

Executive Summary of Findings

The 2004 Southend-on-Sea Borough (private sector) House Condition Survey (HCS) was conducted in order to produce a comprehensive review of current stock conditions in the private sector and this report presents the findings of the HCS.

This report will examine what the conditions of dwellings within the Borough are like and what direction future private sector housing policies may need to take. The latter point is of particular importance as, under the new Regulatory Reform Order, local authorities are now responsible for deciding what sources of funding to use and what schemes to set up, in order to tackle private sector housing problems, with an unprecedented degree of freedom.

The survey was carried out on 1,000 dwellings within the Borough. The total private sector housing stock of the Borough is an estimated 68,600 dwellings. The total is based on the weighted results of the survey and is an estimate at the time of the survey. Giving a precise figure to the dwelling is unnecessary as dwellings are constantly being converted and built, such that the total number of dwellings changes on an almost daily basis.

The age profile of the private sector stock in the Borough suggests that the stock is older than the position for England with more pre 1919 and 1919-1944 dwellings and fewer dwellings built in any period after this date. There are more converted flats in Southend than is the case for England as a whole and a higher proportion of dwellings are privately rented. A stock profile such as this would tend to suggest that worse than average stock conditions would exist, as poor condition is strongly associated with age of dwelling, with houses converted into flats and with the privately rented sector.

A wide variety of issues relating to the condition of dwellings in Southend were collected from the survey and produced in subsequent analysis. The table overleaf summarises many of the key findings from the survey by the three main tenure types.

Summary Table 2: Characteristics by tenure

Characteristic	Owner-occupied	Housing Association	Privately rented	All Stock
Dwellings	53,800	2,900	11,900	68,600
<i>Per cent of stock</i>	79%	4%	17%	
Unfit	2,100	100	1,200	3,400
<i>Rate</i>	4%	4%	11%	5%
Substantial Disrepair	8,250	500	2,650	11,400
<i>Rate</i>	15%	17%	23%	17%
Not Decent	9,200	500	4,100	13,800
<i>Rate</i>	17%	19%	34%	20%
Serious Hazards	3,800	50	1,550	5,400
<i>Rate</i>	7%	2%	13%	8%
In Fuel Poverty	7,400	200	1,800	9,400
<i>Rate</i>	14%	9%	15%	14%
Mean SAP	44	62	46	45
Residents over 60	21,800	700	2,100	24,600
<i>Rate</i>	40%	23%	18%	36%

