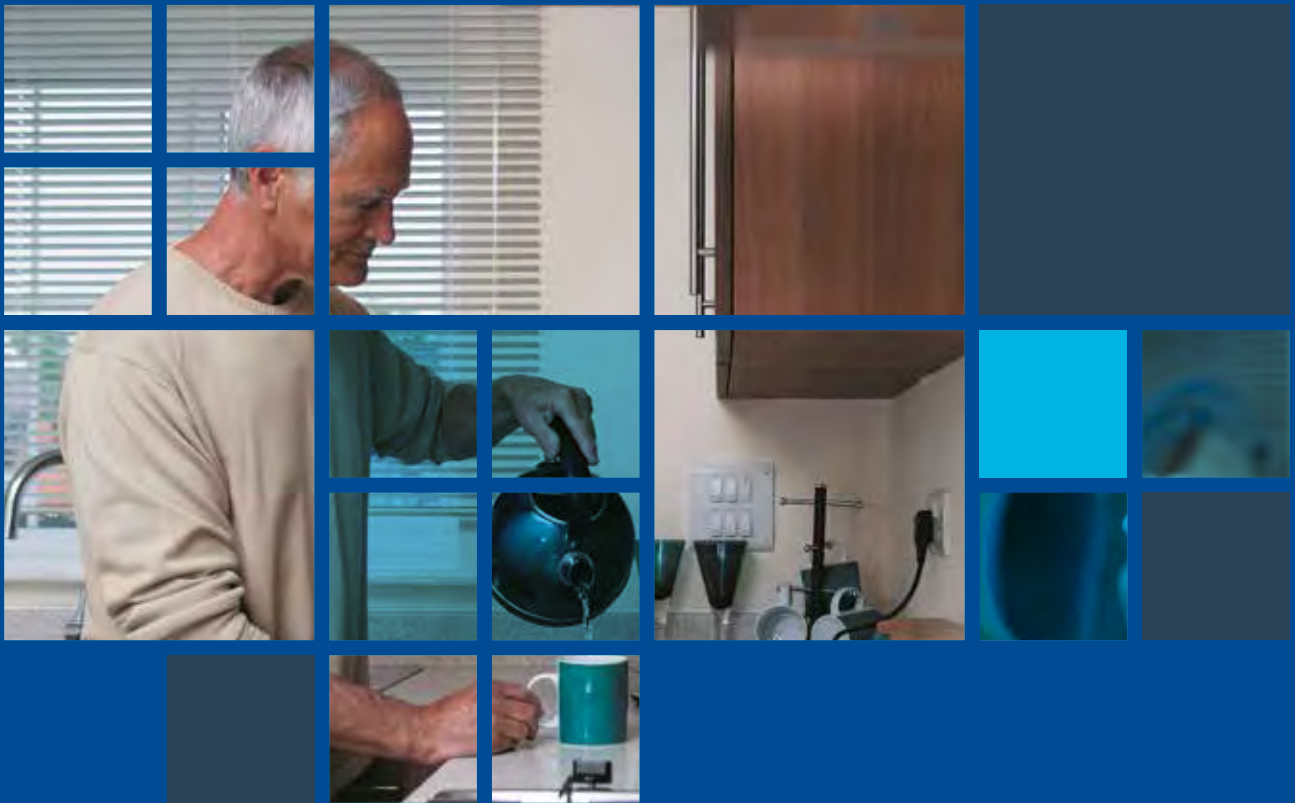


Affordable homes

Residents' views of quality



Primary research

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Primary research

December 2016

The NHBC Foundation

The **NHBC Foundation**, established in 2006, provides high-quality research and practical guidance to support the house-building industry as it addresses the challenges of delivering 21st-century new homes. To date, it has published over 70 reports on a wide variety of topics, including the sustainability agenda, homeowner issues and risk management.

The NHBC Foundation is also involved in a programme of positive engagement with the government, academics and other key stakeholders, focusing on the current and pressing issues relevant to house building.

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Foreword

One of the biggest challenges facing the housing sector is how to maintain, and indeed improve, quality while responding to the urgent need to increase output. While quality has never been off the agenda it has been given renewed emphasis, not least following publication of the recent report of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Excellence in the Built Environment on the quality of new build housing.

This current research from the NHBC Foundation, which focuses on the quality of affordable homes, is a timely contribution to the debate. It provides a reality check against findings from earlier survey work carried out by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), published in the *Quality Counts* reports, which showed high levels of resident satisfaction among housing association residents for their new homes. As such, findings might have been influenced by the experience of residents who had recently moved into new homes from much less satisfactory previous accommodation, it was felt appropriate to explore longer-term perceptions. Hence this study exploring the views of housing association residents three to four years after first moving in.

While this does show, predictably, some loss of the initial euphoria, what is striking is the continuation of a very high level of overall satisfaction, with four out of five respondents saying they remain satisfied or very satisfied with their home after living there for three years or more. Drilling down into the findings, it is notable that this overall level of sustained satisfaction applies to most of the specific features or characteristics seen as particularly important to residents, such as security, space and internal layout. This is a credit to the design guidance issued to housing associations by the HCA.

