

Article

Comparing affordable housing in the UK: April 2008 to March 2018

Affordable housing stock, supply, sales and characteristics, compared between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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1 . Main points

- Housing is a devolved policy across the UK and each country produces data and statistics according to their own legislative framework, which vary substantially between countries; as such, care must be taken when making comparisons across the four nations of the UK because of the different approaches each country has taken to affordable housing.
- In terms of supply, there were 60,000 affordable homes supplied (built, bought or rehabilitated) between April 2017 and March 2018, with the best available data suggesting Scotland comparatively supplied the most affordable homes per person (16 homes per 10,000 people).
- England has seen a larger change than other countries in the types of affordable homes being delivered; there has been a shift from homes being delivered for social rent to other sub-market rent homes ¹.
- The largest contributor to affordable housing is the social housing sector and data for this sector are readily available and comparable.
- In terms of stock, as of April 2018 there were about 5 million homes in the social housing sector across the UK, representing about a sixth of all properties, and this proportion has been stable over the past 10 years.
- Across the UK, Scotland had the highest proportion of homes in the social sector in 2018 (22% of homes).
- In terms of sales, there were 21,000 homes sold from the social sector in England, Scotland and Wales between April 2017 and March 2018, this excludes losses such as demolitions or change of use; it is not possible to compare supply and sales data to understand changes because the coverage of both is not comparable.
- In terms of characteristics, social sector homes in Northern Ireland are generally newer than in the rest of the UK, with 41% built after 1980 compared with about 25% in the rest of the UK.

Notes for: Main points

1. We define social rent, and other sub-market rent homes in the Data considerations section.

2 . Introduction

Housing affects all citizens in the UK. Affordable housing definitions and terminology are complicated and varied (we provide more information in the [Data considerations section](#)).

This article brings together published data from across the UK to present an overall picture of affordable housing. By comparing data published by each of the four nations, it highlights the similarities and differences in the stock, supply, sales and characteristics of affordable housing in the UK. This article builds upon work done across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) on [improving the accessibility and coherence of housing, planning and homelessness statistics](#) and looks more widely at data considerations, including data limitations and gaps. It is the third in a series of cross-UK articles, the previous articles being on the [Private rented sector](#) and [Homelessness](#).

This analysis has been produced in conjunction with a wider [GSS \(Government Statistical Service\) Affordable Housing Harmonisation Review](#). This Harmonisation Review explores in more detail some of the complexity around the terminology and definitions used in affordable housing statistics across the UK, and the feasibility and desirability of harmonising these.

3 . Things you need to know about this release

This article focuses on “affordable housing” (categories of housing classified as such by UK government departments and devolved administrations, usually those deemed to cost less than market rates) rather than definitions of “housing affordability” (which describes the cost of housing in relation to household incomes or resources). If you are interested in housing affordability statistics, these are available for [England and Wales](#). An analysis of housing costs and incomes is published for [Scotland](#), including some UK comparisons. Additionally, housing need and demand assessment tools, which incorporates an assessment of housing affordability for local areas are used in [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#). At present there are no equivalent statistics covering Northern Ireland.

Affordable housing does not have a statutory definition and is instead defined primarily through policy and practice in each of the four nations. The Data considerations section provides more information about the different definitions used across the UK and the impact on this analysis.

Affordable housing products sit across a spectrum of tenure – from fully renting, through partial ownership, to full ownership. This means that it is not straightforward to present a complete set of “affordable housing” statistics. Most housing in the social sector is affordable housing and most affordable housing can be found in the social sector. The private rented and the owner-occupied sectors contain a mixture of “affordable” and “not affordable” housing; statistics describing these sectors do not usually provide an affordable housing breakdown.

In this article we have used statistics describing all affordable housing where they are available; otherwise we have used statistics describing the social sector as they are the best representation of affordable housing that we have. We have used the term “social sector” to mean homes owned by local authorities, housing associations, private-registered providers and registered social landlords. For Northern Ireland, we have also included homes owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

This article sets out to cover the UK, but it is not always possible to present analysis covering all components of affordable housing across the whole of the UK. Where this is not possible, we separate out and present information on the social sector element of affordable housing. It is more difficult to separate out the affordable part of the private rented and owner-occupied tenures. Table 1 presents what coverage is available for each section of the article.

Table 1: Coverage of statistics available by section of this article

Section	Tenure coverage	Geographical coverage
Stock	Social sector only	Whole UK ¹
Supply	All affordable housing	Whole UK
Sales	Social sector only	England, Scotland and Wales ²
Characteristics ³	Social sector only	Mainly UK

Notes

1. The most recent data on the number of homes in the social sector in Northern Ireland describe 2016. [Back to table](#)
2. Northern Ireland only presents total sales information and does not separate out the social sector component. [Back to table](#)
3. Five breakdowns are presented - letting, property age, type, safety and vacancies. [Back to table](#)
4. Three of the five characteristics cover the whole UK (age, type and safety). Letting and vacancies are only presented for England, Scotland and Wales as Northern Ireland only present these statistics at an all-tenure level. [Back to table](#)

All statistics within this article have been taken from official statistics published by government departments or devolved administrations of the UK. The Data sources section provides links to the statistics used in each section. Most of the data sources used are published annually.

Read this report if you want to:

- understand the size, supply, sales and characteristics of affordable housing in the UK
- understand similarities and differences in affordable housing in the UK
- understand data limitations

Read the accompanying [GSS Affordable Housing Harmonisation Review](#) if you want to:

- understand definitions of affordable housing across the UK
- understand the main types of affordable housing products across the UK
- understand what affordable housing statistics are available in the UK
- see the next steps to improve the clarity of affordable housing statistics

4 . Stock: How many homes are there in the social sector?

Data on the number of affordable homes available across the UK are generally not comparable between countries, additionally there is variation on how comprehensive the data are. In most cases, official statistics present information on the stock of "social sector" housing rather than the wider "affordable housing" sector. More information about coverage is provided in the Data considerations section of this article. In addition, the [GSS Affordable Housing Harmonisation Review](#) describes in detail what official statistics are available across the UK, which aspects of affordable housing stock are covered and where there are data gaps.

As of April 2018, there were about 5 million houses in the social sector in the UK. There were:

- England: 4.13 million homes in the social sector (April 2018) ¹
- Scotland: 597,000 homes in the social sector (March 2018) ²
- Wales: 239,000 homes in the social sector (March 2018) ³
- Northern Ireland: 121,000 homes in the social sector (Collected May to November 2016) ⁴

The long-term historic trend has been a decrease in the size of the social sector. In the late 1970s the social sector represented 33% of all housing in England, Scotland and Wales. The reduction has been driven by an increase in sales (which is discussed in the Sales section of this article) and, to a lesser extent, a reduction in building of new affordable housing. Similar data for Northern Ireland have not been published to date.

Over the past 10 years, there has been a very small increase in the size of the social sector in England, Scotland and Wales. It has grown by about 210,000 homes, from 4.75 million homes in April 2008 to 4.96 million homes in April 2018. In the same period the total number of homes in England, Scotland and Wales has increased by 1.89 million homes.

