

Property matters

Gayle Gander sheds light on a successful project to understand property tenure in the rapidly changing London Borough of Newham



Understanding residents is a vital element of improved and more efficient service delivery for all councils. During 2013, the London Borough of Newham initiated a project to implement a definitive property tenure index. The information it held would enable the council to gain a holistic view of the needs of its residents and deliver better services.

Over the past few decades many societal changes have taken place in the borough leading to a different property and tenure mix (see [Table 1](#)). Owner occupation has declined while private renting is still growing rapidly. The number of dwellings per resident is lower than the London average with evidence of extensive overcrowding. A high level of migration and the subdivision of family homes into rooms for rent have major implications for churn, with the potential to create unstable communities if left unmonitored.

Newham also has the largest private rented sector (PRS) in London, turning over an estimated £450m per year and accounting for 40% of the borough's housing stock (and growing). There is also a massive churn in this sector with more than 25% of households moving after 12 months or less.

Table 1 Changes in housing tenure in Newham

	% Housing stock 2001	% Housing stock 2011
PRS – Homes in multiple occupation	20%	35%
PRS – Single occupation		
Council properties (tenanted)	25%	18%
Owner occupier properties	43%	33%
Registered Social Landlords	12%	14%

Source: London Borough of Newham

Between the 2001 and 2011 Census, the population in the borough increased from 243,000 to 303,000. Major infrastructure changes have also taken place, most notably for the London 2012 Olympic Games, Westfield shopping centre and the development of Crossrail.

As a result of these changes, the council identified a number of particular challenges, including measuring variations in demand for school places and sub-letting of properties. Also of concern was the over-generation of domestic waste on which the council pays landfill tax and, more generally, managing the link between high levels of privately rented properties and a lack of care for the environment – resulting in enviro-crimes such as fly-tipping of rubbish and furniture. There is a big impact on emergency and resilience planning and tackling anti-social behaviour.

There are also implications for the way a wide range of services are best delivered to residents and the council believed that understanding and tracking the changes would allow it to model and analyse population characteristics, aid resource allocations and ensure particular groups are not disadvantaged. And to support sustainable economic growth the council needed to understand the community's requirements and provide the right mix of housing type and tenure.

The database

As a first step, the council reviewed the information held on its existing property databases to compile a property tenure system with a number of objectives:

- to record systematically the tenure of dwellings
- to keep these records as up to date as possible
- to amalgamate tenure data from existing council systems to ensure accuracy
- to adopt a system of classification that is consistent with best practice, e.g. the Census
- to track changes or the history of tenure by property
- to agree governance arrangement for the integrity of the data.

The investigation revealed that none of the council systems that used property data held definitive information regarding the property tenure. The next step was to implement a data-mining exercise that looked at the data holdings from a number of systems across the organisation, including:

- anti-social behaviour
- benefits
- council tax



tenure information attached so the data could be mapped, facilitating spatial analysis with other geographic data held within the authority.

Intelligent data

During its life cycle, information on a property address can change. This can be due to a change of name, a sub-division or aggregation within a building, change of use such as from single to multiple occupancy, or eventual demolition. However, throughout, all these historic, alternative and provisional addresses are recorded against the same UPRN.

In effect, the UPRN works as an intelligent data linkage mechanism, allowing the integration of different datasets. By joining up previously disparate datasets, the council gained a better understanding of trends and the relationships that exist between them. This was used to target resources effectively and provide a greater understanding of performance, facilitating informed decision making.

As a result of the project, instances of sub-letting within council properties have been identified, as well as a number of unlicensed privately rented properties. The outcome is a tenure database that can be viewed through the council's intranet, leading to significant savings in officer time.

It was worth it

Benefits have also been realised in a number of different functions. The project has:

