) conducted across the whole of England since 2008. This means that fewer household surveys are typically required for a stock condition survey.
- ^{1.9} Using information from the English Housing Survey (EHS), the Council's own data, and a range of available secondary data, including the full Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) record, Census data, DWP benefit claim records, Valuation Office Agency (VOA) record for council tax, Land Registry records for house prices and a wide range of Office for National Statistics (ONS) data it is possible to estimate the condition of the housing stock of the Borough without undertaking any physical surveys. For example, it is known that older properties and those in the private rented sector are likely to be in poorer condition, while new builds and those in the social rented sector are likely to be more energy efficient and in better condition. Using this information it is possible to derive estimates at ward level for the condition of the housing stock.

Comparing the Study Area with England

- ^{1.10} To gain an understanding of how the study area compares to the rest of England, ORS used the EHS 2020 and other data for the whole of the East of England and also for the whole of England in many of the tables. This places Stevenage's data into wider context.
- ^{1.11} The figures presented in this report are estimates. Quoting an exact figure for any number (for example the number of privately rented dwellings which are non-decent) is not necessary and would not be accurate. Percentages within the report are only quoted to whole numbers or 1 decimal place for the same reason. An additional reason for doing this is that most issues will be changing on a daily basis across a housing stock of this size, so the results can only ever be a snapshot in time.

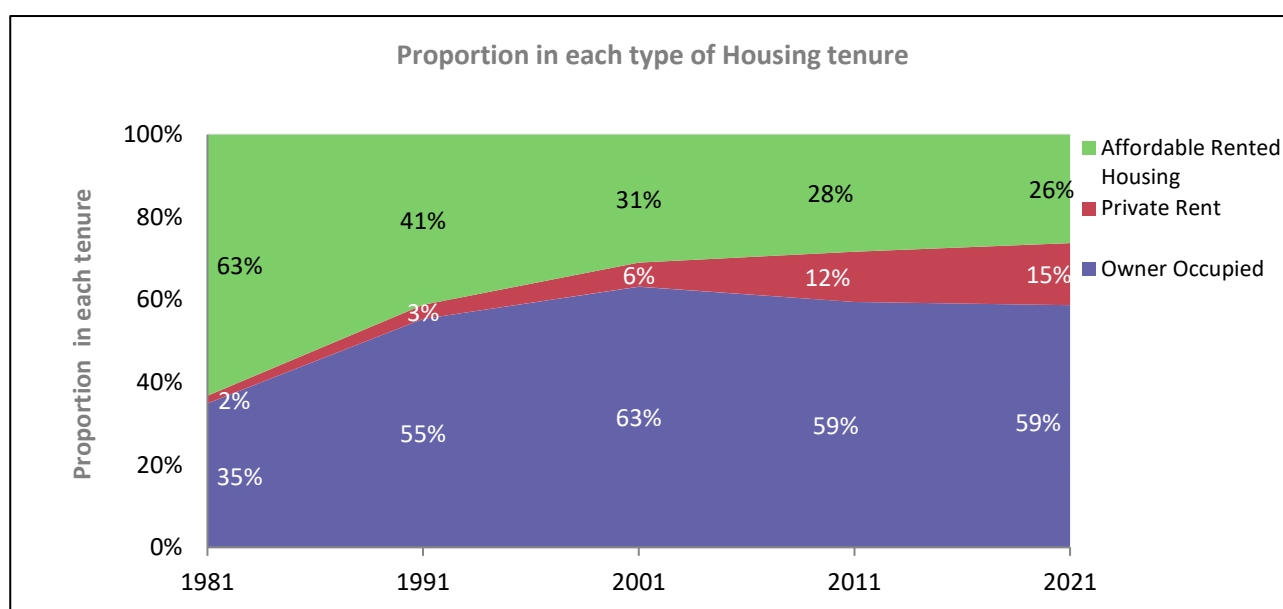
2. Housing Profile

The Housing Stock of Stevenage

Housing Tenure Trends

^{2.1} When considering the local housing market, it is worth noting the changes to tenure over the past forty years. Figure 1 shows how the most notable change in Stevenage has been the decline in the proportion of people in affordable rented properties from 63% in 1981 to 26% in 2021. In contrast, both private rent and owner-occupied properties have seen a growth. There was a particularly strong increase in owner occupiers between 1981 and 1991, which was due to the introduction of Right to Buy policies and their impact on Stevenage's very large affordable housing stock.

Figure 1: Housing tenure trends for Stevenage (1981 – 2021). Source: UK Census of Population



^{2.2} During the same period the actual volume of housing in Stevenage has risen from 25,561 to 36,511 households. The table below provides detailed data for the period.

Figure 2: Number of Households in Stevenage by Tenure 1981-2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Number of Households					Net Change			
	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021	1981-1991	1991-2001	2001-2011	2011-2021
Owner occupied	8,919	16,075	20,686	20,761	21,424	+7,156	+4,611	+75	+663
Private rent	476	983	1,912	4,235	5,496	+507	+929	+2,323	+1,261
Affordable Rented Housing	16,166	11,979	10,156	9,902	9,591	-4,187	-1,823	-254	-311
TOTAL	25,561	29,037	32,754	34,898	36,511	+3,476	+3,717	+2,144	+1,613

- ^{2.3} Figure 3 shows that owner occupied and private rent properties in Stevenage are lower than the levels of East of England and England as a whole, whilst the proportion in affordable rent is higher.

Figure 3: Percentage of Households by Tenure 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Households		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Owner occupied	59%	66%	62%
Private rent	15%	18%	21%
Affordable Rented Housing	26%	15%	17%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Figure 4: Change in Percentage of Households by Tenure 2011- 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Households		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Owner occupied	-0.5%	-2.3%	-1.8%
Private rent	2.9%	2.3%	2.4%
Affordable Rented Housing	-2.4%	-1.0%	-0.6%
TOTAL	0%	-1.0%	0%

The Private Rented Sector

- ^{2.4} The long-term growth in the private rented sector in Stevenage is consistent with national trends. Growth in the sector seems likely to continue, driven by a combination of demand and supply factors:
- » Increasing demand from more households;
 - » Recent reductions in incomes (in real terms);
 - » Affordability of owner occupation reducing;
 - » Changing Bank lending practices;
 - » The impact of inheritance and the difficulties involved in selling properties;
 - » Pensions reform: pension drawdowns invested in buy to let property.
- ^{2.5} The growth of the Private Rented Sector has been acknowledged as both a growing and long-term option for meeting the nation's housing need. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG now DLUHC) with the Intermediary Mortgage Lenders Association forecasted that the private rented sector will increase in size to 35% nationally by 2032.¹ On this basis, the number of households renting privately could double again over the next twenty years.
- ^{2.6} As the PRS expands and other sectors contract, it is clear that many households who would traditionally meet their housing needs in other sectors are now renting privately. This includes many households currently unable to afford their housing costs, which can be seen from the expansion of families receiving housing benefit in the sector, in particular since the start of the most recent recession.

¹ <http://news.rla.org.uk/rpi-rent-revolution/>

- ^{2.7} The Office for Budget Responsibility analysis of the UK's public finances for Government explicitly recognises a likely growth in the share of housing benefit claimants in the private rented sector in its Economic and Fiscal Outlook (March 2014)²:

"The share of [housing benefit] spending accounted for by the private rented sector is forecast to rise from 30 per cent in 2007-08 to 40 per cent by 2018-19. ... We expect the share of claimants in the private rented sector to continue rising over the forecast period, but for average awards to rise more slowly than nominal GDP per capita due to policy, including on uprating." (Paragraphs 4.152-154)

- ^{2.8} It should be noted that since the introduction of Universal Credit, no more updated figures specifically concerning housing benefit have been produced by the Office for Budget responsibility.
- ^{2.9} Importantly, the Government sees the PRS having an important and long-term role in meeting the housing need of the nation; and although the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and housing needs Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) do not mention the current or future role of housing benefit, the policy to support low-income households in the private rented sector with housing benefit is long-standing and housing benefit is explicitly factored into the long-term forecasts for public spending.
- ^{2.10} Policy by both Government and Local Authorities is focused on improving Management and Maintenance in the sector (via licensing or self-regulation schemes) and expanding supply³ (including the Build to Rent investment scheme⁴). The Government published "*A Fairer Private Rented Sector*" in June 2022⁵, and the Executive summary stated:

"The role of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) has changed in recent decades, as the sector has doubled in size, with landlords and tenants becoming increasingly diverse. Today, the sector needs to serve renters looking for flexibility and people who need to move quickly to progress their careers, while providing stability and security for young families and older renters."

- ^{2.11} Given this context, it is important for local authorities to recognise the role of the private rented sector at a local level. It remains appropriate to recognise that the private rented sector will continue to make an important contribution towards providing housing options for households unable to afford their housing costs in the future.

² <http://cdn.budgetresponsibility.org.uk/37839-OBR-Cm-8820-accessible-web-v2.pdf>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/private-rented-homes-review-of-the-barriers-to-institutional-investment>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-to-rent-round-2-initial-due-diligence>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-fairer-private-rented-sector>

Housing Property Type Trends

- ^{2.12} Figure 5 showed an overall increase in properties occupied from the 2011 Census to the 2021 Census with the largest increase being in flats. Although many of the properties in Stevenage are terraced houses, there has been a decrease over the years. A reduction in the number of terraced properties does happen in some areas due to the conversion of houses to flats.
- ^{2.13} However, Figure 6 indicates that converted flats only make up a small amount of this increase, with a larger part being from purpose-built flats. The Council's own records also indicate that there were 226 licensed and 84 unlicensed Houses in Multiple occupation (HMOs) operating in Stevenage in February 2024. This number wouldn't account for a sharp drop in the number of terraced houses in Stevenage. Therefore, it is more likely that the reduction in the number of terraced properties is due to some being vacant at the time of the 2021 Census.

Figure 5: Number of Households in Stevenage by Property Type 2011-2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Number of Households		
	2011	2021	2011-2021
Detached	4,059	4,354	295
Semi-detached	6,397	7,133	736
Terraced	17,531	16,848	-683
Flat or maisonette (purpose built or converted)	6,631	7,950	1,319
Caravan or other mobile or temporary structure	261	228	-33
TOTAL	34,879	36,513	1,634

- ^{2.14} The table below shows how flats in Stevenage have increased over time. The 2021 Census indicates a rise in mostly purpose-built flats, but also in converted flats.

Figure 6: Number of Households in Stevenage by Flat Type 2011-2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Number of Households		
	2011	2021	2011-2021
Purpose Built flat	6,311	7,356	1,045
Part of a convert or shared house including bedsits	320	594	274
In a commercial building	242	211	-31
TOTAL	6,873	8,161	1,288

^{2.15} Figure 7 brings together the information on property type and tenure. Terraced housing takes up the majority across tenure types, especially dominating owner occupied stock. However, private rented properties are shown to be mostly flats.

Figure 7: Number of Households in Stevenage by Property Type and Tenure 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Number of Households		
	Owner Occupied	Private Rented	Affordable Rented Housing
Detached	3,748	345	259
Semi-detached	4,639	896	1,598
Terraced	10,950	1,836	4,062
Flat or maisonette (purpose built or converted)	2,081	2,415	3,664
Caravan or other mobile or temporary structure	5	4	8
TOTAL	21,423	5,496	9,591

^{2.16} In comparison with the East of England and England as a whole, Stevenage contains a much higher share of terraced properties and a lower share of detached properties.

Figure 8: Percentage of Households by Property Type 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Households		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Detached	11.9%	29.6%	22.9%
Semi-detached	19.5%	31.0%	31.5%
Terraced	46.1%	21.2%	23.0%
Flat or maisonette	22.4%	17.6%	22.2%
Caravan or other	0.0%	0.6%	0.4%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Age of the Housing Stock

^{2.17} The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) Council Tax database contains records of when a property was built. For Stevenage, most of the total stock was built after 1945; with over half built between 1945-1972. It should be remembered that the best predictor for the overall condition of the house stock of an area is the age of the properties.

Figure 9: Number of Households in Stevenage by Property Age 2022 (Source: VOA Council Tax: 2022)

	Number of Properties
Pre 1900	430
1900-1939	740
1945 - 1972	21,260
1973 - 1999	10,560
2000-2012	2,920
2013-2022	1,950
TOTAL	37,860

^{2.18} Across the wards of Stevenage, the age of the properties is similar with the majority built between 1945 and 1999 (Figure 10). However, specifically Old Town has a higher proportion of properties built pre 1939 than the rest of the wards. Also, Bedwell and St Nicholas have higher proportions of more recently built properties post 2013 than the rest of the wards.

Figure 10: Percentage of Dwellings by Age Band 2021 (Source: VOA Council Tax: 2022)

	Percentage of Households					
	Pre 1900	1900-1939	1945 - 1972	1973 - 1999	2000-2012	2013-2022
Bandley Hill	0.0%	0.0%	45.1%	50.7%	0.4%	3.9%
Bedwell	0.0%	0.0%	76.2%	4.1%	4.1%	15.7%
Chells	0.0%	0.0%	78.8%	10.9%	10.2%	0.0%
Longmeadow	0.8%	0.0%	58.1%	35.5%	4.8%	0.8%
Manor	0.4%	0.0%	29.7%	64.1%	3.7%	2.2%
Martins Wood	0.0%	0.0%	61.3%	35.8%	3.0%	0.0%
Old Town	7.6%	15.7%	32.8%	15.4%	23.2%	5.3%
Pin Green	0.0%	0.0%	85.8%	2.1%	9.0%	3.1%
Roebuck	0.7%	1.0%	58.4%	29.4%	3.4%	7.1%
Shephall	0.8%	0.0%	95.7%	0.8%	2.4%	0.4%
St Nicholas	0.0%	0.0%	76.6%	1.2%	7.2%	15.0%
Symonds Green	1.5%	1.5%	9.3%	84.8%	1.1%	1.9%
Woodfield	1.4%	0.5%	19.5%	52.9%	24.4%	1.4%

^{2.19} On average, the housing stock of Stevenage is younger than that of the East of England or England as a whole (Figure 11). Stevenage has far less properties built pre 1939 in comparison.

Figure 11: Percentage of Dwellings by Property Age 2022 (Source: VOA Council Tax: 2022)

	Percentage of Dwellings		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Pre 1900	1.1%	10.4%	15.4%
1900-1939	2.0%	14.2%	20.6%
1945 - 1972	56.2%	30.4%	26.4%
1973 - 1999	27.9%	27.0%	21.4%
2000-2012	7.7%	10.0%	8.8%
2013-2022	5.2%	8.0%	7.3%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Overcrowding

^{2.20} The Census 2021 calculates whether a property is overcrowded or under-occupied based upon the bedroom standard. This is calculated by comparing the number of bedrooms the household requires to the number of available bedrooms.

^{2.21} The number of bedrooms the household requires is calculated according to the Bedroom Standard, where the following should have their own bedroom:

1. Adult couple
2. Any remaining adult (aged 21 years or over);
3. Two males (aged 10 to 20 years);
4. One male (aged 10 to 20 years) and one male (aged 9 years or under), if there are an odd number of males aged 10-20;
5. One male aged 10-20 if there are no males aged 0-9 to pair with him;
6. Repeat steps 3-5 for females;
7. Two children (aged 9 years or under) regardless of sex;
8. Any remaining child (aged 9 years or under).

