



The location and monitoring of concentrations of vacant dwellings is a key priority for the government in the delivery of its Public Service Agreement to improve the match between supply and demand of housing. Provisions in the Housing Act 2004 allow local authorities (LAs) to bring vacant dwellings back into use as a means of addressing housing need. Most notably, the availability of data on empty homes will underpin the development of strategies for the regeneration of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods

For the past three years, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has asked LAs to provide this information through an onerous process that every year required aggregation of selected data from their Council Tax systems to be submitted on a spreadsheet – certainly not e-efficient.

At last ESEH (pronounced Easy) simplifies it for you. ESEH will automatically extract and submit the required data from your Council TAX system, ready for analysis by the ODPM – ESEH . . .

Our thanks go to Leeds MDC, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Tandridge DC and the London Borough of Newham for assisting with the pilot phase; and also to Dr Peter Wyatt at University of the West of England for his research assistance.

If you have any queries feel free to contact the ODPM by e-mailing vacant.dwellings@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Mick Johnston

REDUCE YOUR WORKLOAD

Once you have adopted the ESEH XML Schema you will never again have to aggregate data or produce extracts from your system for the annual vacant dwellings survey. In addition the XML Schema is designed to simultaneously extract the data needed for the annual CTB1 survey. Adoption of ESEH will, in return for a limited initial development cost, release LAs from the burden of both the annual vacant dwellings and the CTB1 surveys.

WHY? – THE BENEFITS

Better information on empty homes will lead to more effective strategies for reducing the number of them, with the potential for:-

- Increase of revenue – empty homes represent a loss of Council Tax revenue
- Maximising use of resources – empty homes are seen to be a waste
- Reducing crime levels – empty homes are perceived as a magnet for anti-social behaviour and drug-related crime
- Raising the status of neighbourhoods – empty homes are considered a visual blight and can reduce the general level of property values in a locality
- Happier Citizens – resulting in a reduction in complaints about empty homes
- Simple extraction for annual CTB1 survey – via the XML schema
- A finger on the pulse – trends in the numbers of empty homes say a lot about a neighbourhood

HOW IS IT DONE?

The **XML schema**, shortly to be issued by ODPM, contains the rules which dictate the form in which the data must be extracted from the LAs CTAX management system.

Relevant elements are **mapped**, by LAs or their software suppliers, from their location in their management system to the specified format in the XML schema. A facility to generate the required data extract report is then added to the system

The **Extract** can then be run at any time with no additional work.

Submit data – this is done using the tried and tested INTERFORM already used by LAs for a variety of other statistical returns.

ODPM will be combining vacant dwellings data with that from other sources in order to provide a more comprehensive picture to inform strategic policy decisions. ESEH . . .

- How many properties are there?
- How long have they been empty?
- Why are they empty – is it a short-term transactional vacancy or a longer term structural vacancy?
- Do they represent a significant proportion of the total number of dwellings?
- Where are they located?
- Is there evidence of clustering?
- Are there any other notable characteristics eg above shops, blocks of flats?
- What condition are they in?
- What is the age of the property?
- What is the size and type?

PROGRESS TO DATE

- In **2004**, four LAs: Leeds NDC, Tandrige DC, London Borough of Newham and East Riding of Yorkshire Council, piloted the extraction of raw data in CSV format. This was successfully matched by the ODPM with data from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA).
- During the **2005** vacant dwellings survey, 39 LAs made their returns in the form of an upload of selected raw data in CSV – ODPM then carried out aggregation to ward level.
- For the **2006** vacant dwellings survey the indications are that most LAs will make their return in the form of raw data in CSV format.

The Pilot Study

Leeds MDC, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Tandrige DC and the London Borough of Newham were involved in a pilot project to identify vacant dwellings at the individual property level and link the records with information provided by the Valuation Office Agency on the size, type and age of each dwelling. It was then possible to identify not just the locations with the highest incidence of empty homes but to analyse the types of dwelling which were most often vacant.

This showed the potential of the data and provided the basis for development of the ESEH XML schema to facilitate collection and ensure quality and consistency.

Council Tax System Suppliers

Council Tax management system suppliers will have an important role to play in preparing local authorities to use the ESEH schema. A meeting specifically for suppliers will be held before the Schema is finalised to present the data collection system, allow them to ask questions and give an opportunity to comment on the Schema. This will be on: 12th May 2006, 10.30 to 13.30 at ODPM, Eland House. Formal invitations to be sent early April but please advise by email now to: bjsoars@aol.com or barry@tuckwood.co.uk if you wish to attend.

