

**The Impact of Changes in Definitions in  
Supported Housing and Housing for Older People  
between the RSR 2004 and 2005**

**A Qualitative Follow-Up Study**

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November 2006**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank all the housing associations who gave their time to this research.

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# **Impact of Changes in Definitions in Supported Housing and Housing for Older People between the RSR 2004 and 2005: A Qualitative Follow-Up Study**

## **SUMMARY**

### **Purpose of the study**

This study follows on from previous recent research<sup>1</sup> which evaluated the impact of shifts in RSR data resulting from changes in definitions to Supported Housing and the introduction of Housing for Older People between the 2004 and 2005 RSR.

A very small proportion of Housing Associations (HAs) experienced difficulties re-categorising their stock and it is these associations on which this research is concentrated. It investigates any problems that individual HAs may have had with the new definitions, which in some cases led to incorrect categorisation of stock.

This research was conducted in order to ascertain why unexpected shifts of stock between categories were reported and what could be done to rectify mistakes and avoid confusion in the future.

### **What were the changes in definitions?**

In the 2005 RSR the following changes were made as compared to the 2004 RSR:

- Sheltered Housing no longer forms a category of social housing.
- A new category Housing for Older People was introduced with three sub categories:
  - Housing for Older People (all special design features);
  - Housing for Older People (some special design features); and
  - Designated Supported Housing for Older People.
- The categories and definitions of Supported Housing were also modified to give consistent detail to:
  - Designated Supported Housing
  - Purpose Designed Supported Housing.

### **What was found?**

Overall the response to the changes in categories and definitions in the 2005 RSR were very positive even among those who apparently had problems.

The vast majority of the identified HAs had categorised their stock correctly. Of those that had categorised their stock incorrectly, most had since realised this and re categorised their stock. A minority of HAs needed guidance from the researchers on how to categorise their stock in line with the definitions.

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<sup>1</sup> Knight, A., Lyall Grant, F. & Whitehead, C. (2005). *Impact of Changes in Definitions in Supported Housing and Housing for Older People between the RSR 2004 and 2005*. University of Cambridge.

Very few HAs had problems applying the definitions of Housing for Older People (all special design features) and Housing for Older People (some special design features). More experienced problems with the category of Designated Supported Housing for Older People.

Just over a third believed that Housing for Older People was an appropriate category; the rest preferred the old category of Sheltered Housing. In this context, some HAs felt that an age guideline was needed for the category of Housing for Older People. This in part reflected a misunderstanding of the attributes required.

Nearly two thirds of HAs agreed that the detailed definitions of Housing for Older People included all the relevant physical attributes.

There were very few problems in applying the Supported Housing definitions.

The majority of HAs thought that the definition of Supported Housing included all the relevant attributes and was an appropriate category.

## **Recommendations**

Although the problems identified are relatively small and rather subtle it is important that HAs record their stock correctly. Otherwise it will impact on the overall profile of English social housing stock.

The main identified problems are associated with the terminology regarding Older People terminology as this appears to confuse people and property attributes. The category Housing for Older People is not actually household age related. However, particularly as the vast majority of housing associations categorised their stock correctly, this issue can probably be best addressed simply by clarification within the RSR Guidance Notes.

Similarly with Designated Supported Housing for Older People the main problems identified relate to the fact that some respondents did not read past the title. Again this is best addressed by somewhat clearer direction in the Guidance.

More generally, inserting a sentence stressing the property allocation requirements into the Guidance Notes would address many of the more general concerns. For example; *'if the tenancy is allocated at the beginning as general needs the property should remain as General Needs regardless of the changing support needs of the tenant'.*

There should be a spot check of the RSR 2006 data of those associations identified as incorrectly categorising their stock in the RSR 2005 to ensure the categorisations have been correctly implemented.

# **Impact of Changes in Definitions of Supported Housing and Housing for Older People between the RSR 2004 and 2005: A Qualitative Follow-Up Study**

## **Introduction**

This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study of housing associations experiences of changes in the definitions of Supported Housing and Housing for Older People introduced in the 2005 Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR). It follows on from an earlier, quantitative study which found that while the vast majority of Housing Associations (HAs) correctly re-categorised their stock to fit with the new definitions, a small number of HAs appeared to place some of their stock in unexpected or incorrect categories.

It must be stressed that this report focuses on HAs that were identified as having *difficulty* in re-categorising their stock either because of the new definitions or for other reasons. The vast majority of HAs had no difficulty incorporating the new definitions and reported their stock in the correct categories and sub categories in the RSR 2005.

## **Background**

*Quality and Choice for Older People: A Strategic Framework*, published by the Department of Health and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in January 2001, sets out clear principles for housing and other services to meet the needs and wishes of the older population. The Housing Corporation's policy, *Housing for Older People* published in 2002, follows the same line of thinking. In particular the Housing Corporation recognised the central importance of ensuring that older people are able to make informed choices about the kind of housing they wish to live in and of ensuring a wide variety of housing types to enable older people to have a good choice. Housing associations and other providers have a vital role to play in ensuring that older people, service commissioners, relatives and carers are given clear information.

In 1995, the Housing Corporation made a commitment to produce better definitions of sheltered housing for HAs. It pursued this commitment in collaboration with researchers at the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at Birmingham University<sup>2</sup>. CURS developed a set of descriptions of both sheltered and supported housing that formed the basis for changes proposed for the RSR 2005 and reflected the Corporation's new focus on facilities and design features. It also provides information that potential tenants require to make informed choices about their housing. In the case of supported housing, the description additionally includes designation criteria.

From April 2003 with the implementation of Supporting People the Housing Corporation no longer had responsibility for Supported Housing Management Grant (SHMG). This was very much in line with a shift for the Housing Corporation's regulatory responsibility from support services to the dwelling. The way in which floating support was funded under Supporting People meant that it was no longer possible for HAs to provide accurate data about floating support to tenants in the supported housing stock. From 2003 floating support was collected

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<sup>2</sup> *Towards a Common Currency*, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Birmingham University, 2002

within the category of general needs in the RSR. However, from 2005 the requirement by the Housing Corporation to collect floating support data from the RSR ceased. Floating support data are now collected from the Supporting People Client Record.

