

A comparison of social housing in the Netherlands and England on characteristics and quality

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Abstract

The Netherlands and England both have a large social housing stock. In this article the two countries are compared on sector and stock characteristics, the quality and backlog of the stock, and investment and maintenance expenditure.

Both countries show a declining tendency in the social housing stock. Social management bodies are strongly urged to develop businesslike approaches to housing management. There are differences in the way the management of the property is organized (private or public), independency of operations, regulatory systems and supervision requirements. The housing stock in both countries have many characteristics in common. A significant difference is the age of the stock.

The quality of the stock is measured in both countries periodically by central government (KWR in the Netherlands and HCS in England). Significant improvements in the quality of the stock has been achieved. In both countries the social rented housing stock had the lowest quality backlog of all ownership categories. Although there are differences between local authorities and housing associations, the overall quality of social housing in England is somewhat higher than in the Netherlands. Total investment and maintenance expenditure are on the same level. Within this total expenditure there are differences between the two countries and between social housing management bodies in England. The expenditures are in line with the backlog.

It's interesting that the quality survey in England is based on a quality standard (Decent Home Standard). Decent Home Standard defines the future agenda. All social houses must satisfy the decency criteria in 2010.

Keywords: social housing, characteristics, quality, backlog, maintenance

1. Introduction

Thirtyfive percent (Netherlands) and eighteen percent (England) of the housing stock is managed by social landlords. The proportions in other West European countries are lower. From this perspective it's interesting to compare the Netherlands with England. The main objective is to study the differences and similarities in social housing in the two countries.

We first look at the circumstances and conditions (i.e. the housing stock characteristics, national legislation and housing stock policy) before comparing the quality and backlog of the social housing stock. Both countries periodically survey the quality of the housing stock. Next we will inventorize the investment and maintenance expenditure per dwelling and the underlying maintenance types. For the sake of comparison it is interesting to look at the relationship between the quality and backlog of the stock and the investment and maintenance expenditure.

OTB Research Institute organized an enquiry on strategic stock management and maintenance management among all housing associations in the Netherlands in 2004 [16]. The results have been used in this article. The information on the social housing stock in England was gathered by means of an extensive literature review and contacts with the University of Greenwich in England. The following research questions will be dealt with in this article:

- what are the characteristics of the social housing sector in the Netherlands and England?
- what are the characteristics of the social and other housing stock in both countries?
- what is the quality and backlog of the social housing stock?
- what are the levels of investment and expenditure on maintenance in social housing in both countries?
- is there a relationship between the expenditure or investment and the quality and backlog of the social housing stock in the two countries?

We end the article by presenting our conclusions, along with an outline of developments and relevant recommendations.

2. Social housing in the Netherlands and England

The social rented housing stock in the Netherlands is 2.4 million homes and is almost entirely in the hands of housing associations. The social housing stock accounts for 35% of the total housing stock in the Netherlands. There is also a small private rented sector (12%). A little over half the stock is owner-occupied (table 1). The proportion of social housing is reasonably stable, but is decreasing slightly, partly as a result of housing association sales programmes. In addition, most new building is for owner-occupied housing.

Until recently, the municipalities also managed part of the social housing (municipal housing departments). The housing associations were privatized in the mid 1990s, in which the municipalities had a supervisory role. To avoid problems of being seen to wear 'two hats' (i.e. management and supervision), it was then decided to phase out the municipalities' management role. The property of municipal housing departments was gradually transferred to housing associations. Currently, 540 housing associations manage an average of 4,335 homes [1, 16]. Approximately 10% of the management organizations manage over 10,000 homes.

Table 1: Division of housing stock by tenure in the Netherlands and England

Percentage of total housing stock	Social rented	Private rented	Owner-occupied
Netherlands	35%	12%	53%
England	18%	10%	72%

Source, VROM, 2003 and National Statistics, 2004

England has 3.8 million social rented homes, which amounts to 18% of the total housing stock (21.5 million homes). As in the Netherlands, the private rented sector is small (10%), and more than 70% of the stock is owner-occupied.

