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Institute of
Housing

What you need to know about the Census 2021 housing data

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Background

On 5 January 2023 the Office of National Statistics published their latest Census 2021 dataset. This dataset focused on housing in England and Wales. This is in addition to the data on demography and migration released on 2 November 2022. For both these data sets Welsh Government published an accompanying briefing looking specifically at the Welsh data. We have provided some of the headline figures here with some commentary. We will update the briefing as more data is released.

Household Types

The 2021 census put the total number of households in Wales at 1,347,114. An increase of 44,438 (3.4%). The household type properties are:

- One Person: 429,559 (31.9%)
- Two Person: 472,906 (35.1%)
- Three Person: 212,282 (15.8%)
- Four Person: 157,455 (11.7%)
- Five Person plus: 74,908 (5.6%)

Housing tenure and types of housing

In Wales most households owned their own home (66.4%). The proportion renting privately was 17% and 16.5% rented in the social sector. The number of households renting in the social sector has increased by 0.1% (7,000) since 2011.

The main housing type in Wales is a house or bungalow. 87.2% of all Welsh households lived in this housing type. Most households in Wales lived in a three-bed property.

Further detail on property size, type and tenure will be released later in 2023.

Overcrowding and under occupation

Overall, 30,000 (2.2%) households in Wales were living in overcrowded conditions. This was a reduction of 8,000 from 2011. Yet in Cardiff the rate of overcrowding was almost double at 3.9% followed by Newport at 3.4%.

One million (76.3%) households in Wales were residing in accommodation that had more bedrooms than they needed.

Central heating

The census established that 98.8% (1.3 million) households in Wales had central heating. The main type being gas with 71.6% & (965,000) households. Oil central heating was the source of heat for 7.8% (105,000) households. Yet there is a higher proportion of households using oil powered heating in rural Wales with the highest proportions being:

- Ceredigion - 35.3% (11,000)
- Powys - 27.7% (17,000)
- Carmarthenshire - 23.7% (19,000)
- Pembrokeshire - 22.7% (13,000)

Central heating just powered by renewable energy accounted for 0.5% (6,000) households with 1.1% (14,000) using at least one renewable energy source.

Second Homes and Welsh Language

The data from the 2021 Census puts second home use across Wales as 5.2%. Ceredigion has the highest proportion of second homes at 10.2% and 45.3% of the population speak Welsh. Gwynedd has the highest proportion of Welsh speakers at 64.4% and second homes make up 7.5% of homes in the county.

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A view from CIH Cymru

The data has provided us with an initial view into Welsh households and the homes they live in. Smaller households dominate which could have an impact on the size of homes we develop going forward to ensure they are affordable for our tenants.

The social housing tenure in Wales has not increased as much as expected considering the ambitious build target of 12,500 that was exceeded in the last Senedd term. The target may be exceeded but the increase shown between the 2011 census and the 2021 census is 7,000 or 70 per annum over the decade. This total increase is not sufficient to meet the rising levels of homelessness and unaffordability of the rented sector. More work is needed to see why the increase is lower than expected. Is it a case of old homes being demolished to be replaced with new homes so whilst targets for new build are met there is not a significant increase of social housing in Wales.

It is encouraging to see the decrease of overcrowding in Wales over the last decade. Reflective of the work undertaken by Housing Organisations in Wales to minimise this.

There is still work to do but there is progress. Gas central heating in Wales is still the dominant heat source for households. There is still significant work needed to move to renewable heat sources if Welsh Government wishes to prevent the installation of new gas boilers from 2030 as part of its decarbonisation strategy. This work to move to renewable heat sources is not just needed in the social sector. As outlined in our report decarbonising the private sector we also need significant government investment to support the private sector in providing more sustainable and energy-efficient homes in Wales.

Welsh speaking communities are still being significantly impacted by second homes and we welcome further legislation outlined by Welsh Government to tackle this issue through new taxation powers. Yet as outlined in our recent consultation response to the commission for Welsh speaking communities these monies need to be reinvested in order to provide more affordable homes .

The Welsh Government has set out ambitious targets to develop low carbon social homes and decarbonise existing stock. Yet as the initial data releases from the 2021 Census shows, the net increase in social homes is under the ambitious target and a significant number of homes still rely on gas central heating. Both issues that need to be addressed if we are to ensure that everyone in Wales has the right to an adequate and affordable home.