^{2.22} An occupancy rating of:

-1 or less implies that a household's accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required (overcrowded);

+1 or more implies that a household's accommodation has more bedrooms than required (under-occupied);

0 suggests that a household's accommodation has an ideal number of bedrooms.

- ^{2.23} Across Stevenage as a whole, the number of overcrowded households rose slightly between the 2011 and 2021 Censuses. This saw the overcrowding rate rise from 3.8% to 4.9% overall. It is important to note that 62% of all households technically under-occupy their housing according to the bedroom standard, with 31% of households under-occupying by 2 or more bedrooms. However, 0.5% of households are overcrowded by 2 or more bedrooms.

Figure 12: Under-occupation and Overcrowding in Stevenage 2011-2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Households		
	2011	2021	2011-2021
Under-occupied by 2+ bed rooms	32.5%	31.2%	-1.3%
Under-occupied by 1 bedroom	31.8%	30.6%	-1.2%
Correct number of rooms	31.9%	33.4%	+1.5%
Overcrowded by 1 bedroom	3.3%	4.4%	+1.1%
Overcrowded by 2+ bedrooms	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%
TOTAL	100%	100.0%	+0.1%

- ^{2.24} The highest rate of overcrowding in Stevenage occurs in the private rented sector at 9.1%, while the affordable housing sector has a rate of 8.6% overcrowding.

Figure 13: Under-occupation and Overcrowding by Tenure 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Households			
	Owner Occupied	Private Rented	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Under-occupied by 2+ bed rooms	44.9%	12.1%	11.4%	31.2%
Under-occupied by 1 bedroom	34.7%	27.5%	23.4%	30.6%
Correct number of rooms	18.4%	51.3%	56.6%	33.4%
Overcrowded by 1 bedroom	1.8%	8.2%	7.9%	4.4%
Overcrowded by 2+ bedrooms	0.3%	0.9%	0.7%	0.5%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

- ^{2.25} Overcrowding rates in Stevenage are slightly higher in comparison to those in the East of England and England as a whole.

Figure 14: Under-occupation and Overcrowding by Area 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Households		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Under-occupied by 2+ bed rooms	31.2%	38.5%	35.6%
Under-occupied by 1 bedroom	30.6%	32.9%	33.2%
Correct number of rooms	33.4%	25.2%	26.8%
Overcrowded by 1 bedroom	4.4%	3.0%	3.6%
Overcrowded by 2+ bedrooms	0.5%	0.4%	0.7%
TOTAL	100.0%	100%	100%

Council Tax Bands

^{2.26} As well as identifying the age of properties, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) database also highlights the Council Tax bands for areas. Three quarters of all properties in Stevenage are Bands B or C, which are two of the lowest bands (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Percentage of Properties in Stevenage by Council Tax Band 2022/23 (Source: VOA Council Tax: 2022)

BAND	Percentage of Properties
A	4.4%
B	17.6%
C	57.1%
D	8.7%
E	8.4%
F	2.5%
G	1.1%
H	0.1%
TOTAL	100%

^{2.27} Figure 16 shows that over half of the properties in Stevenage are in council tax band C which is more than double than the East of England and England as a whole. Consequently, there are smaller proportions of the total dwellings in in the other bands in comparison to the regional and national percentages.

Figure 16: Percentage of Dwellings by Council Tax Band 2022/23 (Source: VOA Council Tax: 2022)

	Percentage of Households		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
A	4.4%	14.2%	25.4%
B	17.6%	21.2%	20.7%
C	57.1%	26.0%	23.1%
D	8.7%	17.6%	16.4%
E	8.4%	10.8%	10.2%
F	2.5%	5.9%	5.4%
G	1.1%	3.9%	3.7%
H	0.1%	0.5%	0.6%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Homelessness

- ^{2.28} Statutory homelessness is a distinct concept from those who are rough sleeping and includes a much wider group of people. A 'main homelessness duty' is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group.
- ^{2.29} The 'priority need groups' include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman and people who are vulnerable in some way (e.g. because of mental illness or physical disability) and was extended in 2002 to include anyone:
- Aged 16 or 17;
 - Aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care;
 - Vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in hm forces;
 - Vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.
- ^{2.30} Where a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household.
- ^{2.31} Department of Levelling up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) statistics on homelessness show a total of 650 people were assessed in relation to potentially being homeless in Stevenage in 2022-23, and 630 were found to be owed a duty of care.
- ^{2.32} Figure 17 shows the reason that each of the 630 were made homeless. The largest reason is that friends and family were no longer willing to accommodate them, but for 157 of the households it was because of the end of a private rented tenancy.

Figure 17: Reason for Homelessness for Persons Owed a Duty of Care 2023 (Source: DLUHC Local Authority Level Statutory Homelessness Statistics)

	Number of Cases
Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	238
End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold	131
Domestic abuse	70
Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	62
End of social rented tenancy	14
Eviction from supported housing	24
End of private rented tenancy - not assured shorthold	26
Other violence or harassment	17
Left institution with no accommodation available	21
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	2
Other reasons / not known	25
TOTAL	630

- ^{2.33} To place the data for Stevenage in a like to like comparison, Figure 18 takes a 4-year average for the number of persons accepted as being homeless and then uses this figure to show the number of homeless acceptances per 100,000 persons. The data shows that the number of people accepted as homeless is higher than the average per capita for the East of England and England as a whole.

Figure 18: Homelessness Acceptances Per 100,000 Population (Source: DLUHC Local Authority Level Statutory Homelessness Statistics 2002/23 and 2021 Census)

	Number of Homelessness Acceptances Per 100,000 Population		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Homelessness acceptances	630	38,178	276,995
Homelessness acceptances per 100,000 population	703	411	490

- ^{2.34} Figure 19 shows that the use of temporary accommodation has grown and by around 25% in the East of England and England since; but has grown by 100% in Stevenage from 74 household to 148 households. However, we would note that the Stevenage figure in 2019 was low for the East of England.

Figure 19: Use of Temporary Accommodation in 2019 and 2023 (Source: DLUHC Local Authority Level Statutory Homelessness Statistics)

	Total number		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
2019			
Currently in temporary accommodation in communal establishments (Bed and breakfast or Hostels)	5	2,170	35,660
Currently in temporary accommodation in market housing (Private sector leased or Private landlord)	0	1,500	32,180
Currently in temporary accommodation in affordable housing (Local Authority or RSL stock)	69	2,440	18,400
TOTAL	74	6,100	86,240
2023			
Currently in temporary accommodation in communal establishments (Bed and breakfast or Hostels)	1	1,740	19,900
Currently in temporary accommodation in market housing (Private sector leased or Private landlord)	1	2,480	59,960
Currently in temporary accommodation in affordable housing (Local Authority or RSL stock)	146	3,290	25,900
TOTAL	148	7,510	105,760

- ^{2.35} DLUHC report separate data for rough sleeping, which is based on a given one night count in each local authority. To place the data for Stevenage in a like to like comparison, Figure 20 takes a 5-year average for the number of rough sleepers and then uses this figure to show the number of rough sleepers per 100,000 persons. The data shows that the number of rough sleepers is 2 times higher than the average per capita for the East of England and England as a whole.

Figure 20: 5-year Average Rough Sleeper Count Per 100,000 Population (Source: DLUHC Rough Sleeping Snapshot and 2021 Census)

	Number of Rough Sleepers Per 100,000 population		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
5-year average for rough sleeper count	11	347	3,429
5-year average for rough sleeper count per 100,000 population	12	6	6

^{2.36} It is important to stress that while the rough sleeping situation in Stevenage is on average much more prominent than in the East of England or in England, that actual numbers are an average of 11 persons across the whole borough.

Vacant Properties

^{2.37} For much of England, the 2021 Census saw a rise in the dwelling vacancy rate, in part due to some student households not being at their term-time addresses, and also in part because the number of short-term lets through websites such as Airbnb has risen in recent years. However, the vacancy rate in Stevenage was 3.2%, well below the national average. While this is still above the 1.9% vacancy rate in Stevenage in the 2011 Census, there is no evidence of a vacant home problem in Stevenage. Council Tax records indicate that 199 properties in February 2024 were long-term vacant in Stevenage.

Figure 21: Percentage of Dwellings Vacant 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Households		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
TOTAL	3.2%	4.3%	5.4%

Chapter Summary

^{2.38} When we consider how the tenure of properties has changed across time, affordable rented properties have declined whilst owner occupied, and private rented properties have increased.

^{2.39} The 2021 Census found a larger number of flats occupied than the 2011 Census. This in turn saw more properties occupied in 2021 than in 2011.

^{2.40} For Stevenage, most of the total stock was built after 1945 with over half built between 1945-1972. On average, the housing stock of Stevenage is younger than that of the wider East or for England as a whole. Stevenage has far less properties built pre-1939 in comparison.

^{2.41} 148 of all households in Stevenage are currently in temporary accommodation. Data shows that the number of rough sleepers is 2 times higher in Stevenage than the average per capita for the East of England and England as a whole.

^{2.42} The vacancy rate for Stevenage rose from 1.9% in 2011 to 3.2% in 2021, but this is still well below the national average.

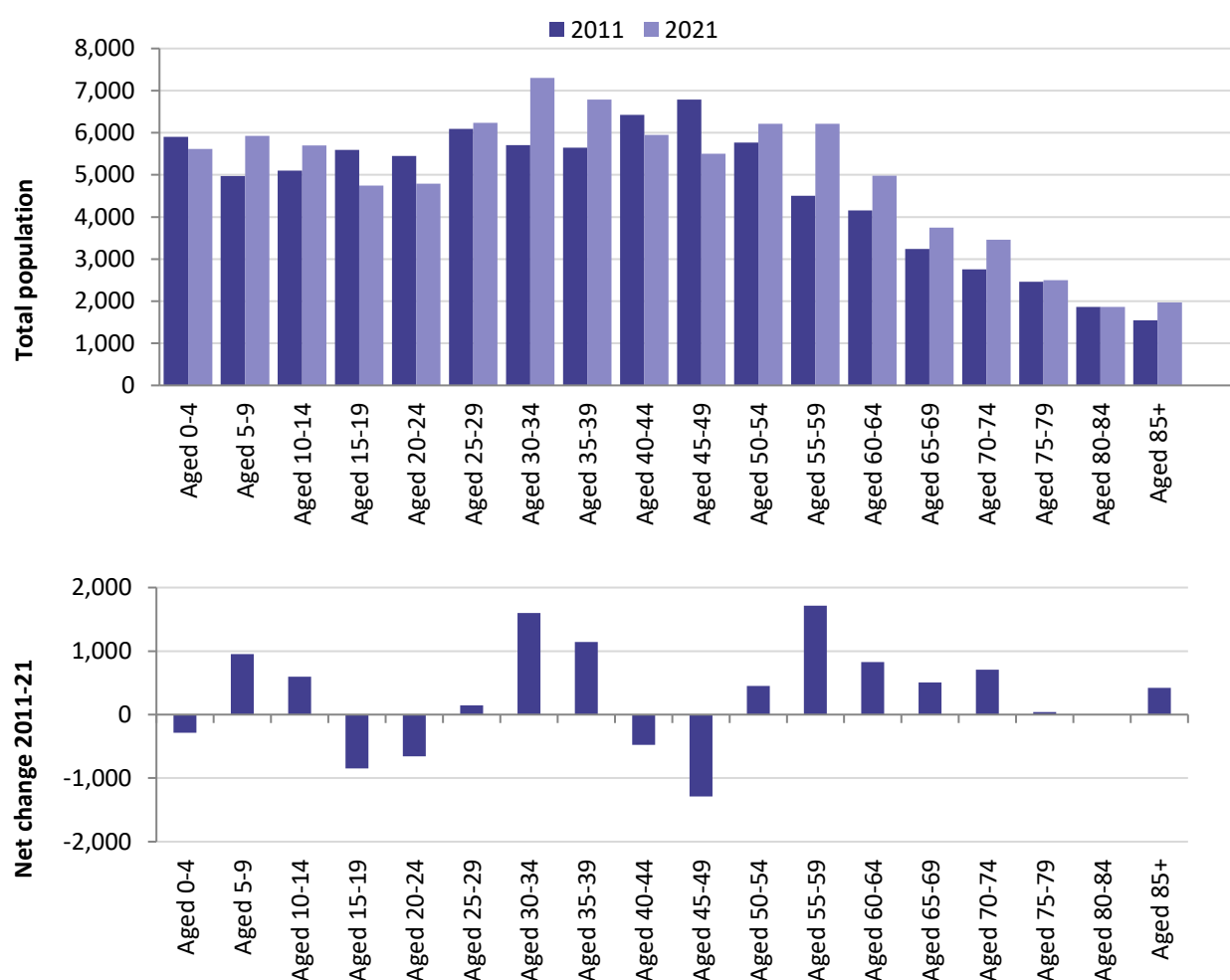
3. Population Profile

The Population of Stevenage

Population Age Profile

- ^{3.1} Figure 22 shows how the age profile of Stevenage has changed between the 2011 and 2021 Censuses. Along with almost every local authority in England, the population of Stevenage is becoming older on average. The total population grew by 5,541 persons and in the context of the wider growth, there was an increase of 1,673 in the population aged over 65 years, while the population aged under 30 years dropped by 99 persons.
- ^{3.2} This has long-term implications for housing in the form of the need to adapt more homes and also to deliver more dedicated older person housing.

Figure 22: Population 2011-21 by 5-year age cohort for Stevenage (Source: UK Census of Population)



- 3.3 Figure 23 shows how the age of the population varies by tenure. To understand the table, consider the example of the population aged 0-4 years: 5.2% of those living in owner occupied properties, 8.8% of those in private rent and 7.3% of those in affordable rented housing are aged 0-4 years. Therefore, the higher the percentage, the greater the share of a housing sector is occupied by that age cohort. Furthermore, the table also shows that 6.3% of the total household population are under 5 years also.
- 3.4 The data in Figure 23 shows that the affordable rented sector has the highest proportion of children, while the proportion of children resident in owner occupied properties is much lower. The population aged 20-44 years are much more concentrated in the private rented sector, while a disproportionate number of people aged 45 years and above are in owner occupation.

Figure 23: Age of Population in Stevenage by Tenure 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Persons by Age by Tenure			
	Owner Occupied	Private Rented	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Aged 0-4	5.2%	8.8%	7.3%	6.3%
Aged 5-9	5.4%	7.5%	9.0%	6.7%
Aged 10-14	5.3%	6.0%	9.2%	6.4%
Aged 15-19	4.8%	4.5%	7.0%	5.3%
Aged 20-24	4.4%	7.8%	6.2%	5.4%
Aged 25-29	5.6%	12.6%	6.6%	7.0%
Aged 30-34	7.2%	13.5%	7.3%	8.2%
Aged 35-39	7.0%	11.3%	6.8%	7.6%
Aged 40-44	6.9%	7.8%	5.4%	6.7%
Aged 45-49	6.6%	6.1%	5.3%	6.2%
Aged 50-54	7.9%	5.0%	6.1%	7.0%
Aged 55-59	8.2%	3.7%	6.3%	7.0%
Aged 60-64	6.8%	2.1%	4.9%	5.6%
Aged 65-69	5.3%	1.2%	3.4%	4.2%
Aged 70-74	4.9%	0.9%	3.3%	3.9%
Aged 75-79	3.6%	0.5%	2.3%	2.8%
Aged 80-84	2.6%	0.4%	1.7%	2.0%
Aged 85+	2.3%	0.4%	2.1%	2.0%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

Health

- ^{3.5} The need for adapted and accessible homes is a point we return to later in the report, but the overall health (in terms of the proportion of the population with limiting long term illnesses) of Stevenage is worse than the wider East and England as a whole (Figure 25).