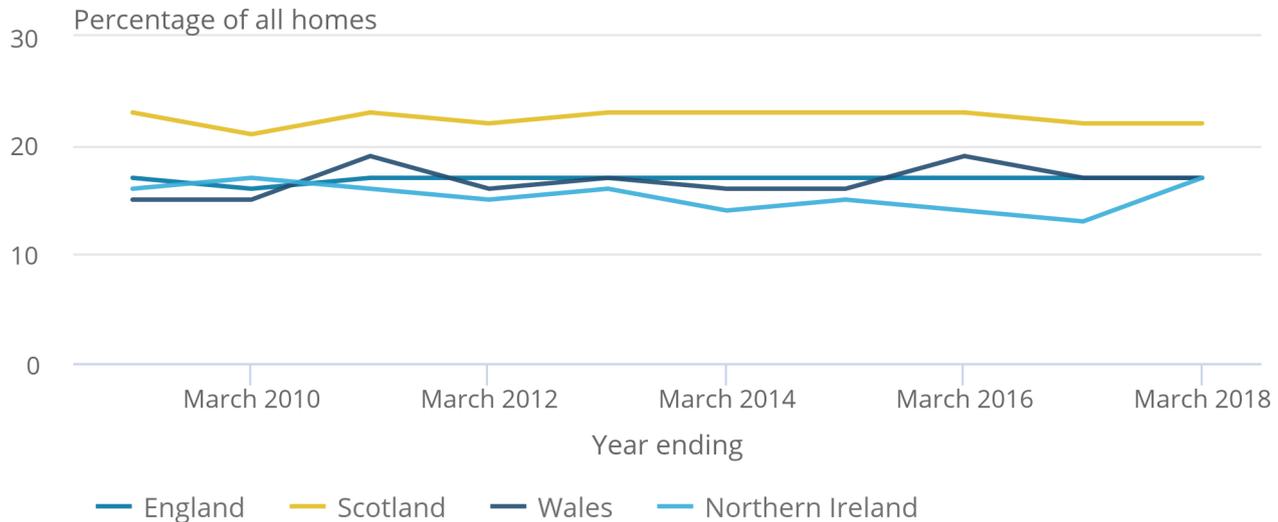
The Family Resources Survey surveys households across the UK and enables us to compare the social sector on a consistent basis. The strengths and limitations of this approach are discussed in the Data considerations section.

Figure 1: The percentage of homes in the social sector in the UK has remained relatively constant since 2008

Relative size of the social sector in each country of the UK, April 2008 to March 2018

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Relative size of the social sector in each country of the UK, April 2008 to March 2018



Source: Department for Work and Pensions – Family Resources Survey

Figure 1 shows that the percentage of homes in the social sector in the UK over the last 10 years has remained constant, averaging at a sixth of all homes (17%). Scotland has a higher proportion of social sector homes, where just over a fifth of all homes were in the social sector (22%). In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, about a sixth of homes were in the social sector (17% in England and Wales and 15% in Northern Ireland).

Notes for: Stock: How many homes are there in the social sector?

1. Figures for England are homes rented from private registered providers and local authorities.
2. Figures for Scotland represent the number of social rented dwellings, either from housing associations or from local authorities.
3. Figures for Wales include 230,000 social housing homes and 9,000 intermediate rent, shared equity and shared ownership homes.
4. Figures for Northern Ireland are estimated social sector dwellings based on NIHE House Conditions Survey (2016) tenure breakdown.

5 . Supply: How many affordable homes are being delivered?

All four UK countries publish official statistics on affordable housing supply and this is the aspect of affordable housing most thoroughly covered by statistics. There are some differences between the statistics collected for each country and this is discussed in the Data considerations section, together with other complexities such as:

- the difference between gross and net supply
- the point at which supply is recorded
- the treatment of Help to Buy sales

April 2017 to March 2018 findings

There are a range of ways in which affordable housing is delivered, which can be broadly categorised as:

- built
- bought (from existing market stock)
- rehabilitated (where uninhabitable stock is renovated or converted)

Between April 2017 and March 2018, there were 60,000 new affordable homes either built, bought or rehabilitated across the UK. Table 2 provides a breakdown of this delivery.

Table 2: There were 60,000 affordable homes built, bought or rehabilitated across the UK Breakdown¹ of affordable housing supply, by country and type of supply, April 2017 to March 2018

Country	Homes built, bought or rehabilitated	Built	Bought	Rehabilitated
England ²	47,100	43,400	3,700	
Scotland ³	8,600	5,300	2,300	1,000
Wales	2,300	Breakdown not provided		
Northern Ireland	2,300	Breakdown not provided		
UK (Total)	60,300	Breakdown not calculable		

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – Affordable housing supply, Scottish Government – Affordable housing supply, Welsh Government – Affordable housing provision, Department for Communities – Northern Ireland Housing Statistics

Notes

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100 homes supplied. [Back to table](#)
2. English figures don't provide a breakdown between the number of additional affordable homes bought and rehabilitated. [Back to table](#)
3. While affordable housing supply is measured similarly across the UK, this table does not compare countries on an exact "like for like" basis. Find out more in the Data considerations section of this article. [Back to table](#)

Between April 2017 and March 2018, there were 227,000 homes built across the UK. This is based on the best available annual data, which covers the whole of the UK. Of the 60,300 new affordable homes supplied, some are included in the UK housebuilding total, but other homes are bought and rehabilitated, rather than newly built, and so are not included in the overall housebuilding figure. The issues of comparability and coverage are discussed further in the Data considerations section.

Changes over time

There has been some variability in the number of affordable homes delivered over the last 10 years. Across the UK there has been an average of 62,400 affordable homes delivered annually, with a high of 78,800 between April 2014 and March 2015, and a low of 43,500 between April 2015 and March 2016.

Figure 2: In the UK there has been variability in the number of affordable homes delivered each year

Delivery of affordable housing in the UK: April 2008 to March 2018

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Delivery of affordable housing in the UK: April 2008 to March 2018



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – Affordable housing supply, Scottish Government – Affordable housing supply, Welsh Government – Affordable housing provision, Department for Communities – Northern Ireland Housing Statistics

Comparison of countries

While it is fair to say that changes to the UK picture are driven by affordable house delivery in England (the largest country by population), the overall picture presented in Figure 2 is not evenly replicated across the UK. Table 3 summarises the main differences in the delivery of affordable homes in each country over the last 10 years and Figure 3 demonstrates the variability and long-term trend seen in each country.

Table 3: There are differences in affordable housing supply trends across the UK
Comparison of trends in the delivery of affordable housing, April 2008 to March 2018

Country	Average number of affordable homes delivered each year	Year-on-year variability ¹	Long-term trend
England	50,800	High	Slight decrease
Scotland ²	7,100	Medium	Increase
Wales	2,400	Low	No major change
Northern Ireland	2,200	High	Increase

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government — Affordable housing supply, Scottish Government — Affordable housing supply, Welsh Government — Affordable housing provision, Department for Communities — Northern Ireland Housing Statistics

Notes

1. The coefficient of variation of the 10-year average for each nation has been used to help consider the variability. [Back to table](#)
2. While affordable housing supply is measured similarly across the UK, this table does not compare countries on an exact "like for like" basis. Find out more in the Data considerations section of this article. [Back to table](#)

Comparison with the private sector

Housebuilding trends in the private sector differ with those for affordable housing. Affordable housebuilding can be more stable in volume and will be impacted by changes to housing programmes, while longer-term trends show that private housebuilding can be cyclical, following the trends of the wider economy. Between April 2008 and March 2018, private housebuilding has increased by 16%.