Sixty six percent of the social housing in 2003 was in local authority hands (i.e. public housing companies), and the other 32% in the hands of housing associations [9]. Although most of the almost 2,000 housing associations are voluntary not-for-profit organizations, they operate under close government regulation and are registered as social landlords (RSLs), and the majority are affiliated with the Housing Corporation (HC). This umbrella organization was set up by, and is supported financially by, the government. The HC is responsible for public and private investments in the corporation sector and oversee the RSLs.

Table 2: Characteristics of social landlords in the Netherlands and England

Characteristics	Netherlands	England	
	Housing associations	Local authorities	RSLs
Total housing stock	6.7 million	21,5 million	
Social housing stock	2.4 million (35%)	3.8 million (18%)	
Number of homes	2.4 million	2.6 million	1.2 million ¹
Number of landlords	540	241	1,925
Dwellings per landlord (average)	4,335	10,788	623

Source, VROM, 2003 and National Statistics, 2004

Public housing company ownership in England is being scaled down sharply. In 1979, they managed 5.1 million of the 5.5 million social homes [14]. Between 1980 and 1990, the total social housing numbers fell to 4.4 million, most importantly because of the sale of 200,000 homes to tenants. Social housing numbers dropped further in 2003 to 3.8 million. As well as the sales, a feature of recent years has been the transfer of 350,000 homes from local authorities to RSLs [11]. The public housing companies managed 2.6 million homes in 2003 and the RSLs 1.2 million [9].

Public housing companies are large management organizations that handle on average more than 10,000 homes. RSLs are considerably smaller, managing on average as few as 1,000 homes. The vast majority of RSLs are extremely small, with the largest 10 managing on average 23,700 homes. The RSL sector is very diverse. There is “a wide range of quite different organizations, varying from ancient almshouses trusts and Victorian charitable foundations to self-build co-ops and former local authority housing departments” [14]. The transfer of ownership from housing departments to RSLs has caused a rise in the average number of homes in management.

¹ Excluding 645,000 LSVT dwellings

Table 3: Characteristics of social housing stock in the Netherlands and England

Characteristics	Netherlands	England	
	Housing associations	Local authorities	RSLs
Typology houses versus flats	70-30	67-33	60-40
High-rise flat		8%	2%
Age profile of the stock: <1945 versus >1945	9-91 (49% 1945-1975)	32-68 (42% 1945-1965)	30% after 1985
Number of rooms	2.3	2.5	2.4
Useable floor area houses/flats	90-68 m ²	93-59 m ² (total stock)	

Source, VROM, 2003 and National Statistics, 2004

3. National legislation and strategic housing stock policy

Dutch housing associations are not-for-profit organizations, which are obliged to operate in the interest of housing, in particular by providing decent, affordable housing to lower-income households. This is reflected in the Housing Act and the Social Rented Sector Management Decree (BBSH), which states the rights and obligations of Dutch housing associations [10, 13]. In the 1990s, the national government granted social landlords considerably greater freedom of policy, but also diminished the financial support to social landlords. Furthermore, demand for social housing decreased, partly because of a booming economy and changes in housing preferences towards home ownership. As a consequence, housing associations in the Netherlands began to adopt businesslike approaches in their housing management. They had to operate in a more market-driven and client-driven way. For technical management, only the lower limits have been set. All dwellings have, at any rate, to satisfy the minimum requirements of the Dutch Building Decree.