At the same time, however, the research has identified some aspects of homes that can lead to dissatisfaction over time as people adjust to their homes. Concerns were voiced, albeit by a minority of respondents, about the adequacy of storage space, sound insulation and parking. There may be important lessons here which, if taken on board, could lead to higher and longer-lasting levels of satisfaction among residents.

Ultimately this research helps our understanding of the needs and aspirations of residents and their ongoing satisfaction with the homes provided by housing associations. This should play a significant role in helping government and the HCA develop a strongly customer-focused definition of the quality expected in the new homes we build.

Rt. Hon. Nick Raynsford
Chairman, NHBC Foundation

1 Executive summary

For a number of years the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has carried out quality assessments of homes provided by housing associations under the government's Affordable Homes Programme^[1]. These assessments collect data on resident satisfaction, and key findings have been published by the HCA in the *Quality Counts: Results of the Affordable Homes Programme Quality Audits* reports^[2]. These reports set out resident satisfaction levels shortly after they have moved in, and at a time when they may be expected to have the rosier view of their homes.

To provide a more complete picture of residents' views of their homes and the housing schemes/developments they live in, the HCA was keen to explore if satisfaction levels changed over time and to find out if there were lessons for design as residents adjusted to, and grew into, their new homes. To address these questions a survey was commissioned, jointly supported by the HCA and the NHBC Foundation, to collect data from housing association residents who had lived in their homes for 3 to 4 years.

Detailed face-to-face interviews were carried out with residents in 200 homes across England. They were asked to gauge their satisfaction with a range of aspects of their homes and the housing schemes they lived in. For many questions, they were invited to add specific comments to explain their level of satisfaction. To provide continuity and comparison, the questionnaire used in this survey was developed from that used in the HCA *Quality Counts* surveys.

The main findings are as follows:

- After 3 to 4 years of occupation, a majority of residents (nearly 80%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall quality of their homes. Significantly, 64% rated their new home 'much better' than their previous home as a place to live. These headline findings are a strong endorsement for the quality of homes built under the Affordable Homes Programme.
- For a number of fundamental design features of homes, in particular internal layout and size of the home, resident satisfaction was very high and broadly comparable with the findings for newly-occupied homes published in the *Quality Counts* reports. Residents were also highly satisfied with the safety and security on their schemes.
- When asked to suggest features that were most important about their homes, residents identified a wide range of aspects of design. The size, comfort and convenience of a newly-built home were among the more common categories identified. Many residents identified safety and security, and privacy as most important, while others recognised social and amenity benefits, suggesting that the new schemes were integrating successfully within local communities.
- Most people were content with the internal environment in their homes; however, there are indications that some residents need more help with running their heating and ventilation systems. So while most residents indicated satisfaction with the ventilation provided in their homes, significant numbers said they were experiencing lingering odours after cooking (10%), mould (28%) or dampness/condensation (41%), indicating

that in many homes ventilation may not in practice be delivering adequate fresh air. About 20% of residents said that they found their heating controls difficult to use, suggesting that a significant number are unlikely to be using their heating systems efficiently.

- For all design considerations investigated in this survey, a majority of people were satisfied with their homes. However, there were a few areas where a sizeable minority (more than 15%) felt that their needs were not being met. These included storage, parking, noise from attached dwellings, balconies and back gardens. Each of these aspects merits careful consideration to see if there are any related implications for the design of homes and schemes.
- When invited to suggest what they would change about their individual homes, the most common responses related to layout, interior space, windows, gardens, storage and heating – although a good number (11%) would not change anything. When asked what they would change about their schemes as a whole, many (30%) would change nothing; however, 16% would change the parking arrangements.



2 Background and introduction

Since 2011 the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has carried out an annual survey to investigate residents' satisfaction with new homes funded through the government-supported Affordable Homes Programme^[1]. The HCA *Quality Counts* survey involves detailed face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of residents across England, and the findings are published in the *Quality Counts* reports^[2]. The purpose of the survey is twofold: it provides a quality audit for the HCA home building programme and it draws out important insights from residents to inform and refine the future design of homes.

The results published in the *Quality Counts* reports are encouraging. Year on year, these surveys show a very high level of resident satisfaction with their new homes. So, for example, the 2012/13 survey identified that 96% of residents were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the overall quality of their homes. For layout, size and appearance of homes, there were similar high levels of satisfaction from 2011 onwards, suggesting that designs were consistently meeting very good standards for these fundamental requirements.

The *Quality Counts* survey does not identify any features of design that are consistently considered to be unsatisfactory. However, feedback from residents has identified a number of aspects of homes that could be improved, including storage, private gardens and balconies, clothes drying space and parking. Satisfaction levels for these aspects were typically in the range of 75 to 80%.

For the HCA, there has been a long-standing interest, not only in measuring the satisfaction levels of people moving into their new homes, but also to understand how well satisfaction levels are maintained as housing schemes mature and as people become accustomed to their homes. To investigate longer-term satisfaction with affordable homes, this research project was initiated jointly by the HCA and the NHBC Foundation, and was supported by participating housing associations. It examined satisfaction levels among people who have occupied a home for 3 to 4 years and followed a similar approach to that used in the HCA *Quality Counts* survey. Where possible this research project has evaluated the same aspects of design as those covered in the *Quality Counts* survey, but the opportunity has been taken to look at some aspects in more detail so that the implications for future design can be assessed more fully.