Figure 24: Percentage of Population with Limiting Long-term Illness (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage of Population		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
TOTAL	17.3%	16.6%	17.3%

- ^{3.6} In Stevenage, limiting long-term illness is highest in the affordable rented sector, with 27.6% of those in affordable rented having a limiting long-term illness (Figure 26). This is slightly lower than both the East of England and the England overall average for this group. Across all tenure types, the proportion of persons with limiting long term illness in Stevenage is also lower than both the regional and national averages.

Figure 25: Limiting Long-term Illness in Stevenage by Tenure 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Percentage with limiting long-term illness			
	Owner Occupied	Private Rented	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Stevenage	13.7%	10.5%	27.6%	16.8%
East of England	14.3%	12.8%	28.4%	16.2%
England	14.9%	13.4%	28.6%	16.9%

The Link Between Health and Housing

- ^{3.7} Recent major news stories such as the Grenfell fire disaster and deaths which were assigned to the impact of mould in the household⁶ have placed increasing focus upon the impact of housing on health.
- ^{3.8} In October 2022, the House of Commons Library produced a briefing note covering the links between health and housing ahead of a parliamentary debate on the issue⁷ This noted that:

“The causal link between poor housing conditions and poor health outcomes is long established.”

“Poor-quality housing harms health and evidence shows that exposure to poor housing conditions (including damp, cold, mould, noise) is strongly associated with poor health, both physical and mental.

The longer the exposure to poor conditions, including cold, the greater the impact on mental and physical health. Specific physical effects are morbidity including respiratory conditions, cardiovascular disease and communicable disease transmission, and increased mortality.

⁶ [Awaab's Law: Damp and mould complaints surge as action promised following toddler's death - Manchester Evening News](#)

⁷ [The role of homes and buildings in levelling up health and wellbeing - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

In terms of mental health impacts, living in non-decent, cold or overcrowded housing and in unaffordable housing has been associated with increased stress and a reduction in a sense of empowerment and control over one's life and with depression and anxiety. Children living in overcrowded homes are more likely to be stressed, anxious and depressed, have poorer physical health, attain less well at school and have a greater risk of behavioural problems than those in uncrowded homes."

- ^{3.9} Health and Housing is a key part of the Levelling-up White Paper published in February 2022, which is expected to pass into legislation soon. This includes the Government's current plans to address the problem of poor housing and includes plans to review the decent homes standard (see Chapter 7) to ensure that it is fit for purpose and seeks to reduce the level of non-decent homes in the rented sector by 2030.
- ^{3.10} The government also published The White Paper, "A Fairer Private Rented Sector" in June 2022, but its progress has stalled. If passed, this would require privately rented homes to meet the Decent Homes Standard for the first time.

Ethnicity

- ^{3.11} Data from 2011 and 2021 shows an increase in population across ethnicities with a particular growth in the Black and Asian populations of Stevenage (Figure 27). The largest ethnic group is the White population with over 74,000 people; which includes other White groups such as Gypsies and Travellers.

Figure 26: Number of Persons by Ethnic Group in Stevenage 2011-2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Number of Persons		Change
	2011	2021	2011-2021
White	73,598	74,098	+500
Asian	4,848	6,699	+1,851
Black	2,836	4,338	+1,502
Mixed	2,265	3,215	+950
Other Ethnic Group	410	1,143	+733
TOTAL	83,957	89,493	+5,536

- ^{3.12} All ethnicities are most likely to be found in owner occupation in Stevenage. In comparison with the regional and national averages, the proportion of all ethnicities in affordable rented housing is higher. Equally, the proportion in owner occupation is lower (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Percentage of Persons by Ethnic Group and Tenure 2021 (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Tenure as a Percentage of Ethnicity			Ethnicity as a %age of Total Population
	Owner occupied	Private rent	Affordable Rented Housing	
Stevenage				
White	59.4%	12.9%	27.7%	82.8%
Asian	62.8%	26.9%	10.3%	7.5%
Black	48.3%	31.2%	20.5%	4.8%
Mixed	48.5%	19.5%	32.0%	3.6%
Other Ethnic Group	52.8%	36.5%	10.7%	1.3%
TOTAL	58.6%	15.3%	26.0%	100.0%
East of England				
White	68.2%	16.8%	15.0%	86.6%
Asian	65.2%	24.4%	10.4%	6.3%
Black	42.9%	34.2%	22.9%	2.9%
Mixed	52.4%	24.7%	22.9%	2.8%
Other Ethnic Group	48.5%	37.0%	14.4%	1.4%
TOTAL	66.6%	18.3%	15.1%	100.0%
England				
White	65.7%	19.1%	15.1%	81.1%
Asian	61.1%	26.1%	12.8%	9.6%
Black	28.5%	27.6%	43.9%	4.2%
Mixed	45.8%	28.0%	26.2%	2.9%
Other Ethnic Group	37.2%	39.7%	23.0%	2.2%
TOTAL	62.5%	20.9%	16.6%	100%

Chapter Summary

- ^{3.13} Between 2011 and 2021, the population of Stevenage grew by 5,541 persons. There was a growth of 1,673 in the population aged over 65 years, while the population aged under 30 years dropped by 99 persons. Therefore, the population of Stevenage is becoming older on average.
- ^{3.14} The data shows that proportionally the affordable rented sector has the highest share of children, while the share of children in owner occupation is much lower. The population aged 20-44 years are much more concentrated in the private rented sector, while a disproportionate number of people aged 45 years and above are in owner occupation.
- ^{3.15} Data from 2011 and 2021 shows an increase in population across ethnicities with a particular growth in the Black and Asian populations of Stevenage.

4. Local Economy and Housing Market

Employment and Cost of Housing in Stevenage

Economic Activity

- 4.1 Figure 28 shows that the share of the population of Stevenage in employment is much higher than the England and East of England averages. The population who are retired is lower than the regional and national averages. This relates to Figure 29 which shows that proportionally fewer people in Stevenage are claiming state pension than in the comparator regions.

Figure 28: Economic Activity for Those Aged 16 Years or More (Source: UK Census of Population)

	Area		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Economically Active			
In employment	62.2%	57.3%	55.7%
Unemployed	2.8%	2.5%	2.9%
Economically active student - employed	1.6%	1.5%	1.7%
Economically active student - unemployed	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%
Economically Inactive			
Retired	18.1%	22.9%	21.5%
Student	3.6%	4.5%	5.6%
Looking after family	4.6%	4.6%	4.8%
Long-term sick or disabled	3.8%	3.4%	4.1%
Other	2.9%	2.8%	3.1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Benefit Receipt

- 4.2 Figure 29 shows that a higher proportion of households are in receipt of housing benefit and/or Universal Credit in Stevenage than the East of England and England as a whole. The receipt of disability related benefits is also slightly higher in Stevenage, whilst state pension claims are lower.

Figure 29: Benefit Take-up as Percentage of Population for Those Aged 16 Years or More (Source: DWP)

	Area		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Universal Credit/Housing benefit	11.3%	8.9%	10.6%
Disability related benefits	10.6%	9.3%	10.5%
State pension	18.1%	23.2%	21.6%

- 4.3 Figure 31 shows variations in the receipt of benefit by wards in Stevenage. Bedwell and Pin Green have the highest rates of households receiving housing benefit and/or Universal Credit as well as disability related benefits. State pension take-up was however highest in Symonds Green, Manor, Old Town, and Longmeadow at over 20%.

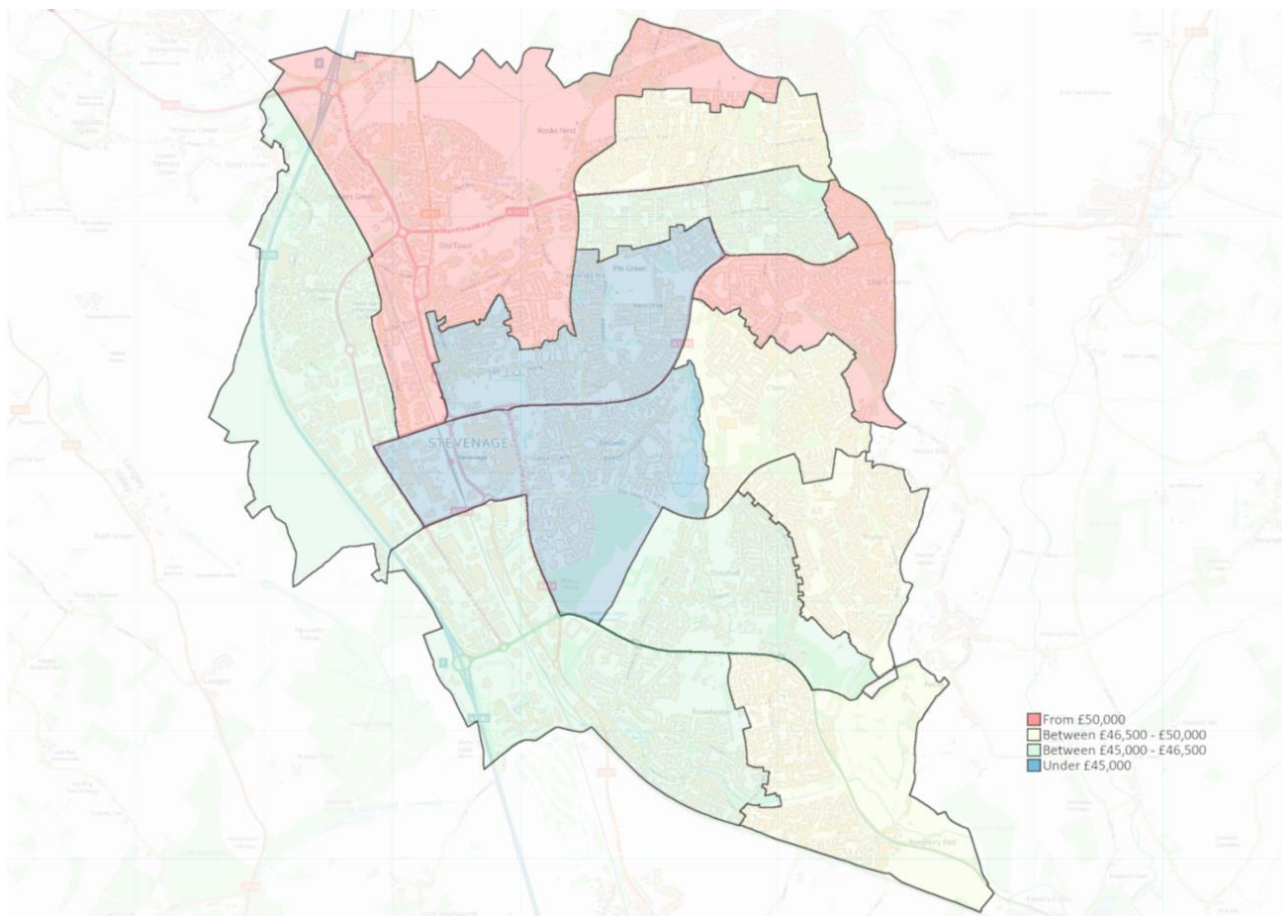
Figure 30: Benefit take-up as Percentage of Population Aged 16+ years by Ward 2023 (Source: DWP)

	Percentage of Persons		
	Universal Credit/Housing benefit	Disability related benefits	State pension
Bandley Hill	10.1%	11.6%	18.4%
Bedwell	16.6%	12.5%	14.8%
Chells	9.0%	9.7%	17.3%
Longmeadow	8.6%	9.6%	20.4%
Manor	4.4%	7.4%	20.8%
Martins Wood	13.1%	11.2%	17.9%
Old Town	12.1%	10.6%	20.6%
Pin Green	14.7%	12.0%	19.2%
Roebuck	12.3%	11.1%	17.3%
Shephall	12.5%	11.6%	15.4%
St Nicholas	12.4%	10.0%	13.3%
Symonds Green	12.9%	11.8%	22.1%
Woodfield	6.3%	8.2%	19.0%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Income

- 4.4 An area where very little information is available for small areas is household income. The ONS do provide an estimate for average household incomes for Middle Super Output Areas (MSOAs), which are one of the building blocks for the Census and typically each contain around 4,000-5,000 households. There are thirteen of these areas covering Stevenage, and the income map below indicates no significant variation in household incomes across the authority.

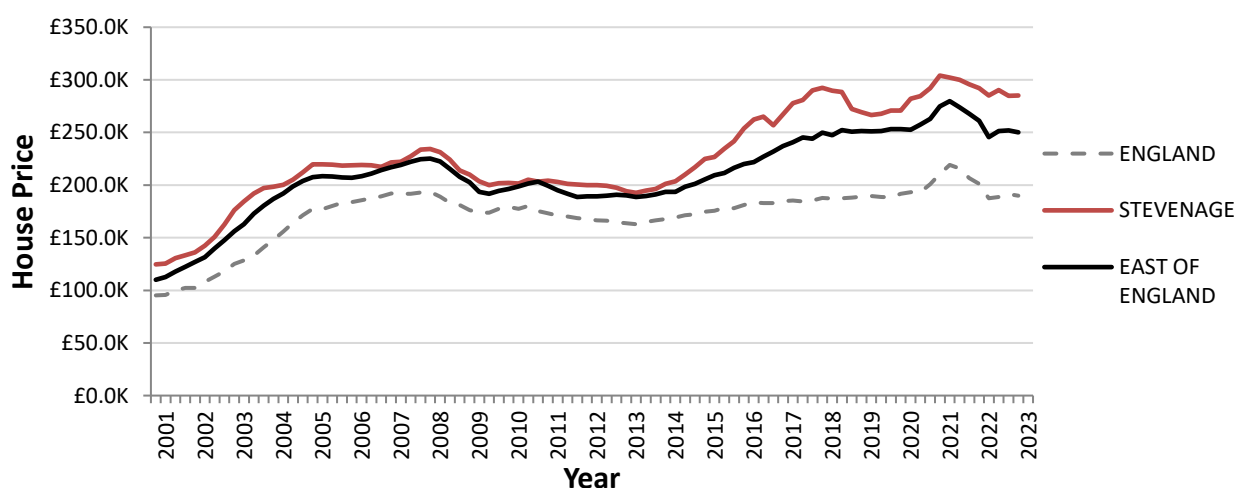
Figure 31: Average Household income by MSOA (Source: ONS)



Cost of Home Ownership

- ^{4.5} House price trends (2001-2023) are shown in Figure 32 based on lower quartile house prices. Lower quartile prices are used to consider the entry level price for home ownership. As the value of money has also changed during this period, the data is adjusted to take account of and remove the impact of inflation through the Consumer Price Index (CPI)⁸; therefore, the values reflect real changes in house prices since 2001.
- ^{4.6} It is evident that real house prices in Stevenage increased substantially in the period 2001-2008. Values reduced during the economic downturn following mid-2008 and continued to decline over the period to 2013. Prices then increased until 2018, fell between 2018 and 2019, before continuing to increase to a peak in 2021 and declining thereafter. Movement in Stevenage house prices has broadly mirrored changes in England as a whole, but at a more expensive rate and with an increase in difference from 2014 onwards.