In England, local authorities and housing associations operate within different statutory, regulatory and funding frameworks. They started independently and developed along different legislative paths. Nevertheless, both parts of the social rented sector have some key similarities. The stock has been provided through public subsidy and is subject to regulation (e.g the Housing Act, the Housing Association Act and the Landlord and Tenant Act). Rents are set below market levels. Like the Netherlands, both local authorities and housing associations are under pressure to develop businesslike approaches towards housing management [14]. From 2001/02, local authorities in England have started to operate under a new financial framework. The associated introduction of business plans is part of the process of encouraging authorities to make better use of their housing assets [2]. These business plans draw on an investment plan informed by condition stock surveys. The recent government agenda for social housing policy was set by the Housing Green Paper [3]. This is a wide agenda that covers many subjects. The agenda for the future emphasizes a more strategic role for local authorities and the need to prepare housing strategy statements that are tuned to regional and national agendas and objectives.

Local authorities and housing associations are responsible for their own investments and the maintenance of their stock. In contrast to housing associations, local authority investment continues to be eligible for central government support (grants for disabled facilities and, from April 2001 onwards, the Major Repair Allowance). Local authority Housing Investment Programme (HIP) allocations are

based on government assessment of requirements for housing investment, informed by local housing strategies and, from 2004, by the priorities set out by Regional Housing Boards.

Housing associations are subject to the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code, which requires RSLs to operate viable businesses with adequate resources to meet current and future business and financial commitments. All business plans are assessed by a lead regulator of the Housing Corporation to check compliance with regulatory requirements [4]. The inspections (oriented to RSLs with more than 250 homes) cover six housing association duties, including maintenance and investment. RSLs must fund all their maintenance and investment plans from their own resources. RSLs must operate a clear asset management strategy and develop clear plans for bringing the housing stock into compliance with the Decent Home Standard by 2010 (see section 5).

Strategic housing stock policy is generally accepted within large social housing associations in the Netherlands. In a housing stock policy document, a housing association constructs a picture of the composition of the desirable dwelling portfolio and sets up market and complex strategies [15, 16].

4. Quality and backlog social housing stock Netherlands

The physical quality of the Dutch housing stock and living environment is measured periodically (i.e. every five to six years) in a Qualitative Housing Survey (KWR). The last comprehensive investigation was carried out in 2000 [7]. The KWR focuses on the structural state of the building, the functional quality, energy-saving measures, security facilities and the spatial quality of the living environment.

The Dutch housing stock consists of 70% single-family and 30% multi-family homes (Table 3). The local and regional differences are large, and indeed, the proportion in the major cities is exactly the opposite.

The *structural quality* is expressed in the necessary repair costs to remedy overdue maintenance and defects. The average repair costs for the entire Dutch stock fell between 1990 and 2000 by 40%, from € 4,200 to € 2,500 per home. For the total stock, this equates to a fall from € 24.3 to € 16.4 billion. The quality improvement arises largely from an improvement of the prewar stock, which is the group of homes that the urban renewal of the 1980s and 1990s focused on [7]. The Dutch social rented housing stock is in good structural condition. The average repair costs are € 2,200 per home.

Exterior frames, roofs, sheds or garages, external walls and ceilings are the most important repair items, accounting for two-thirds of the repair costs. The other structural and installation elements are responsible for the remaining repair costs.

The repair costs are then corrected in the KWR for the size of the home, which is then expressed as relative repair costs. The relative repair costs are a percentage of the rebuilding costs of the home. Four classes are distinguished (Excellent - less than 1%, Good - 1-10%, Moderate - 10-20% and Poor - >20%)

Approximately 8% of the total stock is in the moderate (6%) to poor (2%) categories. In 1990 this percentage was 27%. Considerable improvements are therefore also apparent in the relative repair costs. The social rented housing stock has the best statistics, with only 4% of stock in the moderate (3.5%) to poor (0.5%) classes.

The KWR also investigated the residents' satisfaction with the state of repair of the home. Not surprisingly, the residents of poor and moderate homes were considerably less satisfied with the structural state than residents of good and excellent homes.