In 2004 a pilot study was carried out by Dataspring at the University of Cambridge, based on 2002/03 data to test these proposed new definitions for the 2005 RSR.<sup>3</sup>

Initially, the term Retirement Housing was to be used in the pilot, because ‘...it reflected the way in which the private sector related to housing for older people and provided a cross sector view at the front line’. However this was not accepted by HAs. Somewhat reluctantly, the Housing Corporation agreed on the term Housing for Older People instead. The Pilot RSR report also found that the approach utilised within the RSR still required context. This was because the RSR descriptions were defined more narrowly than the wide range of housing options provided for client groups within the Housing Corporation’s policy. In particular, age is not a pre-requisite to access this type of housing even though the agreed term was Housing for Older People.

As a result of the research and consultation processes the Housing Corporation issued a circular 03/04 ‘The Housing Corporation’s definitions of Housing Association supported housing and housing for older people’. This circular clearly set out the definitions of Supported Housing and Housing for Older People which were to be adhered to as a regulatory requirement.

Housing for Older People had three subcategories. These definitional changes not only reflected a change in the nature of housing and support services following the introduction of Supporting People but also incorporated a shift in focus from the tenant to the physical structure of the building or bedspace. Instead of collecting information or categorising stock on whether support services were attached to the dwelling, the focus moved to property based information such as whether there were laundries available or whether the building or bedspace was wheelchair accessible. Each building or bedspace had to meet specified physical criteria in order to belong to a certain category.

In 2005 the Housing Corporation made some changes in the RSR in line with the definitions of Supported Housing and Housing for Older People. In particular the term Sheltered Housing was removed and Housing for Older People was introduced. Within this category there are now three subcategories: Housing for Older People (all special design features); Housing for Older People (some special design features); and Designated Supported Housing for Older People. The categories and definitions of Supported Housing were changed to Designated Supported Housing and Purpose Designed Supported Housing.

As a consequence of these new definitions it was expected that there would be certain shifts in stock categorisation between 2004 and 2005 as represented in the RSR reported by housing associations. The following shifts were expected:

- Properties categorised as General Needs excluding Sheltered in 2004 would remain within General Needs in 2005.

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<sup>3</sup> Marshall, D., Lyall Grant, F., Whitehead, C. (2004), *The Pilot RSR 2005: Monitoring Sheltered and Supported Housing Summary Report*, Dataspring: Cambridge.

- General Needs Sheltered would either move to Housing for Older People (if it met the design criteria) or would remain within General Needs Housing (2005).
- Supported Housing excluding Sheltered would either remain within the Supported Housing category or move to Housing for Older People (if it met the design or designation criteria).
- Most Supported Sheltered Housing would move to Housing for Older People. If it failed to meet the design or designation criteria it would move to General Needs.

These changes or shifts in housing stock were explored in a paper: ‘Impact of Changes in Definitions of Supported Housing and Housing for Older People between the RSR 2004 and 2005: A Quantitative Study’. This examined the RSR data of individual housing associations and found that most HAs did re-categorise their stock as expected but it also appeared that a minority of housing associations may have misinterpreted or misunderstood the new definitions and moved their stock to categories that did not correctly define their stock. Although insignificant in number, incorrect categorisation would distort the social housing stock profile at local level, therefore distorting the overall housing stock picture in England.<sup>4</sup>

This study involved telephone interviews with a sample of housing associations to investigate any problems they may have encountered with the definitions introduced in 2005. In addition to questions about interpretation of definitions and categorisation of stock, the interview also included further questions regarding floating support and data collection. Floating support had been re-categorised in 2003/2004, but issues housing associations may have come across during this process had not been investigated before. Data collection was a further focus of the interview with questions aimed at exploring whether the changes in the 2005 definitions of Supported Housing affected the way in which housing associations collected their data, including any financial implications.

As a result of the findings of the qualitative research it was agreed that the research team should follow up the returns which appeared to be potentially incorrect.

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<sup>4</sup> The impact of the changes in definition on rents were addressed in ‘A Guide to Local Rents Part II: Social Landlord Rents’ Solomou, W., Cao B-J., Knight, A. and Goel, S. (2005). The Housing Corporation, London.

## **Methodology**

The interview sample was chosen from the HAs used in the previous quantitative study (for details of how these were sampled, see Appendix B). Housing associations were, by and large chosen because the data they submitted in the RSR 2005 showed some incorrect or unexpected re-categorisation of stock. Four comparator associations were also selected (those that correctly re-categorised their stock) in order to obtain their opinions and understand their seeming ease in re-classifying their stock. A summary table showing all the HAs that participated in the study, their stock and whether they had problems is included in Appendix C.

The initial sample for the qualitative study comprised 29 HAs with a reserve list of a further 21 which were all included. In total, 27 HAs agreed to participate, a 54% response rate.

## **Results**

The following sections explain the results of the interviews, and clarify why data were reported within the incorrect category:

- Section One discusses new definitions relating to Housing for Older People.
- Section Two covers the new Supported Housing definitions.
- Section Three concentrates on housing associations that had floating support in their stock in 2003 and 2004.
- Section Four looks at each individual HA's stock between 2004 and 2005. This enabled a closer examination of the stock movement and explores where stock was re-categorised since the new definitions was introduced.
- Section Five looks at the value of the approach, exploring the HAs' opinions about whether these new categories are appropriate, whether the detailed definitions cover all the relevant physical aspects of the housing and any concerns over data collection.
- Sections Six covers the area of stock managed by other agencies or local authorities.
- Section Seven presents the conclusion and recommendations.