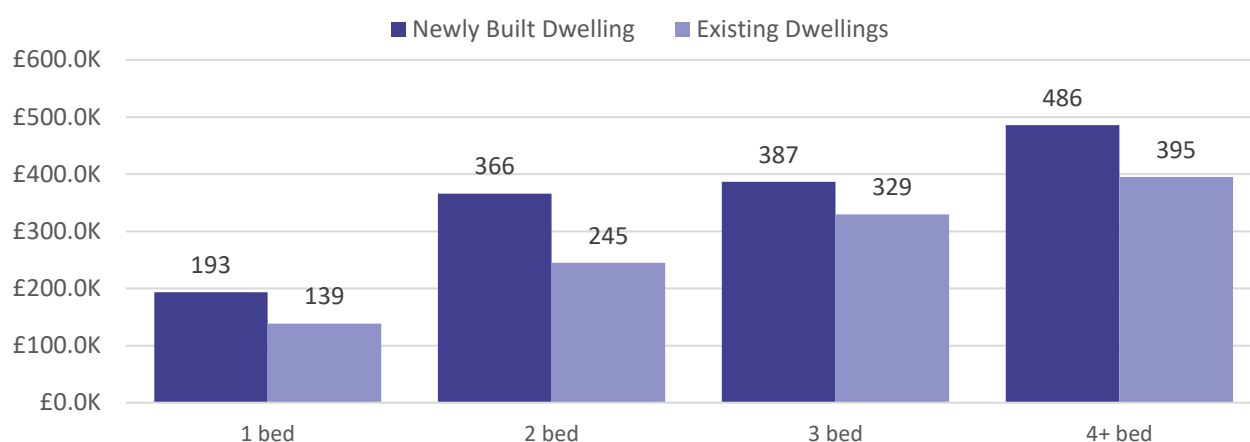
Figure 32: Real House Price Trends: Lower Quartile Prices adjusted to 2023 values using CPI (Source: ONS; Bank of England)



- ^{4.7} Figure 33 show the lower quartile house prices by bedroom size for Stevenage. The data shows both the lower quartile price for existing properties and new build dwellings, with prices taken from the Land Registry records for the sales prices of individual properties. When considering first time buyers in particular, many of the purchasers are likely to be newly forming households seeking one and two bed properties, although some will seek larger properties.
- ^{4.8} The degree to which new build properties are more expensive than existing homes varies considerably by size of dwelling. This is likely to be down to a range of factors which include the location of newbuild housing, the relative size of properties, gardens and the availability of parking, comparative quality and condition of existing stock, and other intangible factors such as character. Across much of England, new build properties are more expensive than existing dwellings, and this is also the case in Stevenage.

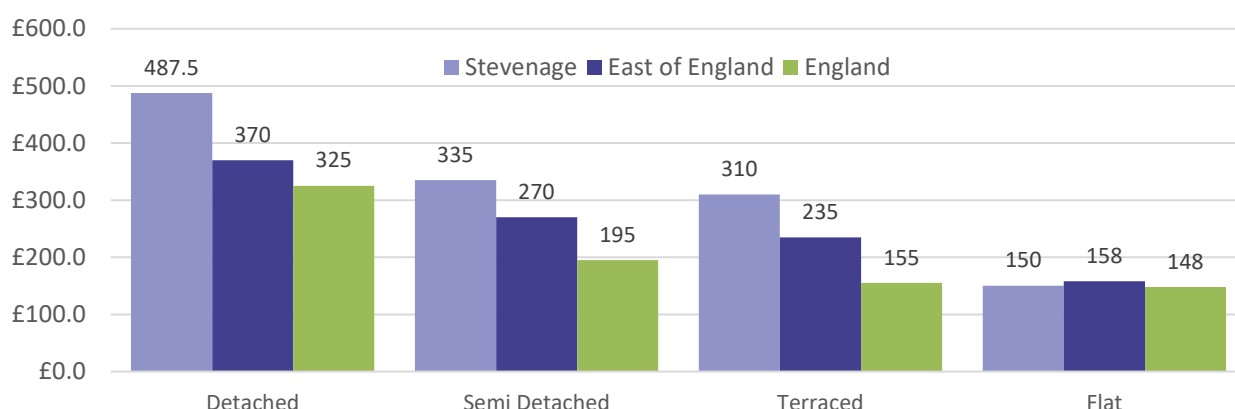
⁸ The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure of the average change over time in the prices paid by consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services.

Figure 33: Lower quartile prices (adjusted to 2023 values using CPI) for existing dwellings and newly built dwellings (2022-2023) by property size in Stevenage (Source: ORS based on ONS House Price Statistics, Valuation Office Agency and Land Registry Price Paid Data)



^{4.9} Figure 34 compares house prices across Stevenage, the East of England and England by property type. This shows very little difference in the prices of flats in Stevenage compared to England and the East, but houses are much more expensive, indicating that the flats in Stevenage are relatively cheap.

Figure 34: Lower quartile prices by property type (March 2023) (Source: ORS based on ONS House Price Statistics)



Cost of Renting

^{4.10} The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is the maximum payment for private rented claimants in receipt of housing benefit based on Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMAs). The LHA was previously based on the 30th percentile private rent, however more recent increases have been based on CPI (Consumer Price Index), and rates were frozen in the July 2015 Budget before being increased in 2020.

^{4.11} Whilst BRMAs do not align with local authority boundaries, the Stevenage & North Herts BRMA covers the whole area. Figure 35 sets out the maximum local housing allowance by size of property in the BRMA in 2016 and 2023 and also shows the percentage rise between these years:

Figure 35: Maximum Local Housing Allowance thresholds 2016 & 2023 (Source: Valuation Office Agency)

Property type	2016 Weekly Rent £ Stevenage & North Herts BRMA	2023 Weekly Rent £ Stevenage & North Herts BRMA	Percentage Growth 2016-2023
Room only	£72.04	£78.59	9.09%
1 bedroom	£122.36	£155.34	26.95%
2 bedrooms	£155.37	£195.62	25.91%
3 bedrooms	£186.46	£241.64	29.59%
4+ bedrooms	£238.80	£299.18	25.28%

^{4.12} Figure 36 sets out the weekly rents for different property sizes. This includes:

- » Median and lower quartile private rent;
- » Affordable rent (80% of median market rents); and
- » Social rent based on existing average rents.

Figure 36: Weekly rent thresholds in Stevenage 2023 (Source: Private Rental Market Statistics, Valuation Office Agency; Regulator of Social Housing Statistical Data Returns. Note: Private rent data excludes housing benefit funded tenancies)

Weekly Rent £	Median Private Rent	Lower Quartile Private Rent	Affordable Rent	Social Rent
Stevenage Borough				
1 bedroom	£183.98	£172.48	£130.31	£95.23
2 bedrooms	£251.83	£219.86	£165.97	£118.19
3 bedrooms	£304.72	£281.72	£189.50	£137.75
4+ bedrooms	£390.97	£346.12	£177.70	£156.77
East of England				
1 bedroom	£172.48	£149.49	£125.54	£89.74
2 bedrooms	£206.98	£178.23	£153.40	£103.68
3 bedrooms	£252.98	£201.23	£174.29	£116.62
4+ bedrooms	£344.97	£289.77	£210.39	£131.16
England				
1 bedroom	£172.48	£132.24	£131.06	£87.79
2 bedrooms	£189.73	£149.49	£141.16	£100.43
3 bedrooms	£212.73	£169.03	£151.77	£111.00
4+ bedrooms	£356.47	£270.23	£192.00	£131.38

^{4.13} It is evident that across property sizes, the median private rent is the highest followed in turn by the lower quartile private rent, affordable rent and target social rent. Across rent types, Stevenage is notably higher than the regional and national averages. However, for affordable rent properties that contain four or more bedrooms, Stevenage is lower than England and East of England.

^{4.14} This point is emphasised in Figure 37 below which compares the entry level lower quartile rents with the LHA rates and shows that all entry level rents are higher than their equivalent LHA rates. This implies that if a household is entirely dependent upon LHA to cover their rental costs, then they will not be able to afford any property at the lower quartile rates in Stevenage.

Figure 37: Comparison of Lower Quartile Rents and LHA Rates (Source: Private Rental Market Statistics, Valuation Office Agency;)

Weekly Rent £	2023 Lower Quartile Private Rents	2023 Weekly Rent £ Stevenage & North Herts BRMA
1 bedroom	£172.48	£155.34
2 bedrooms	£219.86	£195.62
3 bedrooms	£281.72	£241.64
4+ bedrooms	£346.12	£299.18

Chapter Summary

- ^{4.15} The share of the population of Stevenage in employment is much higher than the English and East averages. The proportion of the population who are retired is lower than the regional and national averages. This relates to benefit receipt, with proportionally fewer people in Stevenage claiming state pension.
- ^{4.16} There are more households in receipt of housing benefit and/or Universal Credit in Stevenage than the East of England and England as a whole. The receipt of disability related benefits is also slightly higher in Stevenage than in either the East or England as a whole.
- ^{4.17} Bedwell and Pin Green have the highest rates of households receiving housing benefit and/or Universal Credit as well as disability related benefits. State pension take-up was however highest in Symonds Green, Manor, Old Town, and Longmeadow at over 20%.
- ^{4.18} Real house prices in Stevenage increased substantially in the period 2001-2008. Values reduced during the economic downturn following mid-2008 and continued to decline over the period to 2013. Prices then increased until 2018, fell between 2018 and 2019, before continuing to increase to a peak in 2021 and declining thereafter. Movement in Stevenage house prices has broadly mirrored changes in England as a whole, but at a more expensive rate and with an increasing difference from 2014 onwards.
- ^{4.19} Compared to the East and the whole of England, property prices in Stevenage are relatively high. There is very little difference in the price of flats between these areas.
- ^{4.20} Rents have grown by between 9% and 30% in Stevenage over the period 2016-2023. The cost of renting in Stevenage is notably higher than the regional and national averages. Entry level rents were also shown to be higher than their equivalent LHA rates which implies that if a household is dependent upon housing benefit to cover their rental costs, then they will not be able to afford any property at the lower quartile rates in Stevenage.

5. Statutory Minimum Standards

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

Obligation to Tackle Housing Health and Safety Hazards

- 5.1 Tackling Health and Safety hazards in homes is an important issue both in terms of the quality of the housing stock but also in terms of the contribution this makes to Health and Well Being. The obligation to do so is set out in law.
- 5.2 From April 2006, Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 repealed the former housing fitness standard and through statutory instruments and statutory guidance replaced it with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- 5.3 The Act differentiates between Category 1 and Category 2 hazards. Local authorities have a duty to take 'the most appropriate course of action' in respect of any hazard scored under the HHSRS as Category 1. Authorities have discretionary power to take action with Category 2 hazards (which do not score past the threshold for Category 1). Further information on the HHSRS is given below.

Definition of Hazards under the HHSRS and Category Level

- 5.4 The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a prescribed method of assessing individual hazards, rather than a conventional standard to give a judgment of fit or unfit. The HHSRS is evidence based – national statistics on the health impacts of hazards encountered in the home are used as a basis for assessing individual hazards.
- 5.5 The HHSRS system deals with a much broader range of issues than the previous fitness standard. It covers a total of 29 hazards in four main groups:
 - » Physiological Requirements (e.g. damp & mould growth, excess cold, asbestos, carbon monoxide, radon, etc.);
 - » Psychological Requirements (crowding and space, entry by intruders, lighting, noise);
 - » Protection Against Infection (domestic hygiene, food safety, personal hygiene, water supply);
 - » Protection Against Accidents (e.g. falls on the level, on stairs and steps and between levels, electrics, fire, collision...).
- 5.6 The HHSRS scoring system combines the following elements:
 - » The probability that deficiency (i.e. A fault in a dwelling whether due to disrepair or a design fault) will lead to a harmful occurrence (e.g. An accident or illness);
 - » The spread of likely outcomes (i.e. The nature of the injury or illness);
 - » If an accident is very likely to occur and the outcome is likely to be extreme or severe (e.g. death or a major or fatal injury) then the score will be very high.

- 5.7 All dwellings contain certain aspects that can be perceived as potentially hazardous, such as staircases and steps, heating appliances, electrical installation, glass, combustible materials, etc. It is when disrepair or inherent defective design makes an element of a dwelling significantly more likely to cause a harmful occurrence that it is scored under the HHSRS.
- 5.8 The HHSRS generates a numerical Hazard Score, and Hazard Bands have been devised as a simple means for handling the wide range of possible Scores. There are ten Hazard Bands, with Band J being the safest, and Band A being the most dangerous:
- » Hazard Bands A to C (i.e. Hazard Scores of 1,000 and above) are the most serious hazards, and these are known as **Category 1** (serious) hazards.
 - » Hazard Bands D to J (i.e. Hazard Scores below 1,000) are known as **Category 2** (other) hazards.
- 5.9 A local authority has a duty to deal with any Category 1 hazards found and has discretionary power to deal with Category 2 hazards. The HHSRS focuses particularly on Category 1 hazards; but describes all hazards (including Category 2 hazards in Bands D and E) for comparative purposes. All of the main requirements facing local authorities have remained unchanged in the Housing and Planning Act 2016.

Current Category 1 Hazards in Stevenage

- 5.10 Until recently, the EHS was only published with outputs for England as a whole and for regions. No local authority level information was provided. The raw data from the EHS is available to use for modelling purposes, but this does not include any identifier for a property's location except for its wider region.
- 5.11 In March 2024, DLUHC published information from the 2020 EHS for English local authorities as experimental statistics. The data is based upon extrapolating outputs from the national survey to the local authority areas, so areas with older stock, worse energy performance scores, and more bungalows are modelled to have higher numbers of Category 1 hazards. The EHS modelled data is a break out of national and regional data and should be relatively accurate for most local authority areas.
- 5.12 Figure 38 and Figure 39 compare the outputs for Stevenage with the East and England as a whole by tenure and property type. It is important to note that the data relates to 2020, the condition of the housing stock is improving over time, and also that it relates only to occupied dwellings, so vacant properties have not been considered.
- 5.13 The data shows that overall, Stevenage is projected to Category 1 hazards in 3.5% of its housing stock in 2020, compared to 7.6% for the East and 9.2% for England. The private rented stock is modelled to have the highest rate of Category 1 hazards, with detached and bungalow properties also scoring highly.