The value of this research project is that it was able pick up features that were giving residents enduring satisfaction with their homes and reinforce the application of particular, successful approaches. It also identified areas of dissatisfaction that have arisen from residents' experiences of living in their homes and to help understand what they would change for the better.

3 Method and interpretation

3.1 Method

To match the sample size in the *Quality Counts* surveys, 200 interviews were conducted with housing association residents across England. The sample included properties owned by 15 housing associations.

Interviews were around 45 minutes in length and were carried out in the residents' own homes. Fieldwork took place from autumn 2015 to spring 2016.

To be eligible for participation:

- Schemes must have been funded by the Affordable Homes Programme
- Homes needed to have been occupied for 3 to 4 years
- Residents must be the first occupants of the homes.

The sample also needed to include a good sub-sample of apartments.

All participants received a small incentive for taking part in the form of vouchers.

3.2 Interpretation

For comparison with the results of this survey, resident satisfaction profiles are included from the equivalent questions that were used in the 2012/13 *Quality Counts* survey. This is the nearest comparison that can be made with housing association homes when they were new; however, readers should appreciate the following when examining the two sets of data:

- Firstly, the *Quality Counts* survey data was collected within the so-called 'honeymoon' period of occupancy when people experience the pleasure and delight of their new home, sometimes in stark contrast with their previous home. It is therefore to be expected that the excellent levels of satisfaction recorded in *Quality Counts* surveys were likely to diminish at least to some extent over time. The overall profile of satisfaction shown in this report after 3 to 4 years (although still very good) may be more representative of ongoing longer-term resident satisfaction. It is considered inevitable that as homes are lived in and households become established, the design of the homes will be challenged in a variety of ways and any perceived inadequacies inevitably begin to impact on satisfaction levels.
- Secondly, the sample of residents, distribution of home type and location will vary between this survey and the sample secured for the *Quality Counts* survey. It is not possible to correct for that variation, so comparisons made between the *Quality Counts* survey, and this current survey, should be considered only as indicative.

4 Overall satisfaction with homes

Ensuring that new homes are of good quality and achieve enduring high levels of overall satisfaction among residents, are core targets for housing associations. This research explored overall satisfaction, after 3 to 4 years of occupancy, from three perspectives:

- Overall rating of resident satisfaction
- Longer-term perception of resident satisfaction
- Comparison with previous home.

4.1 Residents' overall rating of satisfaction

Towards the end of the survey questionnaire, after residents had been asked for their views on a range of specific aspects of their homes, they were asked to gauge their satisfaction with the overall quality of the home they had been occupying for the last 3 to 4 years. Their responses are shown in Figure 1.

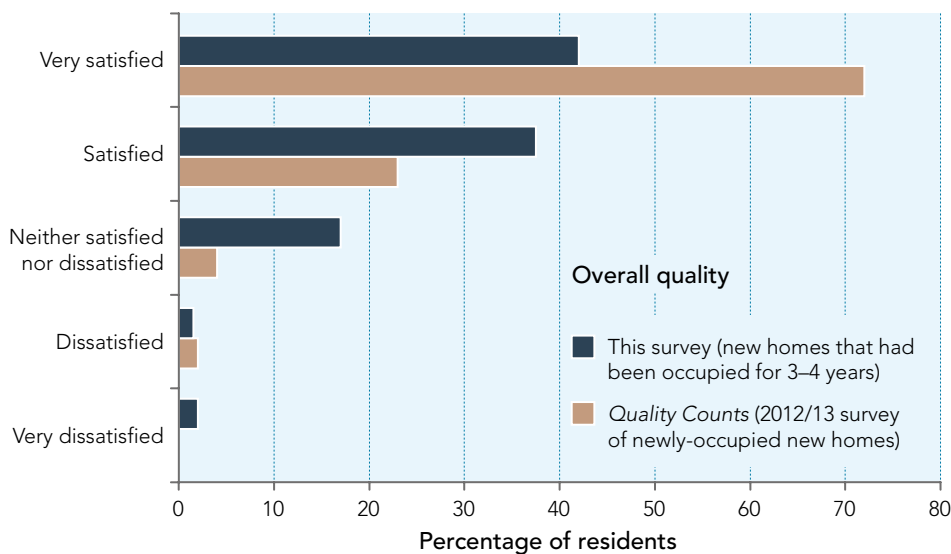


Figure 1 Residents' satisfaction with the overall quality of their homes. Responses to question 'Overall and thinking about everything we've talked about, how satisfied are you with the quality of your home?'

Base: 200 residents

For comparison, response data from the equivalent question in the 2012/13 *Quality Counts* survey (relating to the age cohort of homes being evaluated in this survey) is also shown in Figure 1. While the data suggests slightly lower satisfaction levels after 3 to 4 years of occupation, satisfaction with overall quality remains high, and dissatisfaction remains very low. Qualitative feedback indicates some very positive views.