## 1.0: Housing for Older People

Housing for Older People, introduced in the RSR 2005, consisted of three sub categories: Housing for Older People (all special design features), Housing for Older People (some special design features) and Designated Supported Housing for Older People.

Within section one of the telephone interview (Appendix A) participants were asked whether they had difficulties understanding the definitions of each of the three sub-categories. This question was asked because earlier analysis of the data revealed that some housing associations had re-categorised their stock in unexpected ways. For example, where a HA had 30 General Needs Sheltered units in 2004 it was expected that the 30 units would move into General Needs units in 2005. In a number of cases such units had been re-categorised into Housing for Older People (some special design features). By definition, if they had special design features and some support in place these units should have been recorded under Supported Sheltered Housing in 2004, rather than General Needs Sheltered Housing.

### 1.1 Housing for Older People (all special design features)

The vast majority of the sample did not have any problems with the category Housing for Older People (all special design features). A fifth of the sample did have problems and this is reflected in figure 1. Problems included general confusion with the definitions, the fact that there is no minimum age requirement for the Housing for Older People categories and confusion over the terminology in the guidance notes relating to mobility and wheelchair user standards. This issue was also raised in relation to Housing for Older People (some special design features).

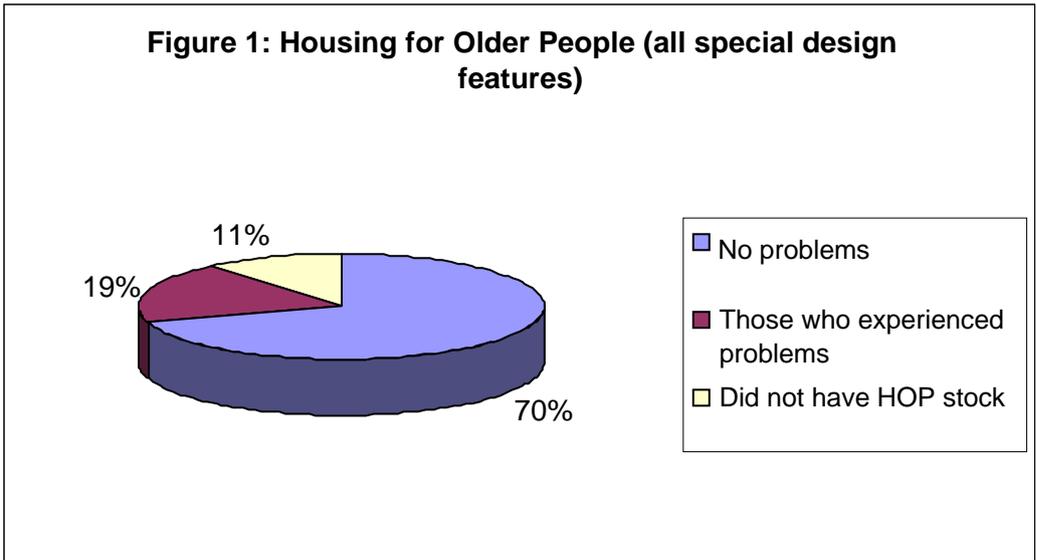
*'Lack of clarity, needs tightening'.*

*'Three different terms in the guidance notes, not clear if they are different or the same... adapted for mobility problems, wheelchair users and wheelchair user standards'.*

Two HAs thought there needed to be clearer guidelines as to what constitutes 'older' people.

*'...issues with terminology - 'older' assumes over 65, instinctively refers to elderly'.*

Three HAs said this did not apply to them because they did not have any stock for older people. These three did not offer any opinion about the definitions (see Figure 1).



**1.2 Housing for Older People (some special design features)**

The vast majority of respondents did not have any difficulty understanding the definition of Housing for Older People (some special design features). Again, three HAs said that this did not apply to them because they did not have any stock for older people and they did not offer any opinion on this definition (Figure 2).

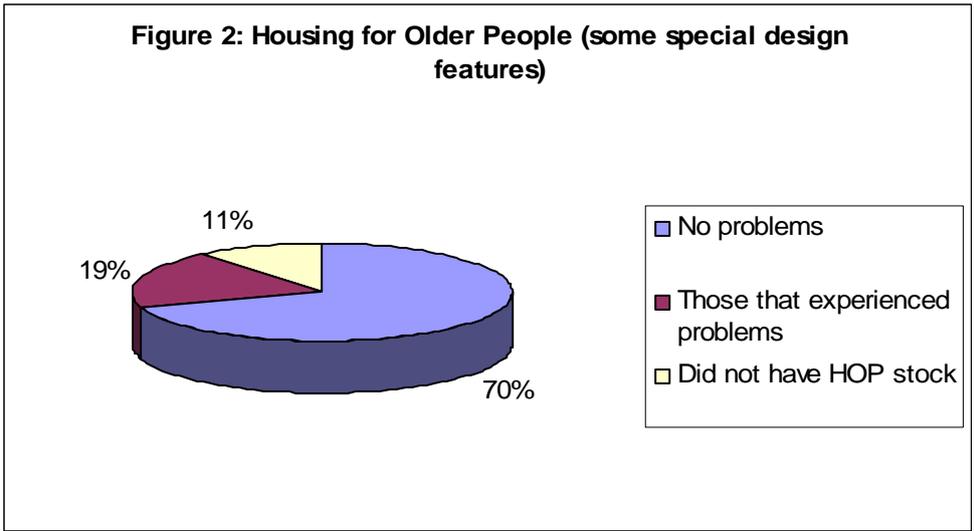
A minority found the definition of Housing for Older People (some special design features) difficult to understand, raising similar issues to Housing for Older People (all special design features). The age of the people eligible for this housing was also mentioned.

One area that was raised was the age of the buildings. It was suggested that where HAs owned older housing stock these units would fall into categories that would not necessarily reflect their true purpose because they do not have any of the required design features. These buildings should therefore all be re-categorised into Designated Supported Housing for Older People.