Functional quality is an important indicator of usable area. The average usable area of the Dutch housing stock is 104 m² (single-family home: 118 m² and multi-family home: 72 m²). Social housing is considerably smaller than the average, with a typical single-family home being about 90 m² and a multi-family home 68 m². The level of facilities in the home increased sharply in the 1990-2000 period, and the same applies to internal and external accessibility. For internal accessibility, the living room, kitchen, sanitary facilities and at least one bedroom are situated on one floor. 37% of the total housing stock satisfies this criterion. For the social housing stock, the figure is almost 50%. For external accessibility, the home must be accessible from outside without needing to climb stairs. Three quarters of the Dutch housing stock is completely accessible, which is mainly because of an increase in the number of multi-family homes with a lift. Corporations have installed a relatively large number of lifts in their early postwar stock.

Table 4: *Quality of the social housing stock in the Netherlands and England*

	Netherlands	England		
	Housing associations	Local authorities	RSLs	Total
Backlog in technical quality (per dwelling)	€ 2,200 (€ 2.500 total stock)	€ 2,416 ² (€ 5,619 per non decent dwelling)	€ 1,497 ³ (€ 5,344 per non decent dwelling)	€ 2,111 (€ 3,519 total stock ⁴)
Backlog in housing quality (functional, energy etc)	Not known			
Central heating	84%	84%	80%	82%
Double glazing	69%	60%	74%	65%
Wall insulation	55%	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Floor insulation	30%	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Secure windows and doors	Unknown	42%	55%	46%

Source, bewerking KWR, 2003 and ODPM, 2003

The *energy quality* of the housing stock is an important topic. The Netherlands is striving for a 10% CO₂ reduction in the existing stock in 2010 relative to 1990. One of the most important energy-saving measures is insulating the shell of the home. KWR 2000 shows that the necessary progress is being made: The proportion of homes with double glazing rose from 57% to 69%, the proportion of homes with wall insulation from 42% to 50%, the proportion of homes with roof insulation from 51% to 63% and the proportion of homes with floor insulation from 24% to 34%. If we focus on the social housing stock, then it appears that the sector has performed several percentage points better than the average for wall insulation, approximately equal to the average for double glazing, and a few percentage points below average for floor insulation and roof insulation.

² This is the average of all 2,79 million local authority dwellings (2001). 43% of the stock is non-decent. € 5,619 per dwelling (see table 5). Exchange rate £ 1 to € 1.47

³ This is the average of all 1,388 million RSL dwellings (2001). 28% of the stock is non-decent. € 5,344 per dwelling.

⁴ This is the average of all 21,141 million dwellings in England (2001). 33% of the stock is non-decent. € 10,556 per dwelling.

Eighty four percent of space heating in the social rented sector is provided by an individual central heating installation. The proportion of local heating has declined steadily. Tap water is heated in 52% of the homes by a combination boiler, but kitchen and bathroom water heaters and storage water heaters are still common. The social housing stock is in line with these average levels. The proportion of solar water heaters in the total housing stock is only 1%.

5. Quality and backlog social housing stock in England

A Public Service Agreement (PSA) was concluded in 2000 between the government and the social rented sector (local authorities and housing associations). The agreement is that all social rented housing will achieve a quality level in 2010 in line with the Decent Home Standard. The Decent Home Standard distinguishes the following four assessment criteria.

- The minimum fitness standard. The fitness standard states that there must be no serious defects, that the home is structurally safe and healthy, that facilities are present for heating, lighting and ventilation, and that the home has tap water, sewers, a WC and a bath or shower and cooking facilities.
- The repair criterion. Twelve essential and three ordinary building components are distinguished. Building components refer to the constructional, shell and internal building elements. The assessment is made on the basis of the age and the state of a building element. Guidelines have been drawn up for the age and state of each building element. A home is deemed to be non-decent if one or more essential, or two or more other building components are old and in need of replacement or drastic attention with respect to their state of repair.
- The modern facilities criterion. A home is assessed on six facilities (e.g. kitchen, bathroom and sound insulation), primarily on age, area, etc.. If the home does not satisfy three or more of these requirements, it is deemed non-decent.
- The thermal comfort criterion. A home must have both efficient heating and effective insulation. Efficient heating is defined as a programmable central heating or heater. The effective insulation requirement (thickness) depends on the type of heating. In the case of gas and oil-fired heating, there must be an insulation package of at least 50 mm in the external walls and roof. In the case of electrical, LPG and solid fuel heating (e.g. wood), the package must be at least 200 mm thick.