Per head analysis

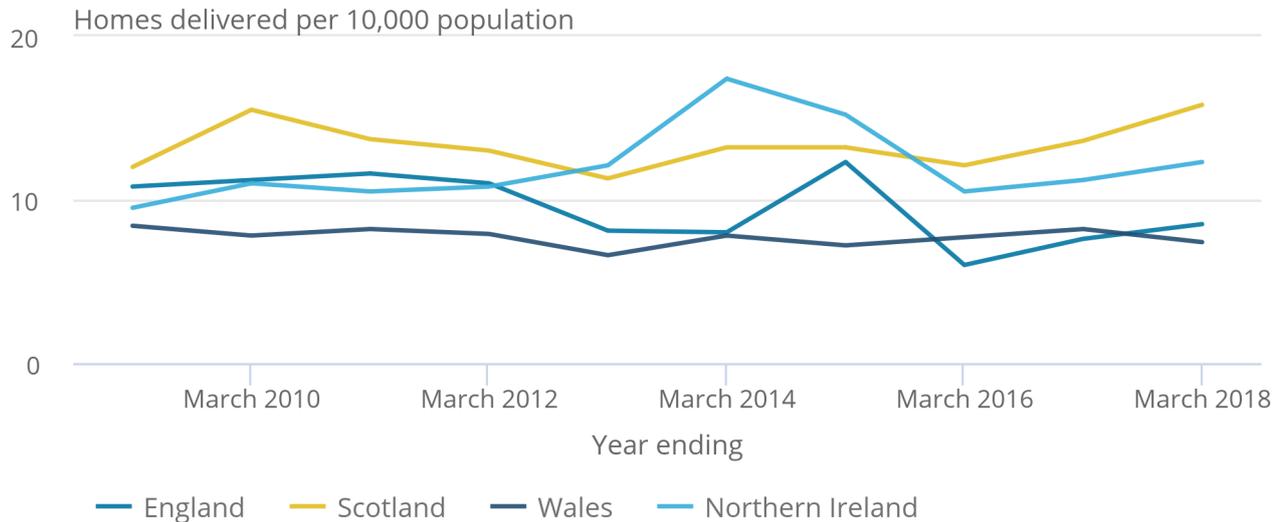
We are able to undertake some "per head of population analysis" to compare the affordable housing supply within each country. It must be noted this is not an exact "like for like" comparison between the countries as there are differences in the types of affordable housing supplied in each country. However, each country includes the same types of affordable house products and they are all measured in a similar way (that is, taken from administrative data sources from the same types of organisations). This means we are able to make broad comparisons across the countries of the UK. See the Data considerations section for more on data comparability.

Figure 3: Over the last ten years, on a per person basis, Scotland has delivered more affordable homes than other UK countries

Delivery of affordable housing per head of population: April 2008 to March 2018

Figure 3: Over the last ten years, on a per person basis, Scotland has delivered more affordable homes than other UK countries

Delivery of affordable housing per head of population: April 2008 to March 2018



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – Affordable housing supply, Scottish Government – Affordable housing supply, Welsh Government – Affordable housing provision, Department for Communities – Northern Ireland Housing Statistics, Office for National Statistics – Population estimates

Notes:

1. While affordable housing supply is measured similarly across the UK, this chart does not compare countries on an exact "like for like" basis. Find out more in the Data considerations section of this article.

Over the 10-year period, the best available data suggest Scotland has delivered the most affordable housing per head, supplying 16 homes per 10,000 population between April 2017 and March 2018. The variability over time in each country reflects changes in supply, this is because the overall population does not change dramatically year-on-year.

Changes to the types of affordable homes being delivered

When looking at types of affordable housing, it is important to remember there are many different products under the affordable housing umbrella. The [GSS Affordable Housing Harmonisation Review](#) describes these products in more detail.

In addition, the devolved nature of housing policy has seen different approaches taken by each country to meet the housing needs of their population. This means that there is also variation between products in countries of the UK. To help make comparisons across the UK, the following categories are used to report against types of affordable housing:

- social rent: often known as council or social housing
- other sub-market rent: distinct from social rent, England, Scotland and Wales all have a range of rental products that are set below market rent
- rent to own: rent to own schemes are known by a variety of names, including Rent to Buy, Rent to Save and Intermediate Rent (in England)
- shared ownership and shared equity: in this article we have included all schemes that are considered affordable housing products by the relevant producer

The analysis in this section presents the change in composition of affordable housing delivered in each country. Note that this analysis does not present the full picture of the change in composition of affordable housing in Scotland and Wales as there are not complete data collected in these countries; see the Data considerations section of this article for more information.

Figure 4: The types of affordable housing being delivered have changed across the UK, particularly in England

Types of affordable housing delivered in each country, year ending March 2011 and year ending March 2018

[Download the data](#)

England has seen a large change in the composition of affordable homes being delivered since 2010. There has been a shift from homes being delivered for social rent to other sub-market rent homes. There has also been a small reduction in the delivery of homes for shared ownership and shared equity.

There has been less change in the composition of affordable homes being delivered in the other countries.

In Scotland, while social rent remains the main type of affordable home delivered, its share has fallen. There has been a shift to sub-market rent and a small increase in shared ownership and shared equity.

In Wales, most affordable homes are delivered for social rent and this has not changed much over the time period considered. There has been an increase in the proportion of homes delivered for sub-market rent, and a corresponding decrease in homes delivered for shared ownership and shared equity, but the increase in sub-market rent was much less than that seen in England.

Northern Ireland has seen the least change in composition, with the split of delivery between social rent, and shared ownership and shared equity between April 2017 and March 2018 very similar to the split of those delivered between April 2010 and March 2011. Currently in Northern Ireland, statistics are not published on delivery of rent to own homes, although in practice there are very few of these. Additionally, sub-market rent is currently not a defined product in Northern Ireland.

6 . Sales: How many social sector homes are sold?

It is difficult to build a complete picture of sales of housing from the affordable sector. In England, Scotland and Wales, statistics are published describing social sector sales. For the first time, in December 2019, statistics will be published describing shared ownership sales and staircasing in England; similar statistics are not available for other countries in the UK. In Northern Ireland, only total housing sales statistics are published and so no specific information is available on sales of housing from the affordable sector. For more information see the Data considerations section.

It is also difficult to bring the published supply data and published sales data together to understand changes in the amount of affordable housing available. This is because the coverage of both the supply data and sales data is not complete. In addition, it does not factor in other variables that will impact stock, such as demolitions or change of use.

We can compare data describing the sales of homes from the social sector. Between April 2017 and March 2018, there were 24,000 homes sold from the social sector in England, Scotland and Wales; this represents less than 1% of the 5 million total homes in the social sector. In general, most sales of social sector housing are through Right to Buy or similar statutory schemes. Between April 2017 and March 2018, in Scotland more than 99% of sales from the social sector were Right to Buy and in England 82% of sales were Right to Buy. Right to Buy and Right to Acquire sales were 69% in Wales.

Right to Buy allows tenants in the social sector to buy their property at a discount and was introduced in Scotland in 1979 and then in England and Wales in 1980. The equivalent House Sales Scheme was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1983. In total, over 2.5 million homes have been sold from the social sector in England, Wales and Scotland through Right to Buy sales, transferring them into private ownership. The Right to Buy ended for new applicants in Scotland in 2016 and ended in Wales in 2019.