*‘Doesn’t work, the age of the buildings are a problem, really confusing, too many categories, they could fit into several’.*

*‘Needs definitions for wheelchair user, wheelchair user standards, does it mean whole or part property?’*

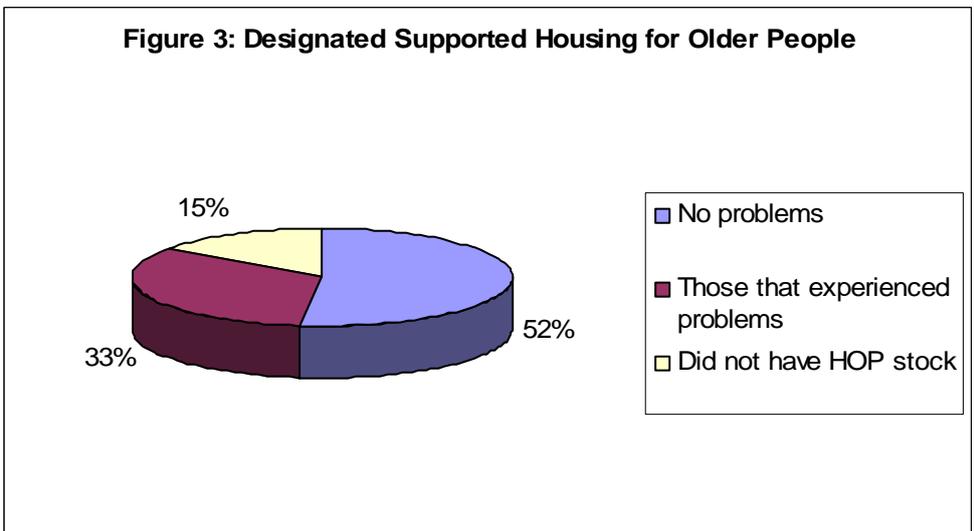
One HA found the descriptions used for wheelchair users confusing and would have liked further clarification in the Guidance Notes. They were unsure if just the kitchen and bathroom had to meet wheelchair user standards or whether the whole unit would have to meet these standards.



### 1.3 Designated Supported Housing for Older People

When the definitions were originally specified it was agreed after discussion with the National Housing Federation to include a third sub-category within Housing for Older People; Designated Supported Housing for Older people. Again the response from HAs was generally positive, with over half of the HAs in the sample saying that they did not have any problems with the definition.

However, a third of the sample had problems understanding exactly what stock should be reported here. (see Figure 3).



The main confusion seems to arise from the use of the word ‘supported’ in the title of this category. It appears that those who had difficulty understanding the definition within this category could not marry the word ‘supported’ in relation to older people’s housing. All support, it was felt, should be encompassed within the main Supported Housing categories.

*'[We have] issues with [the] terminology 'older' – assume elderly over 65, unclear, doesn't work'.*

*'We were told by lead regulators to look to supporting people paper for 'support' ... there is a need for standard definitions and terminology'.*

Two HAs stated that there is no clear definition of what constitutes 'support'.

*'From an organisation's point of view there was general confusion as to what was classed as Supported Housing and what constituted 'support' in Housing for Older People'.*

Of those that said they had a problem with the definition of Designated Supported Housing for Older People, one HA described the problem as follows:

*'Confusing.... this definition was fine until I read "the delivery of support under the supporting framework does not necessarily result in categories of housing as supported if the property is not purpose designated or designated for a particular client group. In the absence of either type of housing, this is General Needs". This statement added confusion'*

This HA had placed all their Housing for Older People stock that did not have any design features in General Needs. The HA explained that the use of 'supported' in the title Designated Supported Housing for Older People led them to look at the supported definitions, rather than the definitions under Housing for Older People. This in turn led them to place their stock in General Needs Housing. This was a problem as their stock met all the criteria for Designated Supported Housing for Older People and therefore should have been categorised as such. The HA was advised of this and said that they would re-categorise their stock for the 2006 RSR in Designated Supported Housing for Older People. It could be argued here that rather than a definitional problem with Designated Supported Housing for Older People it was merely an oversight by the HA in not reading the new definitions properly. Had they done so they would, like the majority of HAs, have placed their stock within the Designated Supported Housing Category.

## **2.0: Supported Housing**

Supported Housing definitions changed in the RSR 2005 with a shift in focus away from the support needs of the individual occupying housing to the physical attributes of the dwellings. Supported Housing now consists of two separate sub categories: Purpose Designed Supported Housing and Designated Supported Housing.

### **2.1 Purpose Designed Supported Housing**

The majority of HAs did not experience any problems understanding the definition of Purpose Designed Supported Housing (figure 4). Three did not have any Purpose Designed Supported Housing stock and did not offer an opinion.

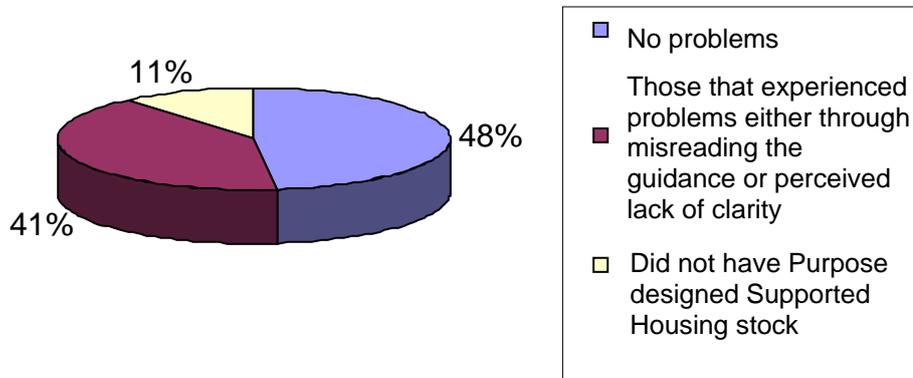
However, 11 respondents said they experienced problems understanding the definition of Purpose Designed Supported Housing. The quotation below reflects the main issues they faced.