4.2 Residents' longer-term perception of satisfaction

After a few years of occupation, residents may not remember so clearly how positive they felt about their new home when they first moved in. Therefore their feedback after 3 to 4 years may be more representative of ongoing levels of satisfaction. In this survey, residents were asked whether their level of satisfaction had changed since they moved in. From their responses (Figure 2) it is clear that a majority did not perceive any change in satisfaction during their occupation. Indeed the feedback may point to a marginal net increase in satisfaction over time.

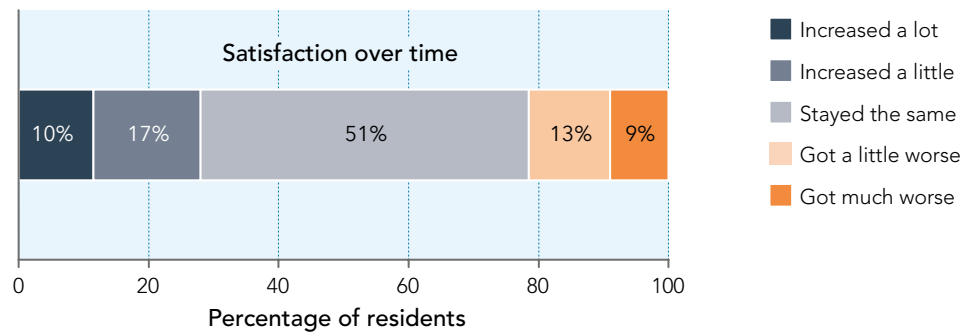


Figure 2 Whether residents' level of satisfaction had changed since moving in. Responses to question 'Over time, since you have moved in, would you say that your satisfaction with your home has [five options]?'
Base: 200 residents

Among residents who thought that their satisfaction had increased, the following reasons were identified:

- Residents had settled into their new home and made it their own: 46% (of those satisfied)
- Residents had grown to like the neighbourhood and their neighbours: 23%
- Residents had become more aware of the quality of their new home: 21%.

Just because what I've done to it, I have made it my home

We have made the place more homely since we have moved in; it is a good starter home

It is a welcome finding that many residents are pleased with the design of their homes and the quality of the neighbourhood. However, the picture is not consistent and some concerns related to the neighbourhood and to the design of the homes were also flagged up by residents who were dissatisfied:

- Problems with the home itself: 54% (of those dissatisfied)
- Problems with neighbours/the area: 27%
- Problems with the housing association: 11%.

The people in the area are not at all friendly. I think because of the layout of the scheme it has caused a lot of hassle, silly little things like kids kicking balls about and people standing in other people's driveways etc.

4.3 Comparison with previous home

One of the key questions for the housing sector is how favourably people view their new-build homes in comparison to the home they moved from. After 3 to 4 years of occupation it is clear that most residents rate their new home 'much better' than their previous one (Figure 3). This is strong evidence that the homes created by the Affordable Homes Programme are providing improvements to most people's living conditions.

For the few that felt that their homes fell short, dissatisfaction was related mostly to storage and living space, and to problems with neighbours such as noise, too many children playing and to social problems in the neighbourhood.

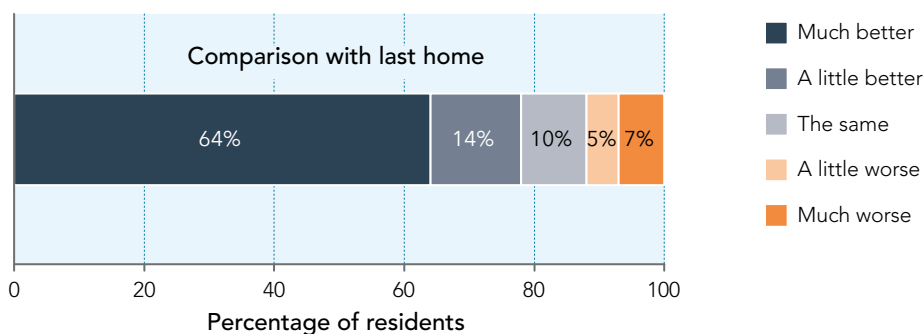


Figure 3 Residents' comparison with their last home. Responses to question 'How does living here compare to your last home [five options]?'
Base: 188 residents

5 What is important to residents?

A key objective of this research was to understand what was important to residents who had been living in their new homes for a few years. To cast light on what they valued, residents were invited to identify features of their homes and schemes that they regarded as important to them. Residents were also invited to identify changes that they believed would improve the overall success of their homes or the schemes they were part of. Their responses help to provide a better understanding of the aspects of design that were contributing to the lasting success of schemes and the things that, if changed or improved, may enhance design.

5.1 What is important to residents about their schemes and homes?

Features that residents valued about their schemes and homes are summarised in Figure 4. Alongside a range of qualities of their individual homes, the scheme location and characteristics of the neighbourhood and community were also seen as very important by many residents.