Table 5: Social housing stock failing the Decent Home Standard in England

	Total stock	Social housing		
		Local authorities	RSLs	Total
Total percentage failing DHS	33%	43%	28%	38%
Failing Modernization	2%	6%	2%	5%
Failing fitness	4%	5%	3%	4%
Failing disrepair	9%	9%	5%	8%
Failing thermal comfort	26%	34%	22%	30%

Source, ODPM, 2003

The quality of the UK housing stock is measured in the Housing Condition Surveys. Like the KWR, the measurements are made periodically. The last comprehensive measurement was in 2001, and before that in 1996 [11, 13].

For the total stock, one third of the homes were non-decent in 2001, whereas the figure in 1996 was still 46%. Therefore, as in the Netherlands, there has been a considerable jump in quality. This improvement can partly be explained by the construction of over 800,000 new reasonably high quality homes in the period concerned (the stock expanded between 1996 and 2001 by approximately 4%). However, the 13% jump in quality is several times as high as this expansion.

As table 4 shows, backlog is defined somewhat more broadly in the House Condition Survey than in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, reliable backlog data is available only on the basis of technical quality, while in the UK the Home Standard also incorporates housing quality in a broader sense (e.g. functional quality and energy) alongside technical quality. The total backlog for the UK housing stock is € 74 billion, which is equivalent to an average of € 3,419 per home.

Social housing stands out in a positive sense, where the backlog of € 9 billion, or € 2,111 per home, is considerably lower than the average for the total housing stock. In 2001, 38% of social housing was non-decent. The quality improvement in the 1996-2001 period is in line with the national trend. In 1996, more than half (i.e. 52%) of the public sector stock was non-decent.

If we focus on the social landlords, local authority property would appear to be in somewhat poorer condition than that of the housing associations, with 43% being labeled non-decent. Otherwise, the backlog per home for this category is still more than € 1,100 lower than the average UK home (average € 2,416 per home). Local authorities can tackle the non-decent homes themselves, but alternatives are also offered to them:

- setting up an Arms Length Management Organization (ALMO), in which the municipality sets up a sort of private company to manage and repair the homes;
- joining the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), i.e. entering into (30 year) contracts through government-supported Public Private Partnerships, where the municipality continues to own the homes, but the private sector takes responsibility for the administration and management;
- transfers of ownership to a housing association (RSL), which then repairs the property (364,000 in the 1996-2001 period).

There were 138 transfers, 36 ALMOs were founded and 16 PFI contracts were concluded in the 1997-2004 period [5].

The property of the housing associations stands out positively in terms of quality, in that ‘only’ 28% is non-decent, and the backlog is only € 1,497 per home. The Housing Corporation itself investigates the affiliated housing associations each year. Data from 2003 shows that the quality increased further in the 2001-2003 period to 23% non-decent [5]. The backlog has therefore continued to decline in recent years.

The most common reason for a dwelling being deemed non-decent is failure to provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (about 80%). 34% of all local authority dwellings and 22% of the housing associations' stock fail on thermal comfort (i.e. lack of adequate insulation, poor heating, or both). 82% of the social rented housing has central heating; 65% has double glazing in part or all of the home. The RSL homes are less old and therefore also better insulated.

Another important reason for non-decency is disrepair. Housing associations perform better than the average. The key building components on which dwellings most frequently fail the disrepair criterion are chimneys (28% of all failing on disrepair), windows (26%), wall structure (14%) and roof structure (13%).