Sales started to fall dramatically after 2003. In England, Scotland and Wales, annual sales fell from 105,000 between April 2003 and March 2004 to a low of 7,000 between April 2008 and March 2009.

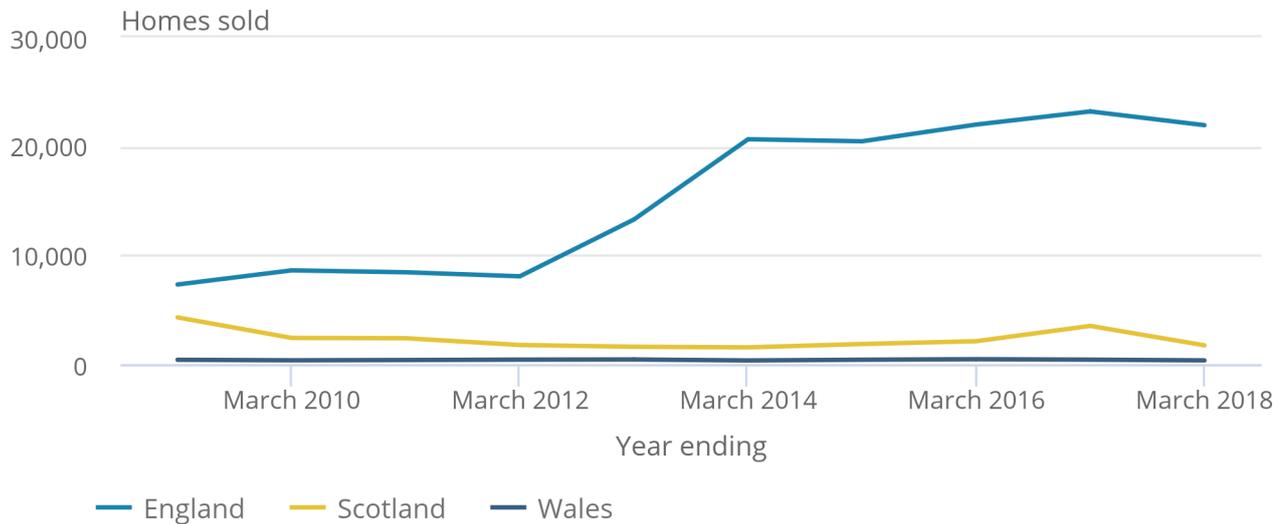
Specifically looking at the most recent 10-year period, the number of homes sold from the social sector has increased (Figure 5).

Figure 5: In England social sector sales have increased over the last ten years

Number of homes sold from the social sector in England, Scotland and Wales, April 2008 to March 2018

Figure 5: In England social sector sales have increased over the last ten years

Number of homes sold from the social sector in England, Scotland and Wales, April 2008 to March 2018



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – Social housing sales, Scottish Government – Applications for and sales of local authority owned housing, Welsh Government – Social landlord housing sales

Notes:

1. In Northern Ireland no specific information is available on sales of social sector housing.
2. Data for Wales between April 2008 and March 2013 also include sales of non-social sector housing owned by local authorities and registered social landlords.

7 . Characteristics: What do we know about homes in the social sector?

It is difficult to build a complete picture of the characteristics of affordable housing. Some administrative data on lettings and vacancies are available for England, Scotland and Wales. Data on property age, type and safety are also available from the housing conditions surveys undertaken in each of the four countries of the UK. You can find out more in the Data considerations section.

Table 4: Sources for data describing characteristics of social sector homes

Characteristic	Data source	Country coverage	Sector coverage
Lettings and vacancies	Administrative	England, Scotland and Wales ¹	Local authority owned social sector ²
Age, type and quality	Survey ³	UK	Social sector

Notes

1. Equivalent lettings and vacancies data are not collected in Northern Ireland. [Back to table](#)
2. Comparable lettings and vacancies data only describe local authority owned homes in the social sector. [Back to table](#)
3. Age, type and quality data are collected from housing conditions surveys, data were collected in: England (2017), Scotland (2017), Wales (2017 to 2018) and Northern Ireland (2016). [Back to table](#)
4. These surveys measure all tenures and provide breakdowns describing homes in the social sector. There is not enough owner occupied 'affordable housing' homes (such as shared equity homes) recorded by these surveys and it is not possible to produce robust estimates. [Back to table](#)

The housing conditions surveys of each nation provide a lot of information about the characteristics of homes in the UK. We have presented data on age, type and safety as comparable characteristics. Further characteristics are recorded, and you can find links to these surveys in our Data sources section.

While the housing conditions surveys are recorded over different time periods, they are sufficiently close together that we can use them to make comparisons.

How many lettings are there?

The Stock section of this article presents information about the size of the social sector, which comprises nearly 5 million homes in England, Scotland and Wales. Of these, about 2 million homes are let from a local authority and the remaining 3 million are let from a housing association (private-registered provider in England, housing association in Scotland and registered social landlord in Wales).

There are not comparable data across the UK that fully describe how people move into and leave the social sector. Looking at letting transactions data provides a basic way of understanding movements. People moving into the tenure is a sign that demand for affordable housing is being met but conversely a lower level of turnover is a sign that people are staying in their property longer and are experiencing greater housing security.

There is comparable letting transaction information for local authority-owned homes in England, Scotland and Wales; equivalent data are not published covering Northern Ireland. You can find more about the available statistics covering housing association-owned homes in the Data considerations section.

Between April 2017 and March 2018, there were 141,000 letting transactions across the 2 million local authority-owned homes in England, Scotland and Wales. These equate to 1 in 14 homes subject to a transaction and there was little variation in this rate between these countries.

Often people will move between houses within the social sector. Table 5 shows the split between lettings where the tenant is moving between homes within the social sector and when they are moving into the tenure for the first time. Data for Wales are categorised differently to those for England and Scotland and are not comparable.

Table 5: Most letting transactions involve tenants who are new to the tenure
Tenant's previous tenure for lettings of local authority social sector homes, April 2017 to March 2018

Country	Moving into tenure	Within tenure moves
England	62%	38%
Scotland	78%	22%

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – Local authority-owned dwellings let, Scottish Government – Local authority lettings

Although we do not have comparable data for housing associations' letting transactions, we do know that housing associations own more homes and supply more homes than local authorities. On this basis we would expect housing associations to have more letting transactions than local authorities; this is supported by "CORE" letting data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and statistics published by the Welsh Government.

How many social sector homes are vacant?

Vacancies are recorded in each country as part of annual statistical returns. A vacancy occurs when there is a gap between tenancies; a property will remain vacant if it needs to be repaired or refurbished or while the next tenant is being found.

As with lettings, there is comparable vacancy information for local authority-owned homes in England, Scotland and Wales; some data on social sector vacancy are published in the [Northern Ireland Housing Executive's House Condition Survey](#). You can find more about the available statistics covering housing association-owned homes in the Data considerations section.