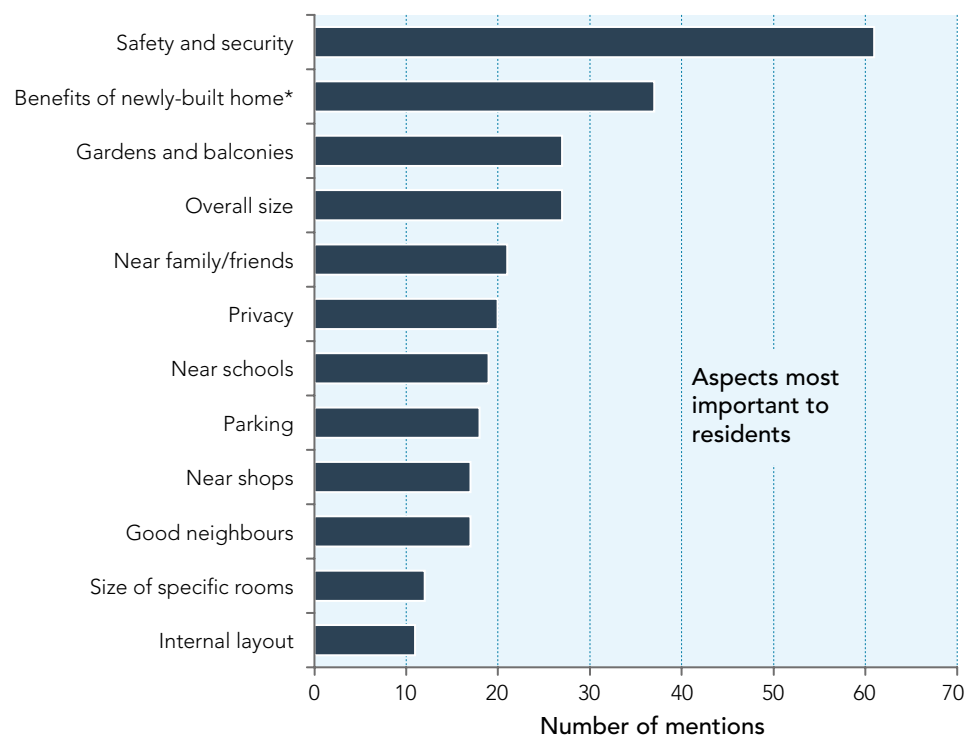


Figure 4 What was important to residents (the most common, unprompted aspects identified by residents). Responses to question 'Thinking about the scheme and your home, what three aspects of them are most important to you?'
Base: 175 residents, unprompted

Note: Not all residents identified three aspects. The base of 175 residents were associated with high satisfaction levels for the aspects they selected.

*'Benefits of newly-built home' includes references to comfort, ease of maintenance, low running costs, 'clean slate' for decorating and general appreciation of new-build standard.

5.2 What residents would like to change

Residents' feedback on what they would change on their schemes and in their homes is shown in Figure 5.

The scheme

At scheme level a large number of residents would change nothing. Apart from parking, which is understood to be a growing national issue, the results suggest that the schemes examined in this survey do not have any common problems recognised by residents. Indeed, with a large number of residents reporting a variety of location and community benefits, it might be argued that the schemes are establishing well 3 to 4 years after occupation. The lack of any challenge from residents on the overall appearance of the scheme is encouraging and supportive of the original neighbourhood design.

Homes

When asked to identify changes that they would like to make to their homes, again quite a few residents were content and would not change anything. However, others did identify some common issues, ranging from the layout of the home to gardens. This report focuses on these clusters of issues raised by residents.