Figure 38: Percentage of Households with Category 1 Hazards by Tenure (Source: EHS 2020 and DLUHC Modelling)

	Percentage with Category 1 Hazards		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Owner occupied	4.2%	8.0%	9.2%
Private rent	5.3%	11.2%	13.2%
Affordable Rented Housing	1.2%	1.7%	5.0%
TOTAL	3.5%	7.6%	9.2%

Figure 39: Percentage of Households with Category 1 Hazards by Property Type (Source: EHS 2020 and DLUHC Modelling)

	Percentage with Category 1 Hazards		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Detached houses	4.1%	10.8%	9.1%
Semi-detached houses	2.6%	19.5%	8.7%
Bungalows	5.9%	8.1%	8.3%
Terraced houses	3.6%	14.0%	11.0%
Flats	2.8%	16.4%	8.0%
TOTAL	3.5%	7.6%	9.2%

^{5.14} Overall, we would suggest that the EHS modelled data for Stevenage looks broadly plausible. The DLUHC data only shows local authorities, but the same process can then be applied to areas such as wards within a local authority. Figure 40 shows this for Stevenage. We have taken the 3.5% estimate for Stevenage from the 2020 EHS data; and have updated this to more recent data. The key factors in assessing the level of Category 1 hazards in each ward were: the age of the dwelling stock, the range of SAP scores as set out in Chapter 8, the tenure mix, and the range of property types. Overall, around 1,100 properties across Stevenage are likely to contain a Category 1 hazard. Please note that the figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 to prevent any spurious precision. The same data could have been provided for property age, tenure and property type, but the numbers involved are frequently extremely small.

Figure 40: Number and Percentage of Households with Category 1 Hazards by Ward in 2023 (Source: ORS Modelling. Note: Figures rounded to the nearest 10)

	Number of Dwellings	Percentage of Dwellings with a Cat 1 Hazard
Bandley Hill	70	2.7%
Bedwell	100	3.0%
Chells	90	3.2%
Longmeadow	80	3.2%
Manor	70	2.5%
Martins Wood	80	3.2%
Old Town	130	3.5%
Pin Green	90	3.3%
Roebuck	80	2.9%
Shephall	100	4.0%
St Nicholas	90	2.9%
Symonds Green	60	2.3%
Woodfield	50	2.1%
TOTAL	1,100	3.0%

^{5.15} As noted earlier, the HHSRS system contains a total of 29 hazards, many of which are extremely rare. It is also the case that in many properties more than one hazard will be present. Until around 10 years ago, the English Housing Survey dataset contained a set of variables which allowed for the identification of key hazards, but this calculation has now been removed from the public data. It is now the case that only a small number of hazards are published as part of the reporting process. For example in 2019, the English Housing Survey found that 2.8% of properties suffered from excess cold, including 3% of owner occupied and 4% of private rent properties. Meanwhile, 3% of properties suffered from damp, with around 11% of all private rented properties affected.

^{5.16} These are the two most common hazards found in properties, and as set out above, the share of properties experiencing Category 1 hazards in Stevenage is well below the number for England as a whole. Therefore, the identification of specific hazards in an area is something picked up by stock condition surveys because the numbers involved are extremely small for almost all hazards and cannot be modelled to a specific dwelling.

^{5.17} It is possible to consider excess cold separately because this is picked up by publicly available Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) data. As noted below, England has an average of 1.9% of properties with excess cold, while Stevenage's average is much lower at 0.4%. The highest rates of excess cold in Stevenage are in owner occupied properties and detached houses (Figure 41 and Figure 42).

Figure 41: Percentage of Households with Excess Cold by Tenure (Source: EPC Register and ORS Modelling)

	Percentage with Excess Cold	
	Stevenage Borough	England
Owner occupied	0.6%	3%
Private rent	0.4%	1%
Affordable Rented Housing	0.1%	1%
TOTAL	0.4%	1.9%

Figure 42: Percentage of Households with Excess Cold by Property Type (Source: EPC Register and ORS Modelling)

	Percentage with Excess Cold
	Stevenage Borough
Detached houses	0.8%
Semi-detached houses	0.7%
Terraced houses	0.3%
Flats	0.1%
Caravan or other	-
TOTAL	0.4%

^{5.18} Unsurprisingly, there is a clear correlation between the age of properties and the percentage with excess cold. A significantly higher percentage of older properties contain the hazard, and the percentage increases the older the properties are.

Figure 43: Percentage of Households with Excess Cold by age of property (Source: EPC Register and ORS Modelling)

	Percentage with Excess Cold
	Stevenage Borough
Pre 1900	5.3%
1900-1949	2.2%
1950-1975	0.5%
1976-1990	0.0%
1991-2002	0.1%
2003-2011	0.0%
2012 onwards	0.0%
TOTAL	0.4%

- ^{5.19} It is also possible to analyse excess cold at ward level (Figure 47). This shows that for wards such as Chells and St Nicholas, excess cold affects none of the housing stock. However, Bedwell, Shephall and Old Town have the highest percentage of dwellings with excess cold. It may also be noted that the percentage of dwellings subject to excess cold in the borough of Stevenage is notably lower than average for both the East region and England as a whole.

Figure 44: Number and Percentage of Households with Excess Cold by Ward in 2022 (Source: EPC Register and ORS Modelling)

	Number of Dwellings	Percentage of Dwellings with Excess Cold
Bandley Hill	2	0.1%
Bedwell	27	0.8%
Chells	0	0.0%
Longmeadow	7	0.3%
Manor	8	0.3%
Martins Wood	5	0.2%
Old Town	22	0.6%
Pin Green	15	0.5%
Roebuck	13	0.5%
Shephall	23	0.9%
St Nicholas	0	0.0%
Symonds Green	8	0.3%
Woodfield	10	0.5%
Stevenage Borough	141	0.4%
East of England	44,689	1.7%
England	398,413	1.7%

Chapter Summary

- ^{5.20} Data from the EHS 2020 shows that Stevenage is projected to have had 3.5% of its housing stock with Category 1 hazards in 2020, compared to 7.6% for the East and 9.2% for England. The private rented stock is modelled to have the highest rate of Category 1 hazards, with detached and bungalow properties also scoring more highly.
- ^{5.21} Updating the modelling for 2023, around 1,100 properties across Stevenage are likely to contain a Category 1 hazard, with around 140 of these experiencing excess cold. As noted above, the rate of failure for Category 1 hazards has fallen sharply across England in recent years and that appears to have been mirrored across Stevenage.

6. The Decent Homes Standard

Measuring Housing Condition against the Standard

Obligation to Tackle Housing Health and Safety Hazards

- 6.1 The Decent Homes Standard is a broad measure of housing condition which was introduced to ensure all public sector housing met a minimum standard by 2010. The percentage of vulnerable households in decent homes in the private sector has also been a focus for Government; whilst local authority targets were withdrawn following the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2007, the percentage has remained part of CLG's own Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSO2, 2.8).
- 6.2 Aside from governmental obligations and measures, the Decent Homes Standard has become the norm for measuring housing conditions and was analysed for this survey.

Introducing the Decent Homes Standard

- 6.3 To meet the Standard a dwelling must achieve all four of the following criteria:

Figure 45: Summary of dwelling decency criteria

A	It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing: At present, this means that it should not have a Category 1 hazard under the HHSRS
B	It is in a reasonable state of repair – has to have no old and defective major elements
C	It has reasonably modern facilities and services: Adequate bathroom, kitchen, common areas of flats and is not subject to undue noise
D	Provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort – has effective insulation and efficient heating

- 6.4 A detailed definition of the criteria and their sub-categories are described in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) guidance: *"A Decent Home – The definition and guidance for implementation"* June 2006.
- 6.5 If a dwelling was to fail any one of these criteria it would be considered "non-decent". The term 'non-decent' can be seen as derogative. However, a non-decent dwelling need not be in a terrible state of repair or in an appalling condition; something as simple as inefficient heating and a lack of insulation can cause a dwelling in otherwise pristine condition to be classified as non-decent.
- 6.6 The Decent Homes Standard is a relatively low bar, so failure to meet it should be regarded as a trigger for action. In some cases, however, it may not be practical to make a dwelling decent and it may also not be in the best interests of the occupiers to do so. The guidance on recording outcomes recognises that there may be instances where it is appropriate to record cases: for example, where work to achieve only partial compliance with the standard has been achieved, or where non-compliance results from the occupier refusing to have work carried out.

- ^{6.7} It is possible for a dwelling to fail the Decent Homes Standard for more than one reason: for example, there is often a strong overlap between Category 1 hazards and thermal comfort failures. As a consequence, the number of fails in total will be more than the number of dwellings which fail because some dwellings have more than one area of failure.

Applying the Standard

- ^{6.8} The four criteria used to determine the decent homes standard have specific parameters. The variables from the survey used for the criteria are described below.

Criterion A: Current Minimum Standards for Housing – Category 1 Hazards identified under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

- ^{6.9} Criterion A is simply determined as whether or not a dwelling fails the current minimum standard for housing. This is now the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) – specifically Category 1 hazards as set out in the previous chapter.

Criterion B: Dwelling State of Repair – Disrepair to major building elements and amenities

- ^{6.10} Criterion B of the Decent Homes Standard looks at the issue of the state of general repair of a dwelling which will fail if it meets one or more of the following:
- » One or more key building components are old (which are specifically defined in the criteria) and, because of their condition need replacing or major repair; or
 - » Two or more other building components are old and, because of their condition need replacing or major repair.
- ^{6.11} A building that has a component failure before the component's expected lifespan does not fail the Decent Homes Standard. A dwelling will be considered to be in disrepair if it fails on one or more major element or two or more minor elements.

Criterion C: Lacking Modern Facilities – Provision of kitchens, bathrooms and other amenities

- ^{6.12} The third criterion of the Decent Homes Standard is that a dwelling should have adequate modern facilities. A dwelling fails the modern facilities test only if it lacks three or more of the following:
- » A kitchen which is 20 years old or less;
 - » A kitchen with adequate space and layout;
 - » A bathroom that is 30 years old or less;
 - » An appropriately located bathroom and WC;
 - » Adequate noise insulation;
 - » Adequate size and layout of common parts of flats.

- ^{6.13} For example, if a dwelling had a kitchen and bathroom older than the specified date, it would only fail the modern facilities test if it also failed another of the identified criteria (e.g. the kitchen had a poor layout, or the bathroom was not properly located).
- ^{6.14} It may be noted that the age definition for kitchens and bathrooms differs from Criterion B. This is because it was determined that a decent kitchen, for example, should generally be less than 20 years old but may have the odd item older than this. The same idea applies for bathrooms.

Criterion D: Thermal Comfort Failures – Provision of efficient heating and effective insulation

- ^{6.15} The dwelling should provide an adequate degree of thermal comfort. Originally this definition was based on the SAP rating of a dwelling, but a number of local authorities criticized this approach, as it requires a fully calculated SAP for each dwelling that is being examined. Whilst this is fine for a general statistical approach, such as this study, it does cause problems at the individual dwelling level for determining an appropriate course of action.
- ^{6.16} The alternative, laid out in the current guidance, is to examine a dwelling's heating systems and insulation types. The revised definition requires a dwelling to have both:
- » Efficient heating; and
 - » Effective insulation.
- ^{6.17} Efficient heating is defined as any gas or oil programmable central heating or electric storage heaters or programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating or any similarly efficient heating systems to be developed in the future. Due to the differences in efficiency between gas/oil heating systems and other heating systems listed, the level of insulation that is appropriate also differs:
- » For dwellings with gas/oil programmable heating: at least 50mm loft insulation (if there is loft space) is an effective package of insulation or cavity wall insulation (if there are cavity walls that can be insulated effectively);
 - » For dwellings heated by electric storage radiators/LPG/programmable solid fuel central heating a higher specification of insulation is required: at least 200mm of loft insulation (if there is a loft) and cavity wall insulation (if there are cavities that can be insulated effectively).
- ^{6.18} Any heating sources which provide less efficient options fail in terms of thermal comfort (e.g. all room heater systems are considered to fail the thermal comfort standard).

Prevalence of Non-Decency

- ^{6.19} As noted in the previous chapter, in June 2023, DLUHC published information from the 2019 EHS for English local authorities as experimental statistics. The data is based upon extrapolating outputs from the national survey to the local authority areas, so areas with older stock, more private rent, worse energy performance scores, and more bungalows are modelled to have higher numbers of non-decent homes.
- ^{6.20} Figure 46 and Figure 47 compare the outputs for Stevenage with the East of England and England as whole by tenure and property type. Again, we would note that the data does relate to 2020 and the condition of the housing stock is improving over time and also that it relates only to occupied dwellings, so vacant properties have not been considered.
- ^{6.21} The data shows that overall, Stevenage was projected to have had 8.3% of its housing stock as non-decent in 2020, compared to 13.5% for the East of England and 15.1% for England as a whole. The private rented stock was modelled to have the highest rate of non-decency, with flats and bungalows also scoring more highly.

Figure 46: Percentage of Non-Decent Dwellings by Tenure in 2020 (Source: EHS 2020 and DLUHC Modelling)

	Percentage non-decent		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Owner occupied	8.6%	12.8%	13.8%
Private rent	16.4%	24.6%	22.9%
Affordable Rented Housing	3.6%	4.6%	11.2%
TOTAL	8.3%	13.5%	15.1%

Figure 47: Percentage of Non-Decent Dwellings by Property Type in 2020 (Source: EHS 2020 and DLUHC Modelling)

	Percentage non-decent		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
Detached houses	5.3%	10.5%	11.2%
Semi-detached houses	6.6%	9.5%	13.6%
Bungalows	12.3%	4.6%	13.2%
Terraced houses	6.7%	9.3%	16.3%
Flats	13.0%	5.1%	18.1%
TOTAL	8.3%	13.5%	15.1%

- ^{6.22} As with Category 1 hazards, the DLUHC data only shows local authority level non-decent homes, but this figure can be broken down to ward level. Figure 48 does this for Stevenage. We have taken the 8.3% estimate for Stevenage from the 2020 EHS data but have updated this to more recent data and also included the impact of vacants in addition to that of occupied properties. The key factors in assessing the level of non-decent homes in each ward were: the age of the dwelling stock, the range of SAP scores as set out in Chapter 8, the tenure mix and the range of property types. Overall, around 2,700 properties or around 7.4% of the stock across Stevenage are likely to be non-decent. Please note that the figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 to prevent any spurious precision.
- ^{6.23} As noted above, the rate of non-decent homes has fallen sharply across England in recent years and that appears to have been mirrored across Stevenage.

Figure 48: Percentage of Dwellings Which are Non-Decent by Ward for 2023 (Source: ORS Modelling. Note: figures rounded to nearest 10)

	Number of Dwellings	Percentage of Dwellings with a Cat 1 Hazard
Bandley Hill	180	6.5%
Bedwell	2550	7.4%
Chells	200	7.4%
Longmeadow	180	7.3%
Manor	170	6.3%
Martins Wood	190	7.2%
Old Town	370	9.9%
Pin Green	220	8.0%
Roebuck	210	7.3%
Shephall	230	9.2%
St Nicholas	200	6.6%
Symonds Green	170	6.2%
Woodfield	130	5.9%
TOTAL	2,700	7.4%

Chapter Summary

- ^{6.24} Data from the EHS 2020 shows that Stevenage was projected to have had 8.3% of its housing stock as non-decent in 2020, compared to 13.5% for the East of England and 15.1% for England as a whole. The private rented stock was modelled to have the highest rate of non-decency, with flats and bungalows also scoring more highly.
- ^{6.25} This data can be updated and applied to ward level outputs, and this shows for Stevenage that around 2,700 properties across Stevenage are likely to be non-decent.