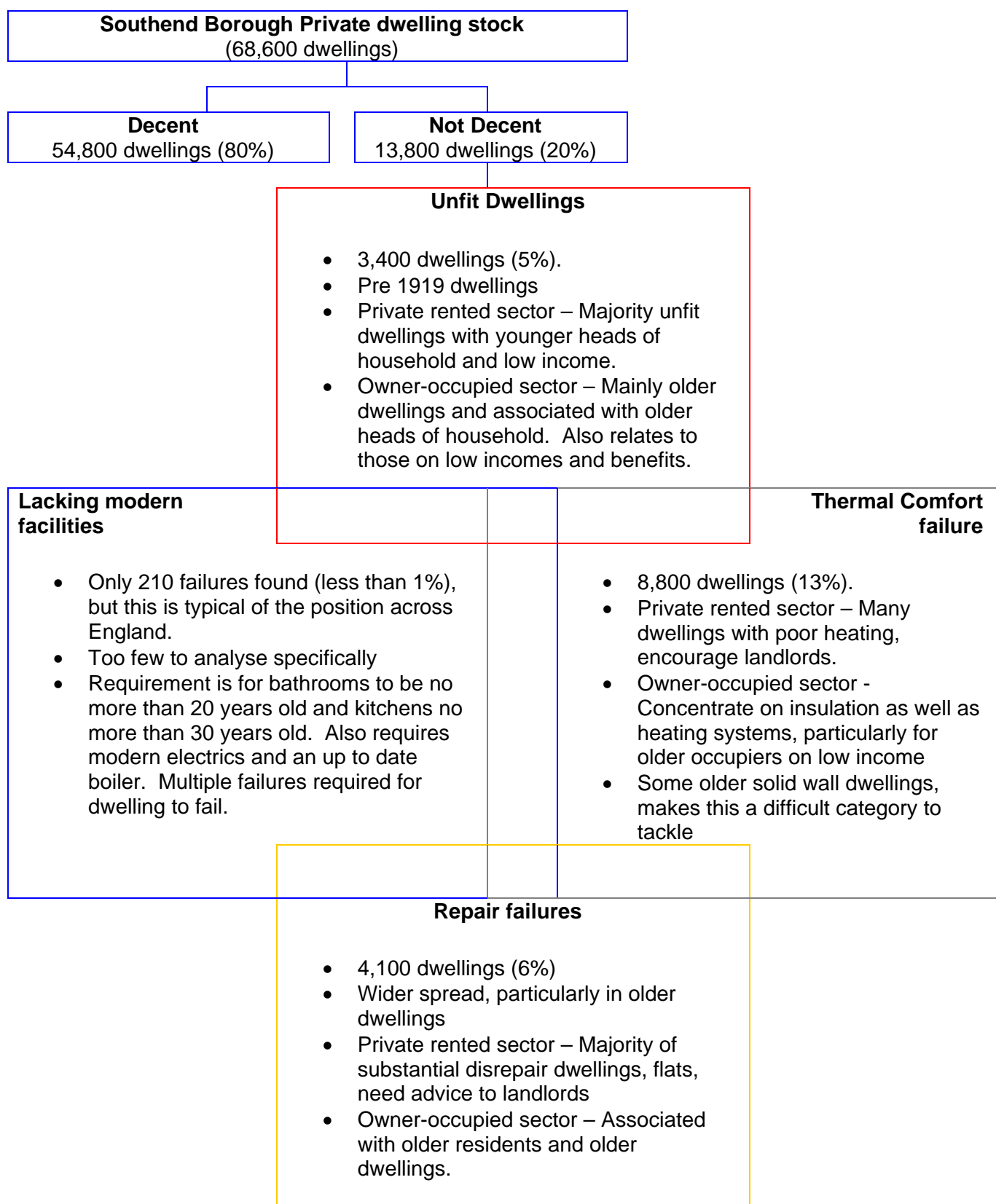
NB For the sake of simplicity all dwellings, including things like caretakers accommodation etc that are not part of the main three tenures, have been subsumed into the figures for the other three tenures.

The table above is useful for giving a summary of a wide variety of characteristics, but does not pinpoint where problems are most concentrated. To do this the relationship between different measures needs to be considered.

The number of dwellings classified as not decent is a useful measure for examining a variety of 'problems' that may exist (for a definition see appendix C – main report). The measure was produced by the ODPM for use by local authorities and housing associations, which must make all their dwellings decent under these criteria by 2010. For the private sector the only obligation at present is to ensure that 70% of dwellings occupied by a vulnerable resident (those on certain means tested benefits) are decent by 2010.

There are a number of factors determining the condition of a dwelling, but the decent homes amalgamates these into four key areas: is the dwelling fit for human habitation, is it in a reasonable state of repair, does it have adequate modern facilities, does it provide thermal comfort to its occupiers.

Total numbers of dwellings affected by different combinations of house condition problems within the Borough



The main chapters of the HCS report go in to greater detail in examining both the dwelling and social characteristics associated with these problems. They also give an indication of the likely cost of remedying these problems for different groups.

The total cost to make all dwellings decent within the Borough would be £75 million, an average of £5,500 per dwelling.

As mentioned earlier authorities are required to increase the proportion of vulnerable occupiers living in decent homes to above 70% by 2010. At present, in the private sector in Southend, the rate is 76% decent and as a consequence the authority already meets its requirements with regard to Decent Homes.

In general conditions in private sector housing in Southend are in worse than average condition with regard to unfit dwellings and serious hazards. Poor conditions are strongly associated with converted flats, which tend to be in the oldest buildings and are most often privately rented.

One of the key characteristics of the stock in Southend is the large privately rented sector and the high number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). The authority has a duty to monitor certain of these dwellings (dependent on type) and take enforcement action where necessary, such as in the case of breaches of fire safety regulations. New legislation is currently being produced that will require all authorities to have a licensing scheme for HMOs, which will place further demands on the authority. The condition and management of HMOs is by far the greatest single issue in relation to Southend's private sector dwelling stock.

Under the Regulatory Reform Order all local authorities are obligated to produce an evidence based private sector renewal strategy and the findings of this summary and report may indicate some of the areas that will need to be considered in any revision of this strategy.