*‘Misread this, I have read over the definitions again and realised that all stock in Purpose Designed should have gone into Designated Supported Housing because it didn’t have any of the design features but are for a specific client group’.*

*‘Care homes providing personal care can only go into two categories in Part A – Purpose Designated Supported Housing or Housing for Older People (all special design features). However, some of our [stock] are for older people but do not meet all the design criteria. The either/or here is too presumptuous, stock does not necessarily fit into these two. In 2005 we put this stock into Designated Supported Housing for Older People, even though this was not an option given in the guidance notes’.*

*‘We had some dwellings that were actually specialist designed but they did not have a communal area... they also may not have had the wheelchair units but they were specialist designed for a specific client group, but because of this definition they are in Designated Supported not Purpose Designed. But they are Purpose Designed’.*

**Figure 4: Purpose Designed Supported Housing**



### 2.3 Designated Supported Housing

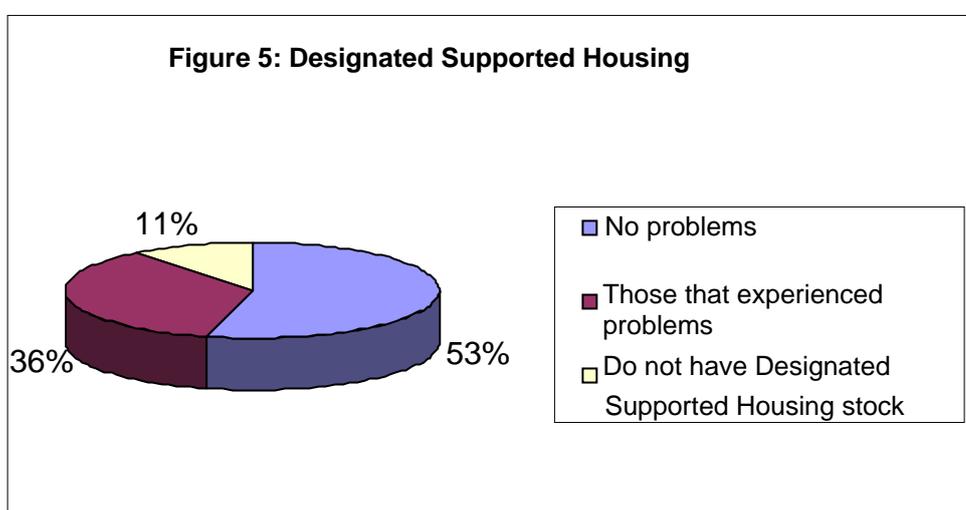
In relation to Designated Supported Housing, again more than half of the sample had no problem with the definition of Designated Supported Housing (figure 5). Three had no Designated Supported Housing Supported stock and offered no opinion. Just over a third reported problems understanding this definition.

*'This is where we had a lot of problems, we have property that is contracted to a council for asylum seekers so we provide the homes but do not do any of the support, we are very confused but thought we should include them anyway so this was kind of a guess'.*

*'[The] move from people to property is confusing when you read through them, a property may have some designs but not all'.*

Two HAs thought that the definitions were unclear.

*'Had a lot of problems, didn't know what was going on with Supported or General Needs, definitions were unclear'.*



In addition to the responses directly linked to each category of Supported Housing, HAs raised some specific issues relating to the completion of the RSR:

*'Housing Corporation seem to keep changing definitions of Supported Housing ...they never get it right... it isn't the definitions that give me the problems, it is the consequences, especially the impact on rents'*

*'There is a move in two directions here with the Housing Corporation going one way and Supporting People the other.....'*

The second comment reflects the fact that the Housing Corporation are now only collecting stock data and Supporting People are collecting data about support. This is as mentioned above, driven by policy.

### 3.0: Floating Support

Prior to 2003 floating support was recorded within Supported Housing as a separate category. In 2004 it was recorded within General Needs as a separate category. From 2005 however, floating support was recorded via Supporting People and was no longer collected via the RSR. Respondents who were identified as having floating support in 2003 and 2004 were asked a series of questions about whether they had problems re-categorising their stock and whether there were any noticeable impacts or significant changes in their stock or data.

Out of the 27 HAs interviewed 11 had floating support during 2003. The majority reported no problems omitting floating support from their stock. It was found that one HA had misunderstood the definition of floating support but has since rectified the problem.

Three HAs commented about noticing a change in their stock data:

*'...movement from Supported to General Needs'*  
*'...mainly to do with older people moving into General Needs'*  
*'...impacted on rents information, it makes it inconsistent year after year'*

More than half of those who had floating support did not notice a change in their data. Not one of the HAs said that the changes in their data affected their overall stock profile.

### 4.0: Tailor Made Questions

Section four involved questions relating to the individual HA's movement of stock between 2004 and 2005. The interviewee was provided with a table which showed the HA's stock movement between the two years. This table was used to ascertain whether HAs had understood the definitions and placed their stock accordingly.

It was found that most participants re-categorised their stock correctly using the new definitions. A further six initially placed stock in incorrect categories but had since realised and rectified this. This should be reflected in the HAs stock movement in the 2006 RSR. At the time of the interview it was found that four HAs had incorrectly categorised their stock and had not realised the mistake.

The researchers explained to each of these where their stock should have gone, taking them through the definitions and clarifying the reasoning behind the re-categorisation. There should therefore be no problems when the 2006 RSR is completed.