WHAT'S NEXT

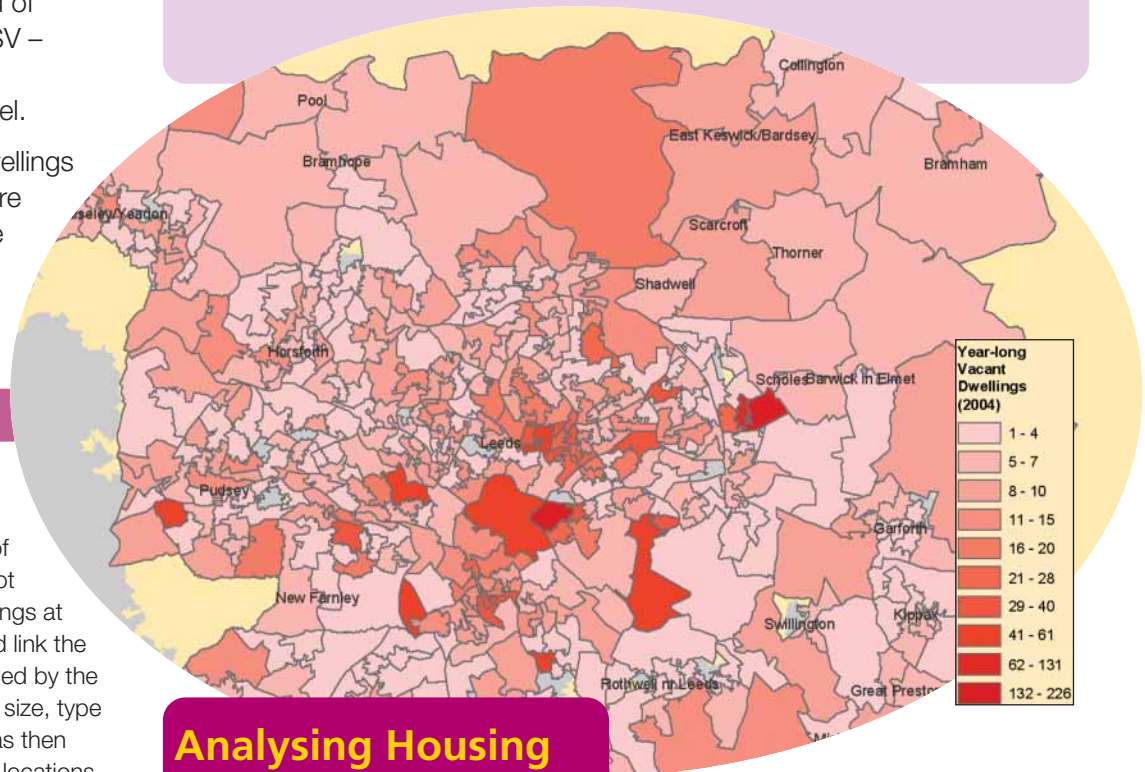
Spring 2006: Suppliers Meeting on 12th May at ODPM, Eland House.

Summer 2006: ODPM will issue the XML schema to LAs and software suppliers

Autumn 2006: Pilot LAs will use the Schema to submit a raw data extract timed to coincide with the November CTB1 surveys. Comparison of these results with the CTB1 returns will provide a basis for validation.

2007: For the Vacant Dwellings Survey all LAs will be asked to provide raw data using the XML Schema.

2008: Subject to successful validation, the ODPM will request that all LAs should now submit their CTB1 returns in the form of raw data extracts.



Analysing Housing Stock Vacancy Rates

The proportion of the dwelling stock that is empty varies enormously across the country at local authority level. The extremes in 2005 were Dover with an overall vacancy rate of 8.1% and St Alban's with 0.8%. At ward level however the contrasts are even more extreme with Barrow Island ward in Barrow in Furness having an overall vacancy rate of 21.3% compared to Bewby ward in Crawley at 0.5%. For policy purposes it is important to identify the extremes. The map (above) analysing data from Leeds demonstrates the range at an even more local level using postcode areas.

Schema Design

The design for the schema follows the e-Government Schema Guidelines for XML and makes use of the architectural schemas available through GovTalk, in particular the BS7666 Address Schema. Testing has taken place during the trial with the pilot authorities. The current schema design makes provision for collection of minimal vacancy data, as utilised in the original pilot. The schema design is now being enhanced to enable it to collect CTB1 information in addition to the basic vacancy attributes.

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