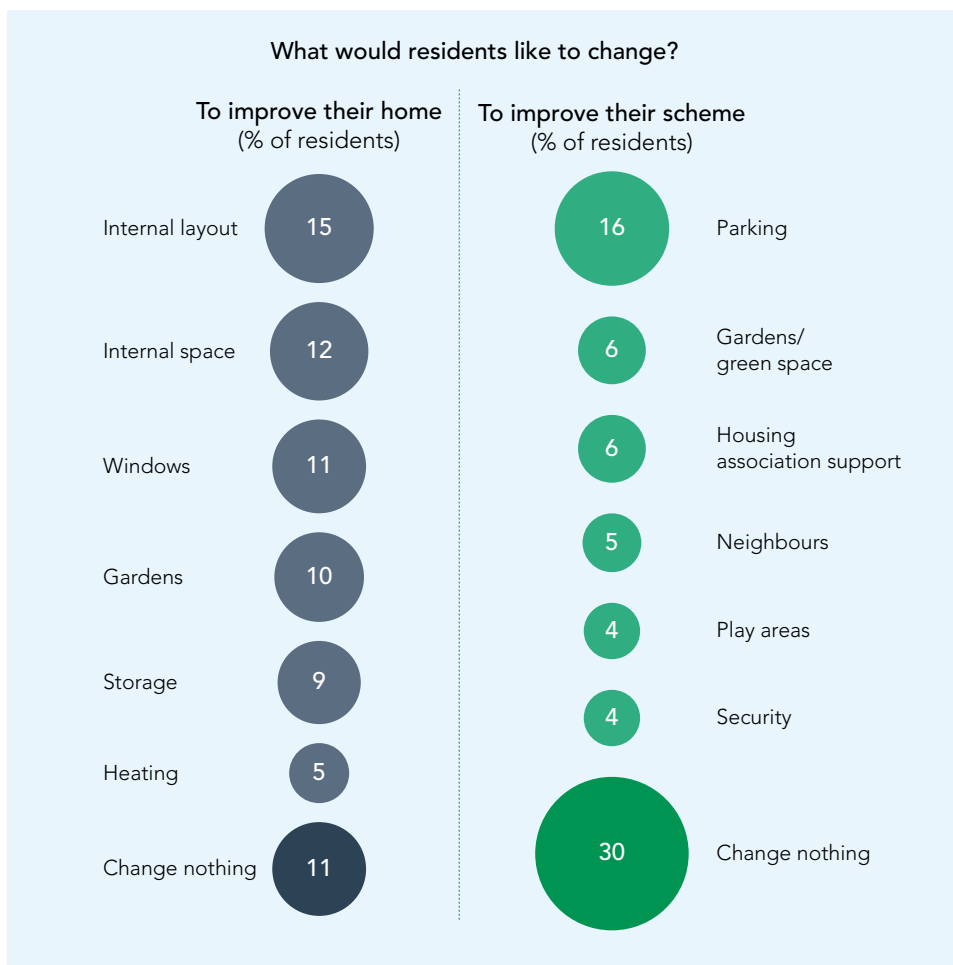


Figure 5 What residents would change about their homes and schemes. Responses to questions 'Which one thing, if anything, would you change about the scheme/your home?'
Base: 200 residents, unprompted

6 Size, internal layout and storage

This survey included separate questions on size, internal layout and storage. However, from the comments received from qualitative feedback, it is clear that these considerations are not always easy for residents to distinguish. So, for example those living with inadequate storage may, quite understandably, relate this to poor room layout or lack of space generally. Size, internal layout and storage are therefore included together in this section. Satisfaction levels with each of these aspects may be influenced quite heavily over time as families grow or contract, as young people require their own space and as households accumulate furniture, household appliances and personal items. In practice it is not surprising that satisfaction levels for these aspects of design are sometimes not quite as high as when people move in – this applies particularly to the issue of storage.

6.1 The size of homes

Feedback from the *Quality Counts* surveys indicates high levels of resident satisfaction with the overall size of their homes. Very good levels of satisfaction (86% satisfied/very satisfied) have been fed back in this survey indicating that, generally, residents remain satisfied with the size of their homes over time (Figure 6).

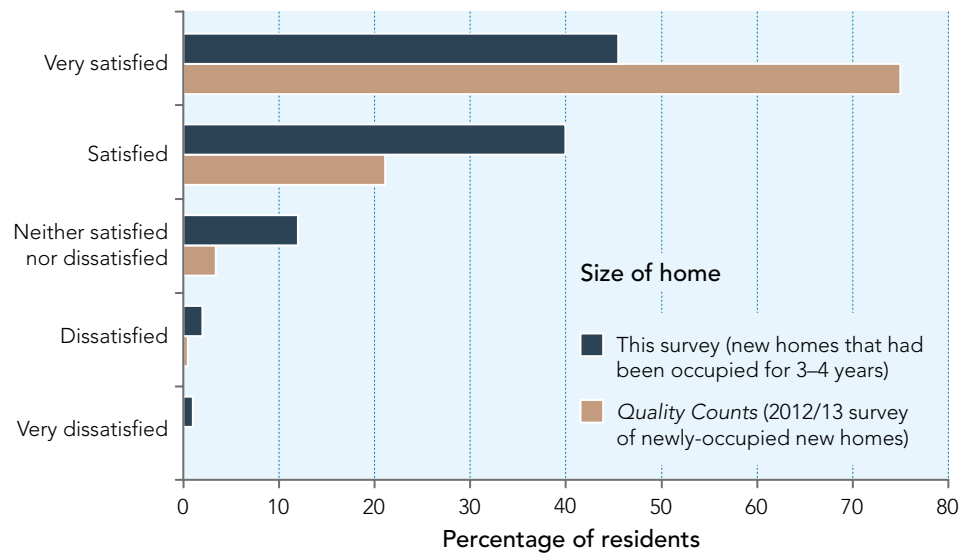
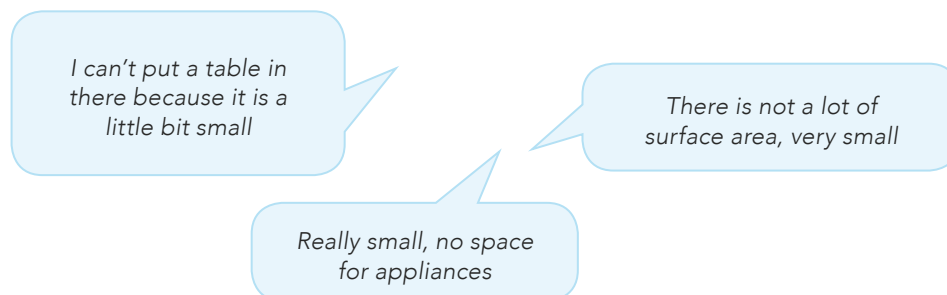


Figure 6 Residents' satisfaction with the size of their homes. Responses to question 'How satisfied are you with the overall size of your home?'
Base: 200 residents

Feedback on satisfaction with size was quite consistent across property type, both houses and apartments. One trend of note was that older people taking part, those in the 55+ age group, were considerably more satisfied with the size of their homes (62% 'very satisfied') than 20 to 25-year-old residents (only 35% being 'very satisfied').