7. Energy Performance and Fuel Poverty

Energy and fuel use

Energy Performance and SAP Ratings

- ^{7.1} The Standard Assessment Procedure or SAP is a government rating for energy efficiency. It is used in this report in conjunction with annual CO₂ emissions figures, calculated on fuel consumption, and the measure of that fuel consumption in kilo Watt hours (kWh), to examine energy efficiency.
- ^{7.2} The Government's SAP rating has been changed a number of times over the years and these changes can have an important effect on comparing SAP ratings. The most significant changes came in 2001 and 2005, which involved a shift to a 1 to 120 scale in 2001 and then a reversion to a 1 to 100 scale in 2005.
- ^{7.3} The key methodology used for gathering SAP information is Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs). Every property in England requires an EPC to be conducted when it is bought and sold and also when it is being let. Social landlords must also maintain an up-to-date EPC for their properties. This means that around half of all properties in England have had an EPC conducted in the past 10 years.

Main Heating

- ^{7.4} Figure 49 shows that, across Stevenage, around 93% of properties use central heating as their main heating sources. However many properties, especially in private rent, still do use storage or single room heaters which tend to be less energy efficient and more expensive. The England average is 92% of properties using central heating.

Figure 49: Main Heating System by Tenure in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Tenure			
	Owner occupied	Private rent	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
STEVENAGE				
Central heating	95.0%	79.6%	94.7%	92.6%
Storage heaters	2.4%	10.1%	4.4%	4.1%
Single room heaters	2.6%	10.3%	0.9%	3.3%
ENGLAND				
Central heating	94.9%	81.6%	92.4%	92.0%
Storage heaters	3.2%	11.0%	6.3%	5.1%
Single room heaters	1.9%	7.4%	1.4%	2.8%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

- ^{7.5} In terms of heating systems by the age of properties (Figure 50), properties built from 2012 onwards have the highest proportion of central heating. Stevenage has high rates of central heating across the years however this appears to drop between 2003-2011 in favour of single room heaters.

Figure 50: Main Heating System by Property Age in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Property Age						
	Pre 1900	1900-1949	1950-1975	1976-1990	1991-2002	2003-2011	2012 onwards
Central heating	97.7%	97.9%	96.6%	92.0%	83.7%	76.1%	98.3%
Storage heaters	1.4%	0.9%	2.5%	4.2%	12.6%	5.2%	0.0%
Single room heaters	0.9%	1.2%	0.9%	3.8%	3.7%	18.7%	1.7%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- ^{7.6} In terms of property types, Figure 54 shows that over 95% of houses in Stevenage run using central heating. However, only two thirds of flats use central heating, with a comparatively larger proportion heated by single room heaters and storage heaters.

Figure 51: Main Heating System by Property Type in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Property type					
	Detached	Semi-detached	Terraced	Flat or maisonette	Caravan or other	Total
Central heating	99.7%	98.4%	96.6%	67.6%	-	91.1%
Storage heaters	0.1%	1.0%	2.2%	12.0%	-	3.8%
Single room heaters	0.1%	0.6%	1.2%	20.4%	-	5.1%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	-	100.0%

- ^{7.7} In general, the heating systems in over 90% of properties are considered to be fairly good. However, around 11% of those in the private rent sector are considered to be fairly or very poor (Figure 52):

Figure 52: Quality of Heating System by Tenure in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

Quality of Heating System	Tenure			
	Owner occupied	Private rent	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Very Good	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Fairly Good	93.9%	79.9%	95.1%	92.1%
Average	2.7%	8.8%	3.9%	3.9%
Fairly Poor	0.6%	1.8%	0.1%	0.6%
Very Poor	2.7%	9.6%	0.9%	3.3%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Loft Insulation

^{7.8} Installing loft installation of at least 200mm can achieve energy efficiency gains quickly and relatively cheaply. Figure 53 shows the proportion of properties in Stevenage with 200mm or more loft insulation by the age of property. There is a notable lack of insulation on properties that were built prior to 1950.

Figure 53: Loft Insulation Where the Property Contains a Loft by Age of Property in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Percentage of dwellings with 200mm or more loft insulation
Pre 1900	33.9%
1900-1949	36.5%
1950-1975	42.7%
1976-1990	44.8%
1991-2002	30.9%
2003-2011	74.2%
2012 onwards	98.5%

^{7.9} Figure 54 shows the proportion of properties in Stevenage with 200mm or more loft insulation by the tenure of property. Social rented properties are more likely to have 200mm or more loft insulation than other tenures.

Figure 54: Loft Insulation Where the Property Contains a Loft by Tenure of Property in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Percentage of dwellings with 200mm or more loft insulation
Owned	40.6%
Private Rent	37.4%
Social Rent	52.2%

^{7.10} Figure 55 shows the proportion of properties in Stevenage with 200mm or more loft insulation by property type. Flats have a considerably higher prevalence of 200mm or more loft insulation than other types of property.

Figure 55: Loft Insulation Where the Property Contains a Loft by Type of Property in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Percentage of dwellings with 200mm or more loft insulation
Detached	48.1%
Semi-Detached	44.6%
Terraced	43.6%
Flat	61.0%
Caravan / Other	-

Cavity Wall Insulation

^{7.11} Across the whole of England, 70% of properties which have cavity walls also contain insulation of those walls. Across Stevenage this figure is 78%, with the private rented sector being the lowest tenure in both Stevenage and England.

Figure 56: Percentage Cavity Wall Insulation by Tenure in Stevenage and England (Source: EPC Register)

	Tenure			
	Owner occupied	Private rent	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Stevenage	75.8%	75.3%	85.5%	78%
England	70.7%	60.7%	77.1%	70%

^{7.12} Insulation of solid wall properties is much rarer, with only 11% covered in England, and 42% of the solid wall properties in Stevenage have been insulated. Affordable rented solid wall properties have a much higher rate of coverage for insulation. Due to the nature of solid wall properties, insulation is much more difficult to implement.

Figure 57: Percentage Solid Wall Insulation by Tenure in Stevenage and England (Source: EPC Register)

	Tenure			
	Owner occupied	Private rent	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Stevenage	24.2%	46.5%	61.5%	42%
England	8.5%	10.5%	27.3%	11%

Windows

^{7.13} Figure 61 shows that over 95% of all properties in Stevenage are double glazed with comparable numbers across tenures. The private rented sector is slightly less likely to be fully double glazed and slightly more likely exclusively single glazed in comparison. When combining this with a similar pattern for heating systems, it could be suggested that private rented properties are less efficiently heated and insulated.

Figure 58: Double Glazing by Tenure in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Tenure			
	Owner occupied	Private rent	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Fully double Glazed	95.5%	94.7%	97.4%	95.9%
Partial Double Glazed	3.6%	3.4%	1.2%	3.0%
Single glazed	0.8%	1.9%	1.4%	1.1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

- ^{7.14} There is a clear correlation between the age of a property and its likelihood of being fully double-glazed (Figure 59). Older properties (i.e. pre-1949) have considerably higher levels of single glazing compared to those built after 1950.

Figure 59: Double glazing by age of dwelling in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Property Age						
	Pre 1900	1900-1949	1950-1975	1976-1990	1991-2002	2003-2011	2012 onwards
Fully double Glazed	42.4%	81.4%	96.7%	95.5%	98.4%	99.4%	100.0%
Partial Double Glazed	31.6%	14.6%	2.7%	2.7%	0.8%	0.4%	0.0%
Single glazed	26.0%	4.0%	0.6%	1.9%	0.8%	0.2%	0.0%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Floor Area

- ^{7.15} The EPC database also contains a measurement of the floor area of a property. As shown in Figure 60, detached homes are much bigger on average than other dwellings in Stevenage.

Figure 60: Average Floorspace by Property type in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Average Floorspace (m ²)
Detached	178.0
Semi-detached	132.8
Terraced	75.3
Flat or maisonette	42.8
Caravan or other	-
TOTAL	80.9

- ^{7.16} Figure 61 below contains the detailed data by tenure, showing that owner occupied properties are typically much larger.

Figure 61: Average Floorspace by Tenure in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Average Floorspace (m ²)
Owner occupied	100.2
Private rent	70.2
Affordable Rented Housing	56.1
TOTAL	81.6

Heating and Lighting Costs

^{7.17} One of the important reasons for outlining the average floorspace of a property in the previous section is that the cost of heating larger properties is clearly higher than a smaller dwelling. To consider the cost of heating in context, Figure 62 looks at the annual heating cost for different property types using different fuels, but all based on the cost per square metre for the dwellings. The data is based upon recorded information for recent surveys but has been uplifted to current energy prices.

^{7.18} Heating is the most expensive for semi-detached properties across fuel types with solid fuel being the most expensive. Mains gas is the cheapest fuel type and is the least expensive for flats and terraced housing. Heating costs are much lower per square metre for electric heaters in flats and terraced housing when compared to other housing types. It is possible that it is easier to place electric heaters in smaller properties in areas where they will have the most impact and this reduces their average running cost.

Figure 62: Average Heating Cost by Property Type (Source: EPC Register)

	Main Fuel - Heating Annual Price per Sq. metre of property				
	Mains Gas	Electric	LPG	Oil	Solid Fuel
Detached	£20.03	£37.20	£31.58	£21.50	-
Semi Detached	£21.45	£60.75	£35.35	-	£69.47
Terraced	£12.32	£27.59	£24.98	-	£22.10
Flat	£10.89	£16.85	£13.15	-	£78.67
TOTAL	£13.96	£19.27	£27.37	£21.50	£32.90

^{7.19} Hot water costs are also the cheapest when using mains gas in flats and terraced housing. However, this does not vary as significantly across property types as it does for heating costs. Using electricity to heat hot water is the most expensive option.

Figure 63: Average Hot Water Cost by Property Type (Source: EPC Register)

	Main Fuel - Hot Water Annual Price per Sq. meter of property				
	Mains Gas	Electric	LPG	Oil	Solid Fuel
Detached	£4.28	£14.52	£11.12	£4.63	-
Semi Detached	£5.25	£16.78	£8.60	-	£7.40
Terraced	£3.27	£9.12	£6.18	-	£7.61
Flat	£3.37	£11.63	£4.37	-	-
TOTAL	£3.68	£11.37	£7.67	£4.63	£7.58

^{7.20} In terms of the cost of lighting, there is a small difference in cost per square metre for any property type (Figure 64). As a result, the main factor in establishing the cost to light a given property is the area of the property (the number of square metres), i.e. the larger floor area, the higher the cost to illuminate. It follows therefore that detached homes have the highest lighting costs as they have larger areas on average compared to other property types (see Figure 60), despite the cost per individual square metre being highest for semi-detached properties.

Figure 64: Average Lighting Cost by Property Type (Source: EPC Register)

	Lighting Cost Per m ²	Average Floorspace in m ² (Figure 60)	Cost per m ² x Avg Floorspace
Detached	£2.90	178.0	£515.58
Semi Detached	£3.21	132.8	£425.79
Terraced	£1.92	75.3	£144.35
Flat	£1.86	42.8	£79.63
TOTAL	£2.14	80.9	£172.90

^{7.21} Annual energy costs in owner occupied properties in Stevenage are considerably higher than those found in private rented and affordable rented housing (Figure 65).

Figure 65: Average Annual Energy Cost by Tenure of Dwelling (Source: EPC Register)

	Average Energy Cost Per Annum
Owner occupied	£1,818
Private rent	£1,435
Affordable Rented Housing	£1,474

^{7.22} Figure 66 shows that average energy costs in Stevenage are at their highest amongst pre-1949 properties, likely reflecting the lower proportion of these properties that have insulation (See Figure 56).

Figure 66: Average Annual Energy Cost by Age of Dwelling (Source: EPC Register)

	Average Energy Cost Per Annum
Pre 1900	£2,094
1900-1949	£1,944
1950-1975	£1,737
1976-1990	£1,525
1991-2002	£1,610
2003-2011	£1,467
2012 onwards	£1,321

CO2 Emissions

^{7.23} Figure 70 considers the side effect of energy use in the home, which is the amount of CO2 emissions produced by a property. The highest CO2 emissions come from the owner-occupied sector and are notably high amongst older properties (pre-1949). This again likely reflects the comparatively low levels of insulation in these older properties (See Figure 56).

Figure 67: Average CO2 Emissions by Tenure and Age of Dwelling (Source: EPC Register)

	CO2 per annum (Tonnes)
Owner occupied	4.3
Private rent	3.1
Affordable Rented Housing	2.3
Pre 1900	8.6
1900-1949	5.7
1950-1975	3.6
1976-1990	3.3
1991-2002	3.6
2003-2011	1.7
2012 onwards	1.1

Energy Performance

^{7.24} Overall, across Stevenage, around 8% of properties are in the highest performance bands for SAP and less than 1% are in the two worst bands (F and G).

Figure 68: Percentage of Properties in Stevenage by SAP Band 2022/23 (Source: EPC Register)

EPC SAP Range Banded	Percentage
Band A (92-100)	0.1%
Band B (81-91)	8.1%
Band C (69-80)	40.8%
Band D (55-68)	42.2%
Band E (39-54)	8.2%
Band F (21-38)	0.6%
Band G (1-20)	0.1%
Total	100%

^{7.25} The EPC ratings of affordable housing in Stevenage show much better results than owner occupation and private rented properties. Overall, the EPC ratings of owner-occupied properties are slightly worse than private rented ones as shown in Figure 69.

Figure 69: SAP Score by Band for Stevenage by Tenure: (Source: EPC Register)

BAND	Percentage of Dwellings			
	Owner Occupied	Private Rented	Affordable Rented Housing	Total
Band A (92-100)	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Band B (81-91)	3.3%	3.4%	2.0%	2.9%
Band C (69-80)	34.7%	46.0%	59.9%	43.0%
Band D (55-68)	50.6%	42.0%	32.2%	44.5%
Band E (39-54)	10.4%	8.2%	5.5%	8.8%
Band F (21-38)	0.8%	0.5%	0.2%	0.6%
Band G (1-20)	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

^{7.26} A steady rise in the most prevalent SAP scores can be seen when considering properties by age (Figure 70). The largest proportion of properties built before 1949 are Band D, similarly in those built 1950-75, but with a notably larger proportion of Band C. For properties built from 1976 to 2011, the majority sit in Band C and post 2012, the majority are Band B.