*'You don't have any definitions that allow for the places [for older people] with no design features but do have warden support. [The researcher asked if they had read the Designated Supported Housing for Older People definition] Didn't read the definition of Designated Supported Housing for Older People because it has 'supported' in the heading and they aren't Supported Housing, need to take the 'supported' out of heading.....supported is supported not Housing for Older People'*

*'This was pretty much straightforward. Supported moved to Supported and our General Needs Sheltered moved to General Needs. The General Needs Sheltered in 2004 [which was for older people] did not have any communal rooms and only had help alarms which we did not believe constituted enough support for them to go into the Designated Supported Housing for Older People.'*

The vast majority of housing associations did not have any difficulties understanding the new Supported Housing and Housing for Older People definitions and subsequently re-categorised their stock correctly. However, three types of issues were raised by those housing associations that re-categorised their stock incorrectly:

1. They did not like the concept of the new definitions; in some cases schemes unique to a particular HA were difficult to place in the new categories;
2. There was confusion with reporting stock they felt was age related (for older people) rather than design related; and
3. Certain HAs either did not read the Guidance Notes properly or misunderstood the guidance given.

All three of these issues are easily rectifiable, especially so with points one and two as it is simply a matter of HAs working through the changes in definitions and changing the way in which they think about their stock.

## **5.0: Value of Approach**

Section five included questions on whether respondents felt that the definitions of both categories, Housing for Older People and Supported Housing, incorporated all the attributes individuals would need; whether the categories were appropriate; and what impact the changes of definitions had had on their data collection.

### **5.1: Physical Attributes of Housing for Older People**

When asked whether they felt that the definition of Housing for Older People included all the physical attributes that such housing should have, 17 respondents said that it did while only four said it did not. Issues such as the fact that there is no mention of a minimum age within Housing for Older People, too many attributes included in definitions and the need to look toward risk reducing support for older people, were cited.

*'Includes too many attributes, makes definitions unworkable... making data collection unworkable. Older people are not a homogenous group and to suggest that one person will need exactly the same as another is ridiculous. Doesn't match the real world'.*

*'As times change and people stay in their homes there is more need for telecare...merely an extension of support being offered already... need to start looking at risk reducing support [and] need to be aware that there are other types of support out there other than a pull cord'.*

Six HAs had no stock classified under the category of Housing for Older People, and did not express an opinion about the attributes listed.

## **5.2: Appropriateness of the Category Housing for Older People**

A third of the sample believed that Housing for Older People was an appropriate category containing the appropriate attributes; a third thought that it was not and the rest had no opinion.

Several issues were raised by those HAs that thought that the listed attributes in the Housing for Older People were not appropriate. Again, the issue of a lack of age guidance was raised. Also mentioned were concerns that this category may be more helpful for the Housing Corporation than for the HAs themselves.

*'Yes this is an appropriate category but for the fact that there is no age guidance'.*

(This relates to the fact that the RSR does not give an age restriction on what is seen as an 'older person' in Housing for Older People)

Two of the HAs interviewed expressed confusion at how the Housing Corporation was defining categories and moving in a different way to Supporting People. They agreed that the new categories might become redundant as the HAs followed the Supporting People programme in moving their permanent support to floating support. Some HAs thought that this move would have implications for the RSR and the profile of the sector. If a shift occurred with warden or permanent support moving to floating support it would mean that all this housing will be recognised as General Needs, thus creating a biased picture of the social housing sector in the England.

*'To me it seems arbitrary - kind of captures housing but things are changing ... this kind of category might be useful for government research etc but it doesn't help us... in the future the categories will become redundant'.*

*'This is a difficult question to answer. I think this is more a question for the Housing Corporation. I just can't understand the direction thing with Supporting People. I can understand the new definitions but it doesn't help us but it helps the government. In the future say 2006/07 we will be moving our warden support from property based to floating support. A lot of HAs will be going this way because of the Supporting People as they are going this way too'.*

### **5.3: Physical Attributes of Supported Housing Definitions**

When discussing the Supported Housing category 22 HAs said that the Supported Housing definitions incorporated all the physical attributes that housing for such individuals need, while three said that it did not and two did not have an opinion.

HAs who suggested that the category of Supported Housing did not incorporate all the physical attributes needed raised concerns relating to the inclusion of a communal area as a requirement for Purpose Designed Supported Housing. This requirement was felt to be outdated.

*‘The thing about the communal lounge is an assumption and hardly exists. Someone has a real hang up on washing machines too’.*

### **5.4: The Appropriateness of the Category Supported Housing**

It was found that most respondents regarded Supported Housing as an appropriate category. Six believed that Supported Housing was not an appropriate category while two had no stock in this category and gave no opinion. Among the six that thought it was not an appropriate category, one believed that it was a little vague, and several thought that it was extremely restrictive.

*‘I think this categorisation is extremely vague on attributes’*

*‘No. Doesn’t include adaptations made on previous General Needs Housing for older people’.*

*‘Purpose designed is extremely restrictive and needs to be addressed ... we have units that are specially designed for client groups but because they don’t have a communal area they go into designated supported’.*

### **5.5 Data Collection**

Respondents were asked questions relating to the impact that the changing definitions had on their data collection. When asked if this way of categorising data was consistent with their management system, a third of the sample said yes while the rest said no – this way of categorising data was not consistent with their management system already in place. This was generally because the current systems did not have the new categories programmed into them when the 2005 RSR came out. They had housing categorised in their management systems by support levels rather than design features.

At least six of the HAs interviewed informed the researchers that they relied on the memory of the people managing Supported Housing units to categorise their stock. If these people could not remember the design features in the individual units they either guessed or just put

them in General Needs. This is an important finding as it could create a biased picture of social housing in England.

*'No, we don't actually have any way of finding out all properties with particular design features without actually going to every property... I try to remember which ones have what then the rest get put in general needs'.*

*'No, categories are based on attributes not design features. We had to go back to the letting people and find out what they could remember about what units had what. We couldn't say definitely how many so the ones they couldn't remember we said no [it would not go in this category and put it in general needs] to it'.*

At least two HAs explained how their management system only took them so far and then the rest they had to do manually which took a lot of time.