Residents were also asked to gauge their satisfaction with the size of specific rooms. Bathrooms had the highest satisfaction levels for size and kitchens the lowest (where a minority were dissatisfied with general lack of space, inadequate working space and insufficient room for appliances).



6.2 Internal layout

Internal layout is a feature with specific architectural meaning and the research interviewers told residents to interpret the term as meaning the layout of the rooms. The high overall level of resident satisfaction with layout (Figure 7) suggests that the design of interior space is good across the homes surveyed and is generally meeting the ongoing needs of residents very well.

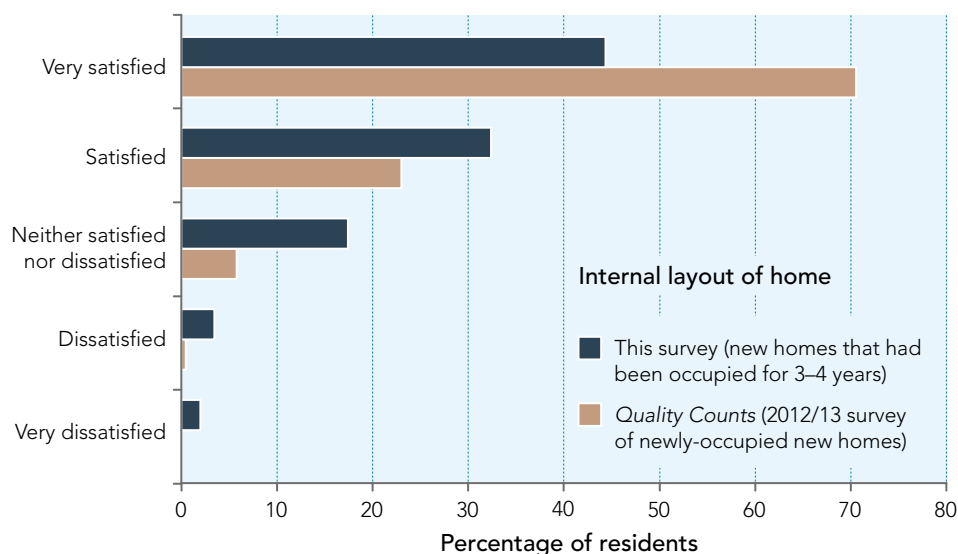


Figure 7 Residents’ satisfaction with the internal layout of their homes. Responses to question ‘How satisfied are you with the layout of your home? By layout I mean how the rooms have been arranged’
 Base: 200 residents

When asked why they liked the layout of their homes, open plan design was the most frequently quoted feature (mentioned by 17% of people, and mostly by those occupying apartments). Respondents appreciated the sense of spaciousness offered by open plan design.

I like the open plan kitchen and living room – makes it feel more spacious

We like the nice open plan living room, the windows are all around it so it lets lots of light in

In addition, a good percentage of residents commented favourably on the layout of particular rooms, including living rooms (11%), kitchens (11%) bedrooms (8%) and downstairs WC (7%).

Where dissatisfaction was registered with internal layout, 7% of residents referred to storage problems and to wasted space that could have been used for storage (eg, space under stairs). Another 5% of residents were dissatisfied with the open plan layout, indicating that this is not a universally popular or accepted feature. Some residents offered perceptive negative feedback on specific aspects of internal layout, including 5% who offered suggestions over orientation of rooms and positioning of windows to achieve better natural light within their homes.

Hallway is a bit of a wasted space and there is no storage space anywhere, there is no loft for example

I don't like the open plan kitchen and lounge, you get lots of lingering smells after making food

6.3 Storage

Storage was recognised by about 20% of residents as an area of dissatisfaction in the 2011 *Quality Counts* report^[2]. At that time the HCA implemented steps to improve the storage provision in designs and in the 2014 *Quality Counts* report^[2], satisfaction with storage in newly-occupied homes appeared to have improved a little. However after a few years of occupation, this current survey indicates that as many as 27% of residents were dissatisfied with the storage provided (Figure 8).

Around half of respondents (49%) said that they had difficulty storing certain basic household items in their homes, with the most common shown in Figure 9.