Figure 70: Percentage of Dwellings by age and SAP score in Stevenage (Source: EPC Register)

	Property Age						
	Pre 1900	1900-1949	1950-1975	1976-1990	1991-2002	2003-2011	2012 onwards
Band A (92-100)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Band B (81-91)	0.0%	0.5%	0.9%	0.8%	1.5%	23.7%	87.5%
Band C (69-80)	4.5%	21.7%	38.0%	53.0%	49.5%	72.4%	12.5%
Band D (55-68)	42.5%	54.8%	49.2%	41.6%	45.7%	3.7%	0.0%
Band E (39-54)	46.4%	20.2%	11.0%	4.5%	3.3%	0.1%	0.0%
Band F (21-38)	3.9%	2.4%	0.8%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Band G (1-20)	2.7%	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Cost to Remedy

^{7.27} A key national and local policy is to improve the quality of the private rented sector, and as noted above around 0.5% of the private rented sector in Stevenage sits in EPC Bands F or G. This amounts to only around 25 properties in total. This is a very small number, but monitoring EPC records of private rented properties would identify some of the properties.

^{7.28} To consider the cost to remedy for Band F and G properties to bring them up to a Band C, we firstly considered if they had any options to effectively improve the property. There were no properties in Stevenage that did not have an effective means to improve the property to Band E or better, 40% would be able to improve the property to a Band E or Band D, but not be able to reach a Band C, leaving 60% of properties able to improve to at least a Band C.

- ^{7.29} Private rented properties with an EPC of F or G would require on average £10,200 to make good to an EPC rating Band E. To make good to B and C would require a further £4,100 on average (£14,300 in total). However, it may be noted that the distribution of cost to remedy is quite large. As can be seen in Figure 71 below, just over 30% of the properties are able to be remedied to Band C for less than £10,000; and 50% could be brought up Band E for less than £5,000.

Figure 71 Cost to Remedy from Band F or G to Band E and C (Source: EPC Register)

	MEET BAND E	MEET BAND C
Less than £1000	-	-
between £1000 and £4,999	50.0%	16.7%
between £5,000 and £9,999	25.0%	16.7%
Between £10,000 and £14,999	-	16.7%
£15,000 or more	25.0%	50.0%

Fuel Poverty

- ^{7.30} A key issue in reducing energy consumption is tackling fuel poverty. Not only do dwellings where fuel poverty exists represent dwellings with poor energy efficiency, they are, by definition, occupied by residents with low incomes least likely to be able to afford improvements.
- ^{7.31} The Low-Income High Costs (LIHC) definition of fuel poverty was adopted by the government in 2013. Under the LIHC definition, a household is considered to be fuel poor if:
- » Its required fuel costs are above the median level;
 - » Spending this amount on fuel costs would leave the household with a residual income below the official poverty line.
- ^{7.32} For each individual dwelling surveyed in an EPC, the energy efficiency software not only calculates the SAP rating and CO2 emissions for a dwelling, but also the cost of heating that dwelling per annum. This cost is based on the standard model of heating the dwelling to 21 degrees Celsius in the main living rooms and 18 degrees Celsius in bedrooms and other rooms, over the course of a year.
- ^{7.33} The government now publish estimates of the number of households in fuel poverty by Lower Super Output Area (LSOA). This is a geographic building block of the Census which typically contains between 500 and 1,000 dwellings. LSOAs do not match to ward boundaries but do match to local authority boundaries.
- ^{7.34} Government data now indicates that 9.7% of all households in Stevenage live in fuel poverty as of 2021, which is below the East of England and England averages. Clearly this figure will have risen in the past year as energy bills have risen, but no new data has been published.

Figure 72: Percentage of Households Experiencing Fuel Poverty in 2021 (Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy)

	Percentage of Households		
	Stevenage Borough	East of England	England
TOTAL	9.7%	12.3%	13.1%

Chapter Summary

- ^{7.35} Across Stevenage, around 93% of properties use mains gas as their main heating source, but many properties, especially in private rent, still use storage or single room heaters which tend to be less energy efficient and more expensive. In general, the heating systems of most properties are considered to be fairly good. However, around 11% of those in the private rent sector are considered to be fairly or very poor.
- ^{7.36} Higher prevalences of 200mm or more loft insulation has been observed in newer properties, social rented properties, and flats.
- ^{7.37} While 78% of properties which have cavity walls also contain insulation of those walls, this figure is lower in the private rented sector, and this represents another area where relatively simple gains to energy efficiency could be achieved.
- ^{7.38} A similar pattern to heating systems and insulation also applies to windows with the private rented sector less likely to have fully double-glazed windows. They are also more likely to be exclusively single glazed than other tenure types. Newer properties have higher levels of double glazing than older properties.
- ^{7.39} Older housing stock in Stevenage has higher rates of CO2 emission and energy use which likely reflects the lower levels of insulation in these properties.
- ^{7.40} Overall, across Stevenage, around 8% of properties are in the highest performance bands for SAP and less than 1% are in the two worst bands. The EPC ratings of affordable housing in Stevenage show much better results than owner occupied and private rented properties.
- ^{7.41} Government data now indicates that 9.7% of all households in Stevenage lived in fuel poverty in 2021.

8. Need for Adapted Housing

Households who Require Adaptations

Housing for People with Disabilities

- ^{8.1} The Government's reform of Health and Adult Social Care is underpinned by a principle of sustaining people at home for as long as possible. This was reflected in the recent changes to building regulations relating to adaptations and wheelchair accessible homes that were published in the Building Regulations 2010 Approved Document Part M: Access to and use of buildings (2015 edition incorporating 2016 amendments – for use in England).⁹
- ^{8.2} Three standards are covered:
- » M4(1) Category 1: Visitable dwellings – Mandatory, broadly about accessibility to ALL properties
 - » M4(2) Category 2: Accessible and adaptable dwellings – Optional, similar to Lifetime Homes
 - » M4(3) Category 3: Wheelchair user dwellings – Optional, equivalent to wheelchair accessible standard.
- ^{8.3} In terms of new developments, Part M states that: *"Where no condition is imposed, dwellings only need to meet requirements M4(1)"* (Paragraph 0.3). Local authorities should identify the proportion of dwellings in new developments that should comply with the requirements for M4(2) Category 2 and M4(3) Category 3 as part of the Local Plan, based on the likely future need for housing for older and disabled people (including wheelchair user dwellings) and taking account of the overall impact on viability.
- ^{8.4} Local planning authorities are expected to plan for households with specific needs and therefore need to be able to quantify the volume of demand.
- ^{8.5} In terms of identifying the needs for specific adaptations required within any given home, a household survey is a prerequisite to gathering this information. However, while working on more general housing needs assessments, ORS has developed a more general model to consider the need for adapted housing. The model does not identify what type of adaptations are required, but it does give an indication of the scale of unmet need.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-and-use-of-buildings-approved-document-m>

Need for Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings

- 8.6 In establishing the need for M4(2) Category 2 housing it is important to consider the health demographics of the area.
- 8.7 Building Regulations for M4(2) Category 2: Accessible and adaptable dwellings states that reasonable provision should be made for people to gain access to and use the facilities of the dwelling and that:

“The provision made must be sufficient to-

(a) meet the needs of occupants with differing needs, including some older or disabled people, and

(b) to allow adaptation of the dwelling to meet the changing needs of occupants over time.”

Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M v1, Page 10

- 8.8 The English Housing Survey explores the number of households which contain someone with a limiting long-term illness (LLTI) or disability which impacts their housing need. This identifies that most (69%) of households have no limiting long-term illness (LLTI) or disability and a further fifth (22%) where illness or disability does not affect their housing need.
- 8.9 Overall 9.2% of households (around 1 in every 11) have one or more persons with a health problem which requires adaptations to their home. This proportion is markedly higher in affordable housing than in market housing (17.3 % and 5.5% respectively -Figure 73).

Figure 73: Households with a long-term illness or disability that affects their housing needs (Source: English Housing Survey)

	Market housing	Affordable housing	TOTAL
Households without limiting long-term illness or disability	76.8%	51.1%	68.9%
Households with one or more persons with a limiting long-term illness or disability			
Does not affect their housing need	17.6%	31.6%	22.0%
Current home suitable for needs	4.5%	13.8%	7.4%
Current home requires adaptation	0.6%	1.6%	0.9%
Need to move to a more suitable home	0.4%	1.9%	0.9%
Total households where a limiting long-term illness or disability affects their housing need:	5.5%	17.3%	9.2%

- 8.10 Within this group, the substantial majority of households live in a home that is suitable for their needs (either having already moved or adapted their existing home). This leaves 1.8% of households either requiring adaptations or needing to move to a more suitable home.
- 8.11 ORS uses the national English Housing Survey together with data about relative levels of limiting long-term illness and disability in Stevenage to estimate the number of households likely to require adaptations or needing to move to a more suitable home in the housing market area.

Figure 74: Households with a long-term illness or disability in Stevenage in 2021 by effect on housing need (Source: ORS Housing Model. Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding)

	TOTAL
Households with one or more persons with a limiting long-term illness or disability	11,369
Does not affect their housing need	8,019
Current home suitable for needs	2,707
Current home requires adaptation	318
Need to move to a more suitable home	326
Total households where a limiting long-term illness or disability affects their housing need:	3,351

- ^{8.12} The model (Figure 74) identifies that there were around 11,400 households living in Stevenage in 2021 with one or more persons with a limiting long-term illness or disability. In around 8,000 of these households, this does not affect their housing need, but in around 3,400 households an illness or disability does impact on housing need.
- ^{8.13} Amongst those households where it does affect housing needs, 2,700 households are already living in a suitable home (having moved or made adaptations). This leaves 318 households needing adaptations to their current home and 326 households needing to move to a more suitable home. The 326 households needing to move represent an existing **unmet need** either for M4(2) housing or, given that some may actually be wheelchair users, for M4(3) housing.

Chapter Summary

- ^{8.14} Data from the Census shows that there were around 11,400 households living in Stevenage in 2021 with one or more persons with a limiting long-term illness or disability. For the vast majority of this group, their limiting long-term condition has no impact upon their health needs or has already been addressed through adaptations within their existing homes. However, some households either need to move from their current home to an adapted one or need to adapt their current home. Of this group, around 318 households need adaptations to their current home and 326 households need to move to a more suitable home.

9. Conclusions

Overall Key Points

Tenure Trends

- ^{9.1} Across the whole of Stevenage, owner occupation rates appear to have stabilised, but the private rented sector is still growing. The private rented sector is still smaller than for England or the East of England as a whole, but going forward the current tenure split is likely to remain relatively stable without major changes in government policy driving new affordable housing development.
- ^{9.2} For Stevenage, most of the total stock was built after 1945 with over half built between 1945-1972. On average, the housing stock of Stevenage is younger than that of the wider East or for England as a whole. Stevenage has far less properties built pre 1939 in comparison.

Age of the Dwelling Stock

- ^{9.3} For Stevenage, most of the total stock was built after 1945 with over half built between 1945-1972. On average, the housing stock of Stevenage is younger than that of the wider East or for England as a whole. Stevenage has far less properties built pre 1939 in comparison.

Homelessness

- ^{9.4} 148 households in Stevenage are currently in temporary accommodation. Data shows that the number of rough sleepers is 2 times higher in Stevenage than the average per capita for the East and England as a whole, but this is only an average of 11 households per year.
- ^{9.5} This situation is clearly not good, but the Council has limited policy options to respond to it. It can be assumed that all the households in temporary accommodation in the private rented sector are unable to address their own housing needs and would ideally require affordable rented accommodation. However, this does not exist in sufficient quantity to meet their needs.
- ^{9.6} The private rented sector in Stevenage contains many households receiving housing benefit support, and a lack of security of tenure and/or ability to maintain financial stability will continue to see many households facing statutory homelessness.

Overall Population

- ^{9.7} Between 2011 and 2021, the population of Stevenage grew by 5,541 persons. There was a growth of 1,673 in the population aged over 65 years, while the population aged under 30 years dropped by 99 persons. Therefore, the population of Stevenage is becoming older on average.

- 9.8 The data shows that the affordable rented sector has the highest proportion of children, while the proportion of children in owner occupation is much lower. The population aged 20-44 years are much more concentrated in the private rented sector, while a disproportionate number of people aged 45 years and above are in owner occupation. In the longer-term, the outstanding question remains as to how households who are currently renting will transition into becoming owner occupiers. Central Government has created schemes such as First Homes to assist households into owner occupation and many will also inherit property, but it is also the case that many currently privately renting will remain in this tenure for the long run. It is therefore important that the stock condition and tenure security of the private rented sector continues to improve.

Employment and Income

- 9.9 There are a number of key statistics around the employment and income data for Stevenage:
- » The share of the population of Stevenage in employment is higher than the English and East of England averages;
 - » The proportion of the population who are long-term sick is higher than the East of England average;
 - » Households in receipt of housing benefit and/or Universal Credit in Stevenage are higher than the rate of the East of England and are well above the rate for England as well;
 - » Both the South East and England have much higher average household incomes than Stevenage.
- 9.10 On this basis the population of Stevenage has poorer health and is more likely to be supported by benefits than in the East of England or England as a whole.

House Prices and Rents

- 9.11 Real house prices in Stevenage increased substantially in the period 2001-2008. Values reduced during the economic downturn following mid-2008 and continued to decline over the period to 2013. Prices then increased until 2018, fell between 2018 and 2019, before continuing to increase to a peak in 2021 and declining thereafter. Movement in Stevenage house prices has broadly mirrored changes in England as a whole, but at a more expensive rate and with an increase in difference from 2014 onwards.
- 9.12 Compared to the East and the whole of England, property prices in Stevenage are relatively high. There is very little difference in the price of flats between these areas.
- 9.13 Rents have grown by between 9% and 30% in Stevenage over the period 2016-2023. The cost of renting in Stevenage is notably higher than the regional and national averages. Entry level rents were also shown to be higher than their equivalent LHA rates which implies that if a household is dependent upon housing benefit to cover their rental costs, then they will not be able to afford any property at the lower quartile rates in Stevenage.
- 9.14 The growing gap between rents in Stevenage and the level of LHA is likely to have contributed to the growth in statutory homelessness. Households will find it increasingly difficult to find a property compatible with their LHA benefit; and any additional money required to cover rents must come from the rest of their budget. It is therefore unsurprising to see many households being declared homeless.

Stock Condition

- ^{9.15} Data from the EHS 2020 shows that Stevenage is projected to have had 3.5% of its housing stock contain Category 1 hazards in 2020 and that 8.3% of its housing stock was non-decent. This compares to 7.6% for the East of England and 9.2% for England containing Category 1 hazards and 13.5% for the South East and 15.1% for England for non-decent.
- ^{9.16} Updating the modelling in 2023, we have identified that around 1,100 properties across Stevenage are likely to contain a Category 1 hazard, with around 140 of these experiencing excess cold. Meanwhile, we consider that around 2,700 properties are likely to fail the Decent Homes Standard.