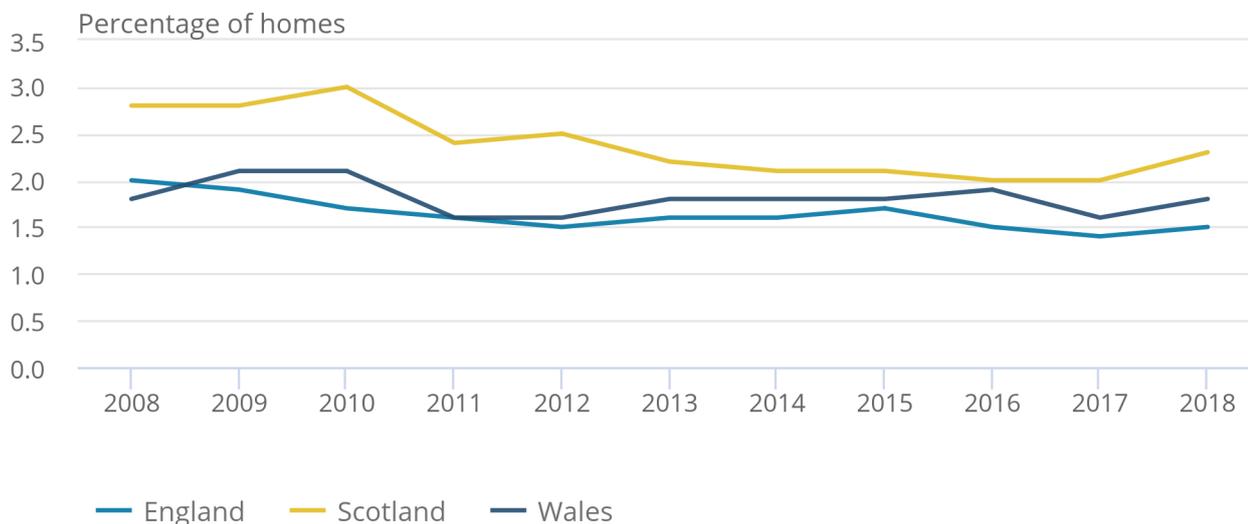
In England, 1.5% of local authority-owned homes were vacant in April 2018, this was 2.3% in Scotland and 1.8% in Wales. Over the last 10 years, vacancy rates have been falling, which can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6: In Scotland and England social housing vacancy rates have been falling, compared with Wales where they have remained relatively constant

Vacancy rate of local authority owned homes across England, Scotland and Wales, 2008 to 2018

Figure 6: In Scotland and England social housing vacancy rates have been falling, compared with Wales where they have remained relatively constant

Vacancy rate of local authority owned homes across England, Scotland and Wales, 2008 to 2018



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – Vacant dwellings by local authority, Scottish Government – Local authority lettings, Welsh Government – Social housing vacancies

Notes:

1. Vacancy is recorded as of 1 April in England and 31 March in Scotland and Wales.
2. Vacancy rate is the number of properties vacant divided by the total number of properties owned.

While few local authority homes are vacant, of those that are, over a third have been so for more than six months. It is possible to compare the length of time properties have been vacant between countries. In England, 37% of local authority-owned vacant properties were vacant for more than six months in April 2018. In Scotland that figure was 41% and for Wales it was 24%.

How old are social sector homes?

Statistics describing the age of homes are collected by housing conditions surveys across the UK. Some elements of the quality of a home may be linked to its age: a newer dwelling will often have more modern facilities and usually requires less energy to heat. The housing conditions surveys provide a more detailed assessment of housing condition and various quality standards although these are mostly not comparable across the UK.

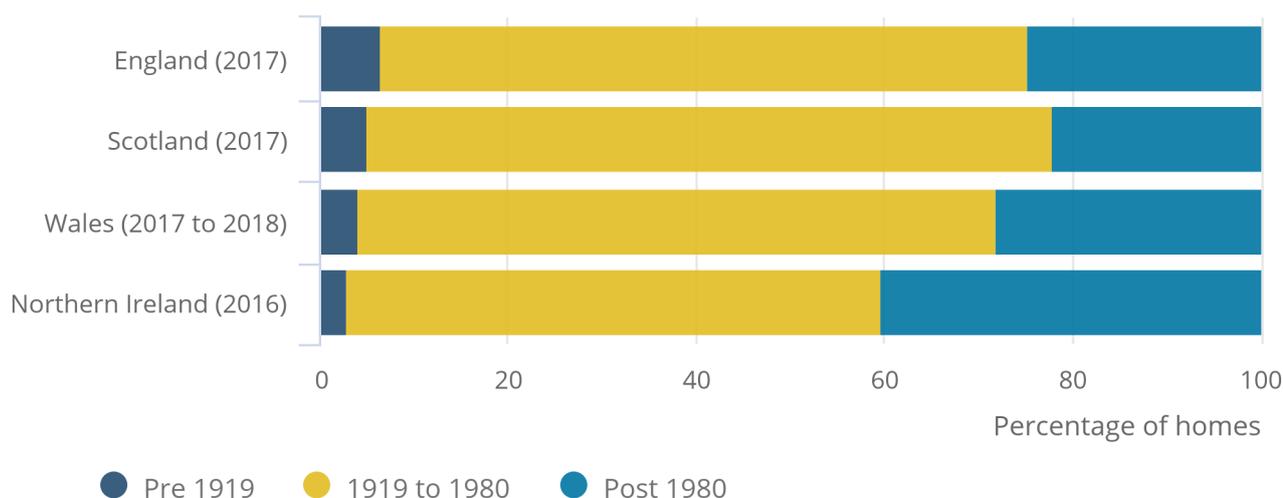
The housing conditions surveys for each country record the age of houses but do not use the same age-band groupings. Therefore, to allow us to make comparisons across the UK we present data in three broad age groupings, which align across the four countries.

Figure 7: Social sector houses are newer in Northern Ireland than in other UK countries

Age of homes in the social sector across the UK

Figure 7: Social sector houses are newer in Northern Ireland than in other UK countries

Age of homes in the social sector across the UK



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – English Housing Survey, Scottish Government – Scottish House Condition Survey, Welsh Government – Welsh Housing Condition Survey, Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Northern Ireland House Condition Survey

Notes:

1. For each country we have listed the data collection period in brackets.
2. For Scotland, categories are pre 1919, 1919 to 1982 and post 1982.

Homes in the social sector in Northern Ireland are newer than homes in the social sector in other countries. In England, Scotland and Wales, about 25% of homes currently in the social sector were built after 1980. In comparison, 41% of homes in the social sector in Northern Ireland were built after 1980.

Are there more flats or houses in the social sector?

The housing conditions surveys for each country record the type of houses, using categorisations and sub-categorisations that are most relevant to that country. To allow us to make comparisons across the UK we have looked at the high-level groupings of flats and houses, as the definitions for these are the same across the four countries.