*'We had to differentiate the properties ... we had to do this manually. The system would show a building and then we had to go through manually and work out which ones were on the top floor and lower floor and then look at all their individual design features etc. In short our system does not allow for breakdowns'*

*'No we have two categories 1. Housing for Older People 2. Supported Housing. Each is recognised as a property and is categorised largely on rent groups. System took us so far and than we had to sit down and go through it manually on a spreadsheet.'*

All the HAs that reported that this way of collecting data was not consistent with their management systems also said that it took a lot of time and energy to re-categorise their stock. Whilst HAs should be aware of the characteristics of their stock for letting purposes in these cases the detail required to fulfil the design or designation criteria in the RSR 2005 was not readily available.

## **6.0: Stock managed by local authorities or 'other' agents**

This section discusses whether HAs had stock managed by a local authority or 'other' agent, whether the same definitions were used by managing authorities and whether, if they had problems, these problems had a financial impact on the collection of data.

It was found that 16 of the HAs interviewed had stock managed by local authorities or 'other' agents while 11 did not. Of the 16, two said that the local authorities or 'other' agents managing their stock used the same definitions of Supported Housing/Housing for Older People. Four HAs had only General Needs stock.

Seven HAs said that the local authorities or 'other' agents did not use the same definitions of supported housing although this did not cause too much of a problem. Two of these HAs just asked for data to be sent through and they themselves re-categorised the stock instead of getting their managing 'bodies' to do it.

*'We didn't ask them, we told them to send us the data and we did it ourselves'.*

*'...they sent the data in and we manipulated it for them. It is easier and it saves time'.*

When asked if this way of collecting the data had any financial impact on their associations, all HAs said no, although ten stressed that it was very time consuming.

*'It was just time consuming ... no financial implications just time'.*

*'Yes. It took people's time and our IT section and checking etc just to report a few statistics'.*

All HAs that had stock managed by a local authority or 'other' agency said that the changes in definitions did not impact on their relationship with the local authority or 'other' agency.

At the end of the interview respondents were asked whether they had any general opinions they wished to express. The following are the opinions of those who made comments.

*'We knew the changes were coming in, we had seen something on the website but when we actually got the guidance notes through we really didn't have enough time to get things sorted'. Three HAs expressed similar views.*

*'We try to react to people and to the new initiatives but we are running out of steam, everything just keeps changing. If we could just have a couple of years where nothing changed so that we could get some continuity it would be great.*

While some of the HAs did find problems with the RSR (and the majority of these are rectifiable) most HAs felt that the RSR, definitions etc. were reasonably clear.

*'The main problem we have is when it comes to extracting rent information, this is extremely time consuming but then again this could be a problem with our system. I can't really criticise the RSR definitions'*

*'Definitions this year were perhaps the most clearly defined than they have ever been in any other year especially those within Housing for Older People. We would like it if the RSR definitions followed the Supporting People definitions'.*

## Conclusion

Overall the majority of feedback received from the HAs was very positive. This is particularly important as all but four were chosen because there was evidence of problems. Many had no problems with any of the definitions and some welcomed these as being the clearest definitions yet. Data collection seemed to occur quite smoothly with no major financial consequences.

However, there were a few areas where problems arose, in particular with the perceived lack of clarity with some definitions.

One area of concern was the lack of an age guideline in the Housing for Older People definitions. This concern was also stated in the 2004 RSR Pilot Study. Some HAs have been acting under the presumptions that 'older' related to those over 65 even though the guidance notes say that age is not a defining factor. The confusion probably reflects past practices, whereby Sheltered Housing was seen as providing for those over 65 even though younger people were eligible. The interviews suggested that some HAs are quite resistant to change, especially where they individually have not experienced any problems with housing intended for older people as defined in the past.

While most HAs did not appear to have problems with the definitions overall, some difficulties were experienced with the third category of Housing for Older People, Designated Supported Housing for Older People. There were questions and confusion in relation to the use of the word 'supported' in the title.

The use of the word 'supported' in Designated Supported Housing for Older People caused some HAs to put their Housing for Older People stock into General Needs. It also led some HAs to categorise their stock based on the previous definition of Supported Housing instead of taking the new criteria into account. Some HAs failed to read the definition because they were halted by the word 'supported' in the title.

Furthermore, there was confusion about what the Housing Corporation believed constitutes 'support'. This led to varying interpretations of what individual HAs believed to be support: from a call button to 24 hour a day 7 day a week on-site support, with other support services also in place.

Some HAs also voiced concerns relating to the Housing Corporation's movement away from support for the tenants and toward property based attributes. The Housing Corporation was seen as moving in a different direction from that of Supporting People which focuses on the individual, not the property.

There was a concern that the need for support services has been overlooked and that the RSR does not take full account of the fact that the types of services needed are changing as people and society change. Concerns were also voiced that the RSR implicitly assumes that the tenants occupying housing in each of these categories all need the same physical attributes. Older people are not a homogeneous group and therefore it is difficult to prescribe the attributes required at the individual level. It was even suggested that some of the changes may become redundant in the future, for example if warden support comes under floating support and if this leads to a shift back to floating support.

## Recommendations

Although the problems identified are relatively small and rather subtle it is important that HAs record their stock correctly. Otherwise it will impact on the overall profile of English social housing stock.

The main identified problems are associated with the terminology regarding Older People as this appears to confuse people and property attributes. The category Housing for Older People is not actually household age related. However, particularly as the vast majority of housing associations categorised their stock correctly, this issue can probably be best addressed simply by clarification within the RSR Guidance Notes.

Similarly with Designated Supported Housing for Older People the main problems identified relate to the fact that some respondents did not read past the title. Again this is best addressed by somewhat clearer direction in the Guidance.

More generally, inserting a sentence stressing the property allocation requirements into the Guidance Notes would address many of the more general concerns. For example; *'if the tenancy is allocated at the beginning as general needs the property should remain as General Needs regardless of the changing support needs of the tenant.'*

There should be a spot check of the RSR 2006 data of those associations identified as incorrectly categorising their stock in the RSR 2005 to ensure the categorisations have been correctly implemented.