Energy Efficiency

- ^{9.17} There are a number of areas where energy efficiency could be improved across Stevenage:
- » While most properties have fairly or very good heating systems, 11% of those in the private rented sector are considered to be poor;
 - » The number of properties with 200mm of loft insulation is below the national average, and is often low in older private rented properties;
 - » The uptake of cavity wall insulation is lower in older private rented properties;
 - » A similar story applies for double glazed windows, which are less frequent in the private rented sector; and
 - » All of the above factors see considerable variation in energy use across properties in Stevenage, with older private rented properties having higher energy use and CO2 emissions.
- ^{9.18} Around 0.4% of properties in the private rented sector are in the lowest energy performance bands. Around 25 properties could potentially be able to improve by a large amount, but at an average cost of £14,300 per property.
- ^{9.19} Government data now indicates that 9.7% of all households in Stevenage in 2021 live in fuel poverty, which is below the East of England and England averages.
- ^{9.20} Therefore, the housing stock of Stevenage has improved considerably in recent years, but there is still potential for further improvements, which would not only benefit the tenants and owner occupiers of Stevenage, but also could offer a wider economic boost to the area through job creation.

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Appendix B

Housing Legislation and Requirements

Housing Acts and other Legislation

Section 605 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended) placed a duty on local authorities to consider the condition of the stock within their area, in terms of their statutory responsibilities to deal with unfit housing, and to provide assistance with housing renewal. Section 3 of the Housing Act 2004 replaced this with a similar duty to keep housing conditions under review.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 came into effect on the 19 July 2003 and led to major change in the way local authorities can give financial help for people to repair or improve private sector homes. Before the Order, the Government set clear rules which controlled the way financial help could be given and specified the types of grants which could be offered. The Order set aside most of these rules (apart from the requirement to give mandatory Disabled Facility Grants). It now allows Local Authorities to adopt a flexible approach, using discretion to set up their own framework for giving financial assistance to reflect local circumstances, needs and resources.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) published guidance under Circular 05/2003. In order to use the new freedom, a local authority must prepare and publish a Private Sector Renewal Policy. The policy must show that the new framework for financial assistance is consistent with national, regional and local policies. In particular, it has to show that the local priorities the strategy is seeking to address have been identified from evidence of local housing conditions including stock condition.

The Housing Act 2004 received Royal Assent in November 2004. The Act makes a number of important changes to the statutory framework for private sector housing, which came into effect in April 2006:

The previous fitness standard and the enforcement system have been replaced by the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

The compulsory licensing of higher risk houses in multiple occupation (HMO) (three or more storeys, five or more tenants and two or more households).¹⁰

New discretionary powers including the option for selective licensing of private landlords, empty dwelling management orders and tenancy deposit protection.

Operating Guidance was published on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System in February 2006. This guidance describes the new system and the methods for measurement of hazards, as well as the division of Category 1 and 2 hazards. Guidance has been issued by the ODPM on the licensing provisions for HMOs, which describes the high-risk HMOs that require mandatory licensing and those that fall under additional, discretionary licensing.

As the Rating System has now replaced the fitness standard, this report deals with findings based on statutory hazards, not unfitness.

¹⁰ The requirement for the property to be 3 storeys was removed in 2018, so now the key determinant is 5 or more people and 2 or more households.

The Housing Act 2004 was updated and amended as part of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 which received royal assent in May 2016. However, the amendments do not have any major impact on the regulatory powers available to local authorities with the exception of changes relating to rights to prosecute private landlords.

Mandatory Duties

Unfit houses (Housing Act 1985) - to take the most satisfactory course of action – works to make property fit, closure/demolition or clearance declaration.

With effect from April 2006 replaced by:

Category 1 hazards, Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) (Housing Act 2004) – to take the most satisfactory course of action – improvement notices, prohibition orders, hazard awareness notices, emergency remedial action, emergency prohibition orders, demolition orders or slum clearance declaration.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (Housing Act 1985) - to inspect certain HMOs, to keep a register of notices served, to require registration where a registration scheme is in force.

With effect from April 2006 replaced by:

HMO Licensing by the Authority (Housing Act 2004) of all HMOs of three or more storeys, with five or more residents and two or more households. Certain exceptions apply and are defined under sections 254 to 259 of the Housing Act 2004.

Note: This qualification for mandatory licensing was updated in 2018 to remove the need for the property to be 3 or more storeys high.

Overcrowding - (Housing Act 1985) - to inspect and report on overcrowding.

Now in addition:

Overcrowding – (Housing Act 2004) – to inspect and report on overcrowding as defined under sections 139 to 144 of the Housing Act 2004 along with statutory duty to deal with any Category 1 overcrowding hazards found under the HHSRS.

The provision of adaptations and facilities to meet the needs of people with disabilities (**Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996**) - to approve applications for Disabled Facilities Grants for facilities and/or access.

Energy Conservation (Home Energy Conservation Act 1995) - to have in place a strategy for the promotion and adoption of energy efficiency measures, and to work towards specified Government targets to reduce fossil fuel use. This should contain assessment of:

- The cost of proposed energy conservation measures;
- The extent of decreases in nitrogen and sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere;
- The extent of decreases in carbon dioxide into the atmosphere;
- The number of jobs created from the measures taken.

Requirements of authorities under the Act

Under revised Guidance (March 2013) all English authorities need to prepare further reports (by 31 March 2013) setting out the energy conservation measures that the authority considers practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in its area.

Authorities should have regard in their reports to:

- (i) measures that take advantage of financial assistance and other benefits offered from central Government initiatives, such as the Green Deal, ECO and Renewable Heat Incentive or other initiatives, to help result in significant energy efficiency improvements of residential accommodation; and
- (ii) measures which an authority has developed to implement energy efficiency improvements cost-effectively in residential accommodation by using area based/street by street roll out involving local communities and partnerships (e.g. social housing partners, voluntary organisations and town/parish councils).

Reports should set out any existing timeframe for delivery and national and local partners they propose to work with in effecting such measures to support local accountability.

Progress reports to be made at 2 yearly intervals, starting March 2013, and to publish these electronically on their website with a link to be forwarded to the Secretary of State.

Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020.

The Regulations came into force on 1 June 2020 and form part of the work to improve safety in all residential premises - and particularly in the private rented sector.

The Regulations require landlords to have the electrical installations in their properties inspected and tested by a person who is qualified and competent, at least every 5 years. Landlords must provide a copy of the electrical safety report to their tenants, and if requested to their local authority. Local authorities can require landlords to carry out vital remedial works or even arrange for the repairs to be done and recover their cost from the landlord.

Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018

The Act came into force on 20 March 2019. The aim of the Act is to help drive up standards in rented homes in both the social and private sectors and provide an alternative means for tenants to seek redress from their landlord if their rented property presents a risk of harm to the health and safety of the occupiers.

Under the Act, sections are inserted into the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 requiring all landlords (private and social) to ensure that their properties, including any common parts of the building, are fit for human habitation at the beginning of the tenancy and throughout. The Act does so by implying a covenant to this effect in the tenancy agreement.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Statutory nuisance is defined in section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Act contains a specific list of matters that amount to statutory nuisances and a more general category comprising 'any other matter declared by any enactment to be a statutory nuisance'. Specific matters include issues like smoke, fumes or dust from premises, noise and light and accumulation of waste. The Act allows local authorities to bring enforcement action to address the statutory nuisance.

Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Regulations

The MEES Regulations set a minimum energy efficiency level for domestic private rented properties. The Regulations apply to all domestic private rented properties that are:

- let on specific types of tenancy agreement
- legally required to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

If the property has an EPC rating of F or G, the landlord must take appropriate steps to comply with the requirements of the MEES Regulations. The (MEES) regulations changed with effect from 1 April 2023, such that the prohibition on new lettings of sub-standard, non-domestic properties now extends to the continuation of any existing lease of a sub-standard, non-domestic property.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022

The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 came into force on 1 October 2015. The updated Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022 came into force on 1 October 2022. From that date, all private and social landlords must:

1. Ensure at least one smoke alarm is equipped on each storey of their homes where there is a room used as living accommodation. This has been a legal requirement in the private rented sector since 2015.
2. Ensure a carbon monoxide alarm is equipped in any room used as living accommodation which contains a fixed combustion appliance (excluding gas cookers).
3. Ensure smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are repaired or replaced once informed and found that they are faulty.

HMO Requirements

The legal minimum standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are contained in Statutory Instrument 2006 No 373, with amendments contained in Statutory Instrument 2007 No 1903. These standards apply to all HMOs, whether or not they need to be licensed.

The standards set out in Statutory Instrument 2006 No 373, schedule 3 stipulate the following:

- » An adequate means of space heating must be provided in each letting and in bathrooms, whether shared or not;
- » Kitchens and bathrooms must be adequately ventilated, including extractor fans in kitchens;
- » Kitchens, bathrooms and toilets must be of adequate size and layout and be suitably located in the HMO in relation to the lettings;
- » All baths, showers, wash hand basins and sinks must be fitted with taps supplying cold water and a constant supply of hot water;
- » For up to 4 occupiers, there must be at least one bathroom and toilet (which can be in the bathroom). This has been amended by Statutory Instrument 2007 No 1903 to say that there must be an adequate number of bathrooms, toilets and wash hand basins for personal washing for the number of persons sharing those facilities, and where reasonably practicable there must be a wash hand basin with appropriate splash back in each unit;
- » For five or more occupiers, there must be at least one bathroom for every 5 sharers, and a separate toilet for every 5 sharers. This has been amended by Statutory Instrument 2007 No 1903 to say that there must be an adequate number of bathrooms, toilets and wash hand basins for personal washing for the number of persons sharing those facilities, and where reasonably practicable there must be a wash hand basin with appropriate splash back in each unit;
- » Adequate size and layout kitchen for the number of sharers, containing sinks with draining boards, cooking equipment, worktops, storage cupboards, for food and crockery and utensils, fridge/freezers (combined or separate), and electrical sockets;
- » Adequate refuse disposal facilities;
- » Adequate fire precautions including fire doors and fire blankets as appropriate.

HMOs should also be assessed against the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and the appropriate enforcement action should be taken, where necessary, to ensure any deficiencies are rectified.

The Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation England 2006 and Licensing and Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation and other houses (miscellaneous provisions) (England) Regulations 2006. Regulation 8 and Schedule 3 govern the following requirements for heating, space, light and ventilation in HMOs.

Heating

The normally accepted standard is a central heating system (preferably gas fired), or fixed heaters (electric heaters should be hard wired, not plugged into the room sockets). Portable electric fires, convector heaters or oil filled radiators, gas cylinder powered heaters or paraffin heaters are not acceptable.

Space

Letting rooms should be not less than 10 m² for a single letting, which can be reduced to 7 m² if there is a communal lounge. Double rooms should be 15 m² and 11 m² respectively.

Natural Light and Ventilation

Clear glazing equivalent in area to 10% of the floor area of the room should be provided in each letting. Openable windows equivalent in area to 5% of the floor area of the room should be provided in each letting. Doors to open air cannot be included in the reckoning.

Fire Safety

Fire safety provisions and equipment should be provided as appropriate to the accommodation in line with the domestic fire safety standard.

Fire Alarms

Fire can break out in even the most safety conscious household, and should this happen, toxic smoke can very quickly spread throughout the house. It is most important, therefore, to alert the occupants as soon as possible that a fire has broken out in the house. The most effective way of providing this early warning is to fit electrically operated fire detection and alarm systems.

These can range from single, battery-operated smoke alarms which are widely available from only a few pounds to quite sophisticated mains operated systems linked to a remote monitoring service who will alert East Sussex Fire & Rescue should the alarm be actuated in the property. Both Stevenage Borough Council and East Sussex Fire & Rescue recommend a system of smoke and heat alarms which are mains operated and have a battery backup. Smoke alarms must be interlinked, either by physical inter-wiring or by a wireless signal, so that when one alarm detects a fire, all the alarms in the building will sound.

In single family homes and low risk houses in multiple occupation the normal standard would be to provide smoke alarms in the circulation space (hall, stairs and landing) and heat alarms in the kitchen. In most other types of HMO additional alarms are located inside the lettings.

Means of Escape

In all cases there should be a clear escape route from all parts of the house to open air. This is usually the landing, staircase and hallway to the front door. These routes must be kept clear of obstruction and a lockable door should be able to be opened from the inside without using keys. In all but the low risk Houses in Multiple Occupation, doors onto the escape route should be to an approved fire resisting standard. Windows are not accepted as means of escape however ground and first floor windows must be openable to allow exit or access for rescue should the normal escape route not be available.

Landlord Fire Safety Responsibilities

Since the introduction of the 2015 Smoke alarm and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations (amended in 2022), most private landlords (there are exceptions to the statutory instrument in cases such as student halls of residence, social landlords, long leases, care homes etc.) are required to fit a smoke alarm on every floor of their property and a carbon monoxide alarm in any room containing a fixed combustion appliance (excluding gas cookers), such as log burners or open fires. There is a further requirement that these are repaired or replaced when the landlord is informed, and the alarms are confirmed to be faulty. The enforcement of these regulations is the responsibility of the local housing authority; and landlords can be fined for failure to comply with the requirements.

Mandatory, Additional and Selective Licensing

The licensing of rental properties is a process whereby the person responsible for the property must apply for a license to rent from the relevant authority. The authority then ensures that the licensee is a “fit and proper person”, and that the property itself is suitable for occupation by the number of tenants proposed. Tenants should have a system to report defects (including responses), periodic inspections should take place, and adequate funding for repairs should be confirmed where necessary (e.g. such as if the landlord is not the manager of the property).

In addition, in the case of HMOs, the license ensures that there is compliance with The Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006 (note that this legislation applies to all HMOs). These regulations require that the HMO is kept safe (e.g. fire safety provision, gas safety certificates, PAT testing of electrical items), a reasonable state of cleanliness (for common areas) and in an appropriate state of repair.

The Housing Act of 2004 prescribed that it is mandatory for any HMO meeting all three of the following criteria to be licensed:

- 1) The property is three or more storeys high¹¹
- 2) The property has five or more people in more than one household, and
- 3) The occupants share amenities such as bathrooms, toilets or cooking facilities.

Exceptions are made in cases where the property is managed by a housing association or other social authority, where the property is wholly in the form of self-contained flats, or where the basement is in commercial use with only two residential storeys above. This legislation therefore broadly covers large HMOs; which government consider high risk. The majority of HMOs in the study area are S257 HMOs and as such are not subject to mandatory licensing since they do not satisfy the above criteria.

Councils have the power to impose licensing on other HMOs not covered by the above. This is known as Additional Licensing and can be introduced if there is an issue with a significant proportion of other types of HMO being poorly managed and giving rise to problems for tenants or the wider neighbourhood. Additional Licensing means that all HMOs in the affected area are required to apply for a license in the same way as the mandatorily licensed large HMOs.

¹¹ The requirement for the property to be 3 storeys was removed in 2018, so now the key determinant is 5 or more people and 2 or more households.

The Housing Act also gives local authorities the power to require further classes of property to be licensed; and is an option to be considered to tackle problems such as antisocial behaviour, low demand for rental properties, poor property conditions or high levels of crime, migration or deprivation. This is known as Selective Licensing and requires almost all private landlords (again there are certain exceptions) in the designated area to apply for a license. Since 2010, there has been a General Approval for all such schemes, modified in 2015 to being generally approved as long as they encompass less than 20% of the authority, or less than 20% of the private rental market. If either of these criteria are exceeded, the scheme requires confirmation from the Secretary of State. This stipulation is designed to ensure that local authority focus is on problem areas, rather than simply applying licensing to the whole area.