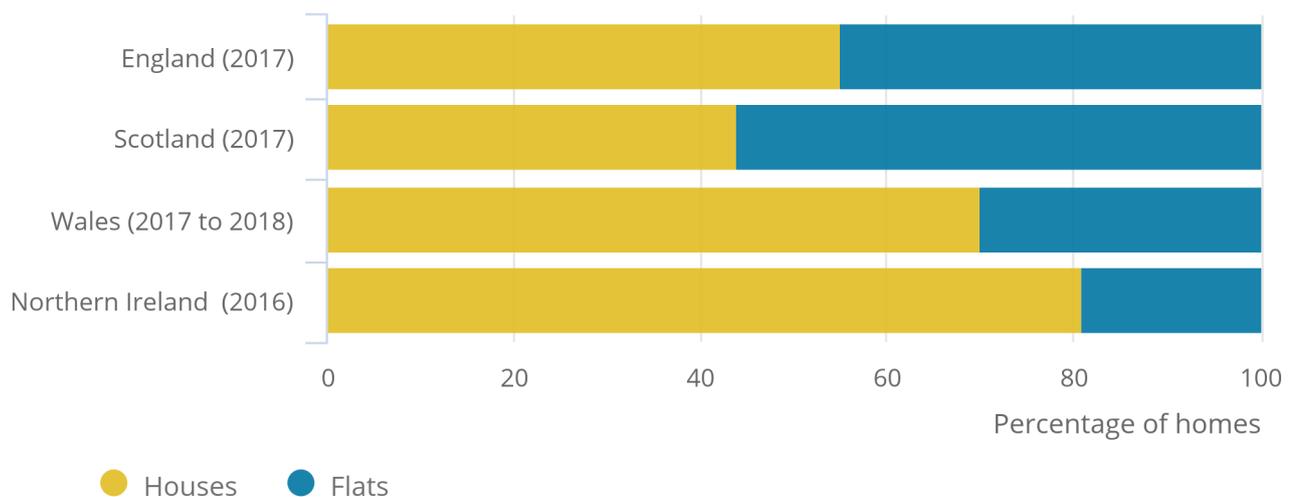
Homes in the social sector in Wales and Northern Ireland are mostly houses; 69% of homes in the social sector in Wales are houses, and 81% in Northern Ireland. They are a more even mix between flats and houses in England and Scotland; 55% of homes in the social sector in England are houses, and 44% in Scotland.

Figure 8: A higher proportion of homes in the social sector in Scotland are flats compared with those in the rest of the UK

Types of homes in the social sector across the UK

Figure 8: A higher proportion of homes in the social sector in Scotland are flats compared with those in the rest of the UK

Types of homes in the social sector across the UK



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – English Housing Survey, Scottish Government – Scottish House Condition Survey, Welsh Government – Welsh Housing Condition Survey, Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Northern Ireland House Condition Survey

Notes:

1. For each country we have listed the data collection period in brackets.
2. Bungalows are included in the houses category.

How safe is social sector housing?

The housing conditions surveys for each country measure the safety of housing.

England, Wales and Northern Ireland assess housing against the [Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#); under the HHSRS hazards that present a serious and immediate risk to a person’s health and safety are described as Category 1 hazards.

Scotland do not assess against the HHSRS. The closest measure used is the [Tolerable Standard](#), which is considered the basic level of repair a property must meet to be considered fit to live in.

Table 6: A higher proportion of homes in the social sector in Wales have category 1 hazards than those in England and Northern Ireland
Measures of safety of homes in the social sector across the UK

Country ¹	Category 1 hazards ²	Below tolerable standard ³
England (2017)	5.80%	-
Scotland (2017)	-	0%
Wales (2017 to 2018)	6.80%	-
Northern Ireland (2016)	4.40%	-

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – English Housing Survey, Scottish Government – Scottish House Condition Survey, Welsh Government – Welsh Housing Condition Survey, Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Northern Ireland House Condition Survey

Notes

1. For each country we have listed the data collection period in brackets. [Back to table](#)
2. Under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, Category 1 hazards present a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety. [Back to table](#)
3. In Scotland, the Tolerable Standard is considered the basic level of repair a property must meet to be considered fit to live in. [Back to table](#)

A smaller proportion of homes in the social sector in Northern Ireland have Category 1 hazards under the HHSRS than those in England and Wales. As social sector homes in Northern Ireland are newer than those in the rest of the UK (see Age section), this might account for a smaller proportion of them having Category 1 hazards.

These house condition surveys also show that homes in the social sector are safer than homes in other tenures. A smaller proportion of social sector homes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have Category 1 hazards than homes in other tenures. Likewise, a smaller proportion of homes in the social sector in Scotland are below the Tolerable Standard than homes in other tenures.

Because of the different aspects of safety measured, you cannot directly compare Category 1 hazards data with below Tolerable Standard.

8 . Conclusions

Definitions and terminology of affordable housing used in government statistics are complicated and varied across the UK, because of devolution based differences in policy. This article helps examine affordable housing in the UK by increasing the clarity of information available. In comparing data published by England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, this article has highlighted the similarities and differences in the stock, supply, sales and characteristics of affordable housing in the UK.

We have not been able to provide comprehensive statistics about all aspects of affordable housing in the UK, partly because affordable housing does not have the same definition across the UK. Affordable housing products also sit across a spectrum of tenure – from fully renting, through partial ownership, to full ownership. This means that it is not straightforward to present a complete set of “affordable housing” statistics.

However, for the first time, we have brought affordable housing statistics together. We have been able to derive insights about the overall levels of supply, stock and sales of affordable housing across the UK. We have compared the differences in types of affordable housing being delivered and we have compared some of the characteristics of the affordable housing stock.

The largest contributor to affordable housing is the social housing sector and data for this sector are more readily available and comparable. There are about 5 million homes in the social housing sector across the UK, representing about a sixth of all properties, and this proportion has been stable over the past 10 years.

To help understand some of the complexity, this article should be read in conjunction with the wider [GSS \(Government Statistical Service\) Affordable Housing Harmonisation Review](#). This Harmonisation Review explores in more detail the terminology used in affordable housing statistics across the UK, and the feasibility of harmonising these and opportunities to improve coverage. This work has shown that there is a demand for more information on housing affordability. To help meet this need we are investigating the feasibility of producing more data on housing affordability.

Alongside this work to improve the clarity of affordable housing statistics, the GSS is committed to working together through the [Cross-Government Housing Statistics Group](#) to improve the accessibility and coherence of all housing, planning and homelessness statistics. This article on affordable housing is the third in a series of cross-UK articles, the previous articles examined the [private rented sector](#) and [homelessness](#). Our challenge is to acknowledge the devolved nature of housing and planning statistics, while continuing to improve coherence and coverage. You can find more about our cross-government initiatives in our [workplan \(PDF, 262KB\)](#).

9 . Annex A: Data considerations

Data up to the April 2017 to March 2018 financial year are presented in this article, as this is the most recent annual time period for which data are available across the UK.

Definitions

Affordable housing does not have a statutory definition and is instead defined primarily through policy and practice in the four nations. Planning policy is the main source of definitions for official statistics, while definitions from official targets and funding programmes also shape the data included in statistical releases. Table 7 summarises the definitions used across the UK. The main policy documents for [England \(PDF, 593KB\)](#), [Scotland \(PDF, 1.25MB\)](#), [Wales \(PDF, 256KB\)](#) and [Northern Ireland \(PDF, 1.58MB\)](#) are published online.

Table 7: National definitions and source of definitions of affordable housing

Country	Main policy document	Affordable housing categories	Additional information
England	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Affordable housing for rent 2. Starter homes 3. Discounted market sales housing 4. Other affordable routes to home ownership 	The definitions of the affordable housing categories set out in the NPPF are relatively broad, and there are many products which fit into each category
Scotland	Affordable Housing Supply Programme	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social 2. Mid-market rented homes 3. Low cost home ownership properties 	Scotland is different to the other countries. It defines affordable housing in relation to a supply programme (in the other UK countries affordable housing is defined in relation to housing planning)
Wales	Technical Advice Note 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social rented housing 2. Intermediate housing 	A broader definition is used in the Welsh Government's affordable housing supply target
Northern Ireland	2015 Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social rented housing 2. Intermediate housing 	Sub-market rent is currently not a defined product in Northern Ireland.