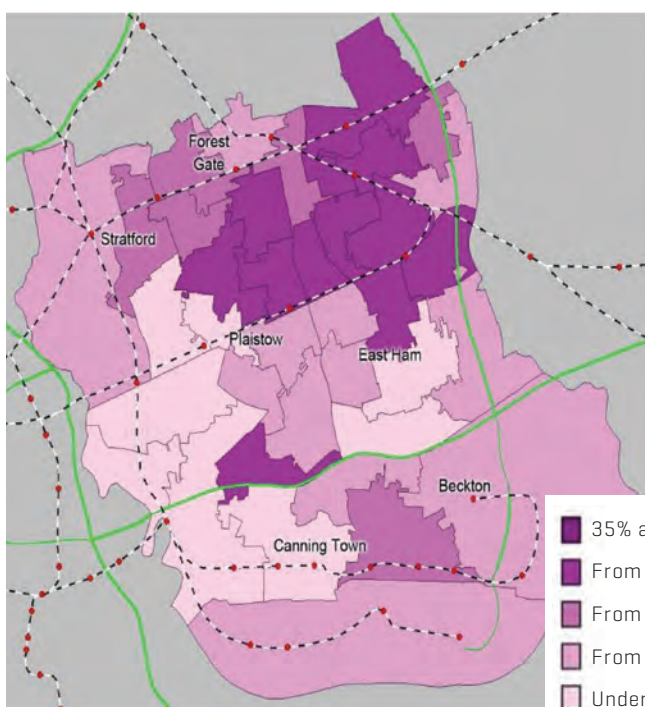
- supported the work of the housing management services and private housing operations teams through more accurate data
- enabled applications for a single person discount for Council Tax to be investigated more easily
- provided the basis for a private rented property licence
- supported wider improvement and performance work through having data in one place

- customer-relationship management system
- electoral register
- housing records
- waste/bin collection records
- planning
- landlord licensing.

This information was brought together into one database using the council's Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) as the 'glue'. The unique property reference number (UPRN) contained within every record in the LLPG was used to link the data sources together. As a reference key to join address records, this resulted in an integrated database with

Figure 1

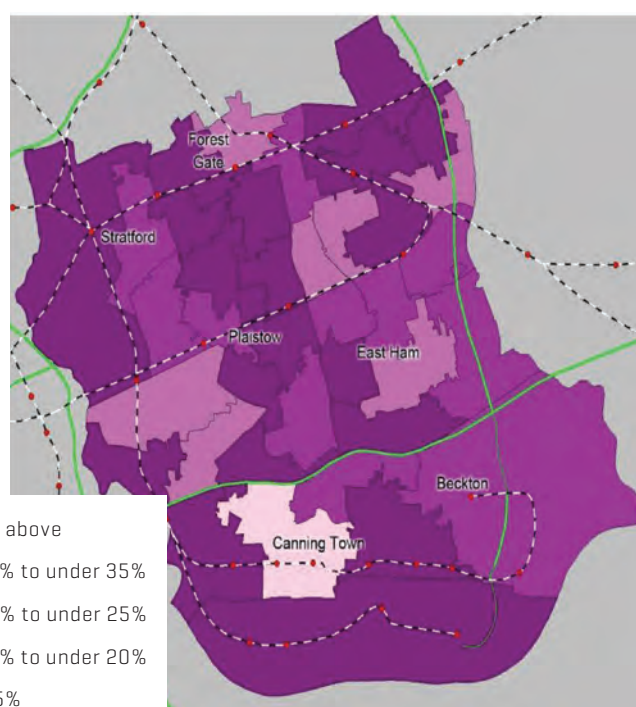
Private rented sector shift in the London Borough of Newham: Distribution of private rent 2001



Source: UK Census of Population

Figure 2

Private rented sector shift in the London Borough of Newham: Distribution of private rent 2009



Source: Newham Household Survey 2009

- provided the council with a much better understanding of the complex dynamics of the housing market – 6,000 council leaseholders (owner occupiers) turned out to include 2,000 to 3,000 rented properties that the council was not informed about
- facilitated council claims for the New Homes bonus – with £1.9m collected so far
- identified private rented properties with 95% accuracy, leading to more satisfactory enforcement visits
- found indications of sub-letting involving around 1,300 leaseholders, leading to potential additional income of around £90,000 from administration fees
- most importantly, led to a better understanding of the local residents.

The data-matching process also helped to cleanse the address database, improving the quality of the LLPG, with council-wide benefits, and also benefiting the resulting AddressBase® product range, which is widely used by the public sector. Created by GeoPlace by combining local authority data with other national datasets, the products are the definitive source of spatial address and property information. They include the UPRN to provide accurate identification of properties and addresses across England, Wales and Scotland.

The sharing of information across departments has also helped to build working relationships between other services and to develop processes regarding property information. It has initiated a further project to create a people database, using similar matching and regression techniques, which should

help to identify those affected by local and central government policy changes.

Meanwhile, the tenure database is being used to aid resource allocation and ensure that particular segments of the population are not disadvantaged.

In a related project, the council has implemented a compulsory private rented property licence application process across the borough and the database will be used to focus on identifying unlicensed properties. ●

More information

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Improving the private rented sector John East, Director, Community Infrastructure, London Borough of Newham, see <http://bit.ly/presnewh>

Newham, London – Local economic Assessment 2010-2027, see www.newham.info/Custom/LEA/Housing.pdf

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