A small proportion of the social housing stock fails to satisfy either the minimum fitness standard or the modernization standard. Regarding the modernization standard, the most common contributory factors are the age of the kitchen or the bathroom.

The total of the non-decency criteria exceeds 100%. It goes without saying that homes can be assessed as inadequate on more than one criterion. Older homes are generally of lower quality (i.e. have a higher non-decency rating) than younger homes, and this is particularly true of the fitness and disrepair criteria. Prewar and postwar homes differ little in terms of modernization and thermal comfort.

More than 80% of the tenants are actually satisfied with the housing [9], which means that tenants can still be satisfied with their home in spite of non-decency. In the assessment of the home, matters such as living environment and level of rent naturally also play a role.

6. Investments and maintenance expenditure social housing

The Dutch housing associations spent about € 3 billion in 2002 on maintenance. This is equivalent to € 1,263 per home per year [1]. Besides maintenance, housing associations expended approximately € 2.1 billion per year on investment in existing stock (conversions, renovation). This is equivalent to € 922 per home per year [16].

Table 6 : Investment and maintenance expenditure per year in the existing social housing stock in the Netherlands and England (estimate)

	Netherlands	England		
		Housing associations	Local authorities	RSLs
Total investment in the existing stock (conversions and renovation)	€ 2.1 billion	€ 1.1 billion ⁵	€ 2.2 billion	€ 3.3 billion ⁶
Investment per dwelling	€ 922	€ 423	€ 1,192	€ 742
Total maintenance and repair expenditure	€ 3.0 billion	€ 3.0 billion ⁷	€ 3,0 billion	€ 6.0 billion
Maintenance per home	€ 1,263	€ 1,154	€ 1,636	€ 1,350
Total investment and maintenance	€ 5.1 billion	€ 4.1 billion	€ 5.2 billion	€ 9.3 billion
Total investment and maintenance per home	€ 2,185	€ 1,577	€ 2,818	€ 2,092

Source, Aedes, 2003, Vijverberg, 2005, National Statistics, 2002, Housing Corporation, 2004

⁵ Estimate: £ 720 million. Exchange rate £1 to € 1.47

⁶ Estimate: £ 18 billion was invested in the 1997-2004 period in existing homes: average £2.25 billion a year. Another £7 billion will be invested in the 2004-2007 period.

⁷ £2,046 million

The total investment and expenditure on maintenance are almost equal in both countries. In the Netherlands the average level of investments per home is higher and maintenance expenditure lower.

Local authorities in England expended an amount equivalent to € 1.1 billion on conversion and renovation in 2001 [8]. This amount excludes the Private Finance Initiatives (PFI contracts). In addition, local authorities spent € 3 billion on maintenance and repair in 2001. For RSLs the estimate is € 2.2 billion on conversions and renovation and € 3 billion on maintenance in 2003 [6].

Within social housing in England the housing associations investment and expenditure exceed the local authority expenditure with almost 80%.

Closer analysis of the maintenance expenditure in the Netherlands reveals that routine day-to-day maintenance accounts for about one-third of expenditure (i.e. € 448 per dwelling per year). The remaining € 815 is spent on planned maintenance and major repairs expenditure [1]. For local authority no reliable data was found. For RSLs planned maintenance expenditure is about the same as in the Netherlands. Routine maintenance makes the difference. Expenditure in this maintenance type per home are 82% higher [6].

Table 7: Volume of maintenance business per home according to maintenance type in social housing in the Netherlands and England

	Netherlands		England		
	Housing associations	%	Local authorities	RSLs	%
Routine maintenance	€ 448	35%	Unknown	€ 817	50%
Planned maintenance and major repairs	€ 815	65%	Unknown	€ 819	50%
Total maintenance and repair expenditure	€ 1,263	100%	€ 1,154	€ 1,636	100%

Source, Aedes, 2003, Housing Corporation, 2004

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The Netherlands and England have a large social housing stock. Housing associations have been privatized in the Netherlands, and are responsible for their own financial affairs. Associations are therefore fairly independent in operations. The national and local authorities in the Netherlands retain some influence on the operations through rent policy and admission and supervision requirements.