More information and analysis of the definitions used to describe affordable housing across the UK can found in the Harmonisation Review.

Affordable housing products sit across a spectrum of tenure; for some sections of this article we have not been able to present a complete set of affordable housing statistics, instead we have presented information on the social sector element of affordable housing. We have used the term "social sector" to mean homes owned by local authorities, housing associations, private-registered providers and registered social landlords; for Northern Ireland, we have also included homes owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Supply definitions

In the Supply section of this article we have drawn from the Harmonisation Review and used the following categorisations of affordable housing products delivered.

Social rent

Often known as council housing or social housing, usually managed by local landlords or housing associations (although exact definitions and terminology vary across the UK). Rents are set in accordance with official criteria that vary between countries, but in each country social rents are the cheapest of all affordable housing products.

Other sub-market rent

Distinct from social rent, England, Scotland and Wales all have a range of rental products, which are set below market rent. A range of terminology is used to describe such schemes, including affordable, mid-market, national housing trust, intermediate and living rent.

Rent to own

Rent to own schemes are designed with the expectation that the tenant will become the owner; they are known by a variety of names, including Rent to Buy, Rent to Save and Intermediate Rent (in England).

Shared ownership and shared equity

Countries and stakeholders vary as to whether they consider shared ownership and shared equity schemes affordable housing products. In this article we have included all schemes that are considered affordable housing products by the relevant producer. Note that Help to Buy properties have not been included in any shared equity figures used in this article.

Table 8: Types of affordable homes included in each countries' statistics

Type of affordable housing	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Social rent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other affordable rent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Type not supplied
Rent to buy	Yes	Type not supplied	Yes	Statistics not collected
Shared ownership or shared equity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sales definitions

In the Sales section of this article we have described how houses have been sold through tenants using the Right to Buy. In this article where we describe Right to Buy statistics we also include the following.

Preserved Right to Buy

Tenants of private-registered providers (in England) and registered social landlords (in Wales) cannot ordinarily use the Right to Buy. If a tenant originally let their home from a local authority that was then transferred to a private-registered provider or registered social landlord, they may still buy their home using the Preserved Right to Buy.

Right to Acquire

Gives qualifying tenants of private-registered providers (in England) and registered social landlords (in Wales) the right to purchase their home, though at a lesser discount than through Right to Buy.

Data limitations

Stock limitations

It is difficult to build a cross-UK picture of the stock of affordable housing sector.

All countries do publish relevant data that covers a large proportion of this stock, which could be categorised as affordable housing, although this is not comprehensive. In most cases this is described as “social housing” rather than “affordable housing” data.

While data are available on various aspects of affordable housing stock, particularly in England, data are not comprehensive or generally comparable and there is limited understanding of total affordable housing stock. An important reason for this is that affordable housing categorisations are most commonly used in the context of supply. Supply data usually come from the administrative systems of funding programmes, which are no longer concerned with the housing once it has been delivered.

The [GSS Affordable Housing Harmonisation Review](#) describes the available official statistics describing affordable housing stock, notes which aspects of affordable housing are covered and identifies where there are data gaps.

The Family Resources Survey provides comparable data for comparing tenure between countries in the UK.

All countries publish statistics describing the number of properties in each tenure. In England, Scotland and Wales these are published annually, in Northern Ireland they are collected less frequently, as a part of housing conditions surveys. These dwelling stock by tenure statistics are the most reliable and comprehensive source for housing stock in the individual countries. However, they differ in terms of how they define and categorise different tenures and so are not comparable.

The Family Resources Survey provides a comparable measure of tenure between the four countries of the UK. It is a continuous survey, which collects information on the income and circumstances of individuals living in a representative sample of private households in the UK. The survey has been running in England, Scotland and Wales since October 1992 and was extended to cover Northern Ireland in 2002. Its primary objective is to provide information to inform the development, monitoring and evaluation of social welfare policy.

The Family Resources Survey samples 41,000 households across the UK. More information can be found in the Family Resources Survey [background note and methodology paper \(PDF, 359KB\)](#). Because the survey measures households it will not collect information on vacant dwellings.

In the Family Resources Survey the social rented sector is defined as homes “rented from a council” or “rented from a housing association”.

Supply limitations

Scotland’s affordable housing supply release only includes units funded through their Affordable Housing Supply Programme

Statistics for England and Wales both include developer-funded Section 106 supply, although for England it is thought that some will be missed as local authorities are not aware of it all. Northern Ireland does not currently have an equivalent mechanism. Data for Scotland include Section 75 units receiving some form of government funding. Data are not available to estimate the number of affordable homes delivered without central government funding in Scotland, but it is thought that the numbers of these homes may be relatively low based on current estimates of the number of funded Affordable and Section 75 homes being delivered.

The published additional affordable housing supply statistics describe the gross increase in stock in the tenure.

It is important to be aware that in all countries the affordable housing supply statistics do not factor in losses (such as demolitions and sales), so represent gross rather than net supply. This means that the only way to understand changes in the net supply of affordable housing is to consider changes to the stock.

Our article only considers affordable housing completions.

Across the UK, affordable housing supply can be recorded either when development of the property is approved, started, completed or delivered; definitions of these terms differ between the UK countries. This needs to be considered when attempting to compare supply data between countries. In this article, we have chosen to present completions data, as these have the most consistent definitions across the UK.

Help to Buy sales are not included in affordable housing supply figures across the UK.

Statistics on the number of Help to Buy sales are published separately by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government. In Northern Ireland there is no Help to Buy scheme. More information about the shared ownership and shared equity statistics that are available is presented in the [GSS Affordable Housing Harmonisation Report](#).

New-build homes – it is not possible to directly compare additional affordable housing supply with the number of new homes built in a given period.

This is primarily because the additional affordable housing supply figures include acquisitions (purchases of privately-owned properties and newly-built properties purchased from the open market) and rehabilitations, although breakdowns are available for some countries.

In addition, for newly-built affordable homes, supply figures are based upon reports made by the landlords and grant approvals. Housebuilding statistics are based upon building control reports. So, there is also a recording comparability issue as these are recorded at different stages of development.

New build homes – we have used the best available data to compare UK housebuilding.

The data sources used to calculate the UK housebuilding total differ across the four UK countries. Although different data have been used, more about this can be seen in [UK House building data](#).

To provide a better understanding of new housebuilding across the UK, we are working to provide more information on what statistics are available and how the production and development plans differ across each of the four UK countries.

Types of homes delivered - there are not complete data for homes delivered in Scotland and Wales

When looking at the change in types of affordable housing delivered in each country (the breakdown by tenure), there are complete data for England and Northern Ireland (which covers both government and non-government funded supply).

For Scotland, only homes funded by the government are included as Scotland's statistics do not record non-government funded supply (which is described further in this Annex).

For Wales the delivery of affordable housing split by tenure is only available for homes delivered by registered social landlords and exclude those delivered by local authorities.