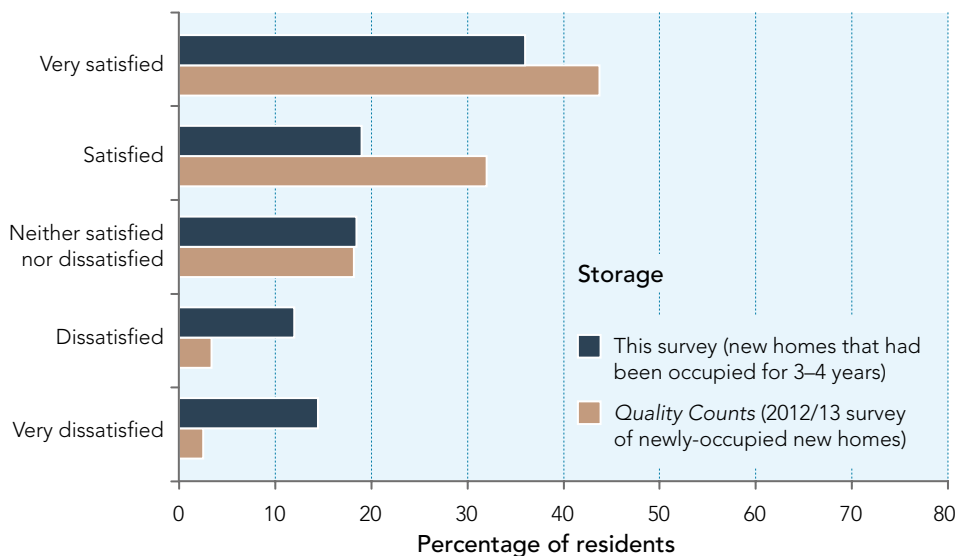


Figure 8 Residents' satisfaction with the storage available in their homes. Responses to question 'How satisfied are you with the storage space you have?'
Base: 200 residents

The Hoover and the clothes horse are really hard to store. I have used the cupboard in the hallway but technically we are not allowed to use it

I find it hard to store the bedding because the airing cupboard is really small

Other everyday items that cropped up occasionally as being difficult to store included suitcases and tools. About 5% of residents said they had a problem storing 'everything'.

As well as insufficient storage for essentials, some residents highlighted the lack of space for items that were additional to the equipment installed in the home, or might not be expected to be kept in the home, including bike storage (6%) and tumble dryer (5%).

There is no space for a tumble dryer and I had to sell my dishwasher

The tumble dryer is in the cupboard because I wanted a dishwasher in the kitchen

While the feedback from this survey indicates that most residents are satisfied with their storage, it is a source of dissatisfaction among a relatively high proportion. However, it is not clear whether those dissatisfied with the storage provided are predominantly those who have higher, perhaps unrealistic, requirements.

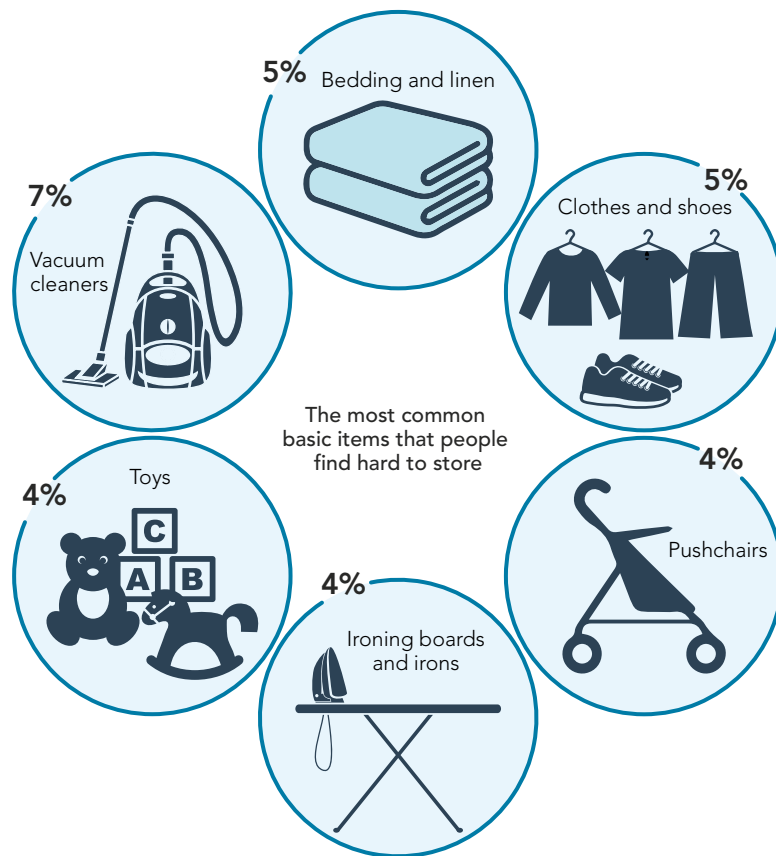


Figure 9 The most common basic items that people find hard to store (percentage of residents identifying a particular item). Responses to question 'Are there any items you find difficult to store?'
Base: 200 residents, unprompted

7 Satisfaction with indoor temperature, heating controls and ventilation

7.1 Indoor temperatures

Residents were asked about their levels of satisfaction with summer and winter temperatures inside their homes. Responses are an indirect, but useful measure of the in-use performance of the heating and ventilation systems installed, and an indication of the energy efficiency of the home.

As shown in Figure 10, most residents are very satisfied with the temperatures in their homes during winter and summer. Many residents were impressed with