A substantial proportion of the social housing stock in England is still in public hands. There is more regulation and supervision. There is a division in the social rented housing stock in England, with property falling either under local authorities or housing associations. A similar situation also existed some time ago in the Netherlands. The local authorities in the Netherlands have now transferred the majority of the property to housing associations, with a view to avoiding problems of ‘wearing two hats’ (i.e. management and supervision). There are signs that the same is happening in England. Local authority property is being transferred on a large scale to housing associations. The local authorities still retain the majority of the stock. Another difference with the Netherlands is that the housing associations are small. In order to facilitate professionalization, the property level of the average housing association will probably expand sharply in the coming years. In England too, social

management bodies are being strongly urged to develop businesslike approaches to housing management.

Housing associations in both the Netherlands and England are responsible without government support for investments in and maintenance of their stock. It is striking in this regard that housing associations in England are under the supervision of an umbrella organization (i.e. HC) that was set up and is supported financially by the government.

The social housing stock in the Netherlands and England have many characteristics in common. The distribution between houses and flats, the number of rooms and useable floor area is about the same. A significant difference is the age of the stock. More than 90% of the stock in the Netherlands was built after 1945, whereas the corresponding figure in England is less than 70%.

In both the Netherlands and England, the quality of the housing stock is measured periodically by the government. The Netherlands have the Qualitative Housing Survey (KWR), and in England there is the House Condition Survey (HCS). Most recent investigations have shown significant improvements in the quality of the stock in both countries in recent years, which is attributable partly to building additional new social housing. However, the most important reason appears to be the investment and maintenance programmes. In both countries, the social rented housing stock has the lowest quality backlog of all the ownership categories. The quality backlog of an average public sector home in the Netherlands is € 2,200, and in England the average is € 2,111 per home. However, the measurement of quality backlog in England is not limited to technical quality (as is the case in the Netherlands) but also covers housing quality (e.g. functional and energy aspects) in a broader sense. It therefore has to be concluded that the quality of social housing in England is somewhat higher than in the Netherlands. Otherwise, there is a pronounced difference in quality between local authority and housing association homes in England. The quality backlog of housing local authority property is considerably greater.

The total investment and expenditure on maintenance are almost equal in both countries. In the Netherlands the average level of investments per home is higher and maintenance expenditure lower. Within social housing in England there are big differences between investment and maintenance expenditure of housing associations and local authorities. The figures match with the backlog.

It is interesting that the Decent Home Standard in England is based on the House Condition Survey. The Decent Home Standard distinguishes four criteria on which the quality measurement focuses (i.e. the minimum fitness standard, repair criterion, modernization criterion and thermal comfort). Currently, 38% of the social rented housing stock fails to satisfy one or more criteria. Thermal comfort is the greatest culprit. 80% of the non-decent dwellings are inadequate on this criterion. A Public Service Agreement sets down that all local authority and housing association homes must satisfy the decency criteria in 2010. It would be advisable for the Netherlands to introduce this broad quality measurement approach into the KWR and subsequently to reach performance agreements in national or local covenants between governmental bodies and housing associations.

This research will be continued on links between expenditure, quality and backlog. Is it for instance possible to calculate quality improvement? Therefore we have to get more reliable information on investment and backlog in the social housing stock in England and the Netherlands over a period of time. Another interesting topic for future research is the effectiveness of the combination of condition survey tools and (real-time) quality standards. For that we have to dig deeper into KWR, HCS and quality standards. Maybe it's interesting to involve other European countries in future research. We are especially interested in North European countries in this perspective (also fairly large social housing stock).

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