This means that the analysis does not present a full picture in these countries.

Sales limitations

Each country's statistics on sales of affordable housing have different coverage.

Current statistics do not provide a complete picture of sales of affordable housing across the UK. Statistics describing sales of social sector housing have different coverage in each country. Table 9 compares this.

Table 9: Coverage of social sector sales statistics across the UK

Nation	Housing provider	Coverage	Types of sales
England	Local authority and private registered provider	Social sector	Sales to tenants, right to buy, sales out of sector
Scotland	Local authority and some housing association	Social sector	Sales to tenants, right to buy, out of tenure, within tenure
Wales	Local authority and registered social landlords	All housing owned by social landlords (this includes some non-social housing)	Sales to tenants, sales out of the tenure
Northern Ireland	Statistics not provided for social sector sales		

Statistics for England describe sales of all properties in the social sector, these will exclude affordable homes not in this tenure (for example, shared ownership homes). Further statistics are available from the Regulator for Social Housing describing the sales of all homes owned by private-registered providers owning more than 1,000 social housing units (this includes the sale of shared ownership and shared equity homes). Statistics for Scotland provide data on local authority-owned homes and some information on housing association-owned homes.

Statistics for Wales describe the sale of all homes owned by both local authorities and registered social landlords (which includes some non-social housing). For sales after April 2013 this can be separated into social housing and non-social housing.

Statistics are not published in Northern Ireland recording the sales of affordable homes or those in the social sector.

There are not comparable statistics available on the demolition of social housing in the UK.

Statistics are not published across the UK describing the demolition of affordable housing. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government publishes comprehensive data on the demolition of social sector housing.

The Scottish Government publishes data on the demolition of housing broken down by tenure; it notes that local authority-owned stock demolitions are accurate but that these data should be considered as a minimum level of demolition activity in Scotland and are not comprehensive.

Characteristics limitations – lettings

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has two sources of data on lettings. The Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) includes data on letting of local authority- owned homes, this is an equivalent data collection to that produced by the other countries. Lettings transactions in England are also recorded in the CORE (Continuous Recording) system, which covers both local authority and private-registered provider owned homes. Statistics on lettings from CORE do not include all providers so are not comparable with those from LAHS or from the other countries of the UK.

The Scottish Government produces a table of lettings, which only describes homes owned by local authorities. [Social tenants in Scotland publication](#) provides further information on the number of social housing lets each year split into local authority and housing association lets.

The Welsh Government publication describes letting transactions for both local authority-owned homes and for those owned by registered social landlord. Statistics on letting transactions in Wales do not record tenant's previous tenure.

Characteristics limitations – vacancies

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government also publishes data on vacancy of social housing. For local authorities it includes all vacant properties. For private-registered providers it only includes vacant properties for general needs (72% of private-registered provider properties). More detailed information on private-registered providers are published in the [Statistical Data Return](#), this includes vacancies in low-cost rental homes and homes for low-cost home ownership awaiting first tranche sale.

The Scottish Government publishes information on the number of vacant normal dwelling stock social housing units split into local authority and housing association properties.

The Welsh Government publishes information on social housing vacancy split into local authority and housing association properties.

Characteristics limitations – age, type and safety

Each country in the UK undertakes their own housing conditions surveys. We have used the results of these to compare some of the characteristics of social housing. These surveys measure a range of housing characteristics across all tenures. We have compared measures where data are readily comparable describing houses in the social sector.

The [English Housing Survey](#) provides detailed statistics on many aspects of the physical conditions of homes in England. It is a continuous survey, which collects information on people's housing circumstances and the condition and energy efficiency of their homes.

The [Scottish House Condition Survey](#) is produced as a module in the Scottish Household Survey, which is a continuous survey. The survey looks at the physical condition of people's homes and the experiences of householders.

The [Welsh Housing Conditions Survey](#) (WHCS) collects information about the condition and energy-efficiency of all types of housing in Wales. The previous comprehensive collection of data on housing conditions in Wales before the WHCS was the Living in Wales Property Survey in 2008.

The [Northern Ireland House Condition Survey](#), presents a comprehensive overview of Northern Ireland's dwelling stock and its occupants every four to five years, including information about fuel poverty, disrepair, Decent Homes, the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP), the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), unfitness, and household profiles.

10 . Annex B: Data sources

In this article we have used data produced by government departments and devolved administrations. Most of the data used are published annually and most data are taken from administrative sources. In this section we use the following abbreviations:

DF, Department of Finance (Northern Ireland)
DfC NI, Department for Communities (Northern Ireland)
DWP, Department for Work and Pensions
MHCLG, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
NIHE, Northern Ireland Housing Executive
ONS, Office for National Statistics
SG, Scottish Government
WG, Welsh Government

Stock

For the section on stock we have used the following statistics:

- MHCLG, [Live Table 100](#): number of dwellings by tenure and district, England
- SG, [Stock by tenure](#)
- WG, [Social landlord housing stock and rents](#)
- NIHE, [2016 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey \(HCS\)](#)
- MHCLG, [Live Table 102](#): dwelling stock by tenure, Great Britain (historical series)
- DWP, [Family Resources Survey](#)

Supply

For the section on supply we have used the following statistics:

- MHCLG, [Live Table 1000](#): additional affordable homes provided by type of scheme, England
- SG, [Affordable housing supply](#)
- WG, [Affordable housing provision](#)
- DfC NI, [Northern Ireland housing statistics](#)
- MHCLG, [Live Table 120](#): components of housing supply; net additional dwellings, England 2006-07 to 2017-18
- SG, [All sector new house building](#)
- WG, [New house building](#)
- DF, [New dwelling statistics](#)
- ONS, [Population estimates](#)

Sales

For the section on sales we have used the following statistics:

- MHCLG, [Live Table 678](#): annual social housing sales by scheme for England
- SG, [Applications and sales \(local authority housing only\)](#)
- SG, [Housing statistics for Scotland 2018](#): key trends summary (Chart 9)
- WG, [Social landlord housing sales](#)

Statistics on social sector sales are not published for Northern Ireland.

Characteristics

Lettings

For the section on lettings we have used the following statistics:

- MHCLG, [Live Table 602](#): Local authority-owned dwellings let by local authority, England, from 2000
- SG, [Local authority lettings](#)
- WG, [Social housing vacancies, lettings and arrears](#)

Statistics on social sector lettings are not published for Northern Ireland.

Vacancy

For the section on vacancy we have used the following statistics:

- MHCLG, [Live Table 615](#): Vacant dwellings by local authority district: England, from 2004
- MHCLG, [Local authority housing data](#)
- SG, [Public sector vacant stock](#)
- WG, [Social housing vacancies, lettings and arrears](#)

Statistics on social sector vacancies are not published for Northern Ireland.

Age and type

For the sections on age and type we have used the following statistics:

- MHCLG, [DA1101: stock profile](#), English Housing Survey
- SG, [Scottish House Condition Survey](#)
- WG, [Welsh Housing Conditions Survey](#)
- NIHE, [2016 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey \(HCS\)](#)

Safety

For the section on safety we have used the following statistics:

- MHCLG, [DA4101: health and safety - dwellings](#), English Housing Survey
- SG, [Scottish House Condition Survey](#)
- WG, [Welsh Housing Conditions Survey](#)
- NIHE, [2016 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey \(HCS\)](#)