## **Appendix A:**

### **Telephone Interview**

Have you received the email that was sent to you on \_\_\_\_\_?

Are the numbers of stock as of [Enter Date here] on the fax correct for your Housing Association?

In 2005, the four categories in 2004, were changed into three new categories in 2005 see table below;

Categories in 2004	Categories in 2005
General needs housing	General needs housing
General needs including sheltered housing	Housing for older people
Supported housing	Supported housing
Supported including sheltered housing	

#### **1.0 Section One: Housing for Older People**

- 1.1 Did you have any difficulty understanding the new 2005 definition within the category of Housing for Older People (All special design features)? If so, why? Was there a particular part you found difficult? Which/why
- 1.2 Did you have difficulty understanding the new 2005 definition within the category of Housing for Older People (Some special design features)? If so, why? Was there a particular part you found difficult? Which/why
- 1.3 Did you have difficulty understanding the new 2005 definition within the category of Designated Supported housing for older people? If so, why? Was there a particular part you found difficult? Which/why

#### **2.0 Section Two: Supported Housing**

- 2.1 Did you have any difficulty understanding the new 2005 definition within the sub category of Purposed designed supported housing? If so, why? Was there a particular part you found difficult?
- 2.2 Did you have any difficulty understanding the new 2005 definition within the sub-category of Designated Supported housing? If so, why? Was there a particular part you found difficult?

### **3.0 Section Three: Floating Support (Only applies to those with Floating Support tenants)**

Floating support used to be collected as supported housing (2003), then general needs (2004), and now is not collected at all as a separate entity. In order to assess the integrity of the RSR data collected about floating support we would be grateful if you answer the following:

- 3.1 In the RSR 2004 did you find it difficult to re-categorise your floating support stock from supported to general needs housing?
- 3.2 If so, which groups /why?
- 3.3 Did you notice any changes in your data resulting from the re-categorisation of floating support stock being re-categorised?
- 3.4 If so, what were these changes?
- 3.5 How did these changes affect you overall stock?

### **4.0 Section Four: Tailor made questions**

These questions will probe the individual HA's stock figures and how they categorised their stock based on their stock movement between 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2005. For example if a Housing Association has moved most of their supported stock directly into general needs housing they will be asked questions relating to why they did this.

### **5.0 Section Five: Value of Approach**

The changes in definitions in 2005 shifted the focus from the needs of the tenants ie certain client groups with specialised needs, to the physical attributes of the dwelling.

- 5.1 Do you think that the 2005 definition of housing for older people incorporates all the physical attributes that housing for such individuals need?
- 5.2 If not, what attributes do you believe were not accounted for?
- 5.3 Do you think that the 2005 definition for housing for older people is an appropriate categorisation?
- 5.4 If not, why?
- 5.5 Do you think that the 2005 definition of supported housing incorporates all the physical attributes that housing for such individuals need?
- 5.6 If not, why?
- 5.7 Do you think that the definition for housing for supported housing is an appropriate categorisation?

5.8 If not, why?

***Data Collection***

5.9 Was this way of collecting data consistent with your management system?

5.10 If not, how was this different to your management system?

5.11 Did this difference cause problems in the collection of data?

**6.0 Section Six: Stock managed by Local Authorities or ‘other’ agencies**

6.1 Was any of your stock being managed by a Local Authority/or another organisation?  
If yes, which one?

6.2 If so, did the LA/other agency use the same definitions of supported housing when reporting to you for the purposes of completing the RSR?

6.3 If not, how did you deal with incorporating this information into the RSR?

6.4 Did these difficulties impact on the financial cost of collecting the data for the RSR in 2005 compared to the RSR 2004?

**7.0 Section Seven: General Questions**

7.1 Did the changing definitions impact on your relationship with the Local Authority/ agency managing your stock?

7.2 If so, how?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Methodology**

The study 'Impact of Changes in Definitions in Supported Housing and Housing for Older People between the RSR 2004 and 2005' was carried out to assess the changes in definitions introduced by the Housing Corporation in the 2005 RSR relating to Sheltered and Supported Housing. The purpose of the study was two fold; firstly, a quantitative study was carried out to see where HAs should, in theory, re categorise their existing stock from 2004 to 2005, according to the new definitions. The second part of the study involved qualitative interviews. The aim was to interview those HAs that appeared to have had difficulties with reclassifying their stock (i.e. there was a shift in their stock that did not appear to be in line with the theoretical flow identified in the first part of the study).

The sample of HAs selected for interview was taken from those used in the quantitative analysis.

The following were chosen:

- 4 HAs that lost General Needs Housing
- 4 HAs that gained General Needs Housing
- 4 HAs that lost Supported Housing
- 4 HAs that gained Supported Housing
- 2 from each category who appeared to have moved stock in line with both expectations and the stock flow chart
  
- One of the HAs selected on this basis was a Group Structure, so three subsidiaries were also interviewed, making a total sample of 27.

**Appendix C: Stock held by Housing Associations interviewed**

<b>HA Identification Number</b>	<b>HOP (all special design)</b>	<b>Experienced problems</b>	<b>HOP (some special design)</b>	<b>Experienced problems</b>	<b>Designated Supported Housing for older people</b>	<b>Experienced problems</b>	<b>Purpose Designed Supported</b>	<b>Experienced problems</b>	<b>Designated Supported</b>	<b>Experienced problems</b>
1	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
2	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
3	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
4	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
5	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
6	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
7	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
8	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
9	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
10	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
12	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
13	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
14	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
15	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
16	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
17	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
19	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
20	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
21	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
22	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
23	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
24	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
25	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
26	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
27	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No

\* Please note researchers still collected opinions from Housing Associations that did not have stock in the categories in question therefore percentages may not add up between this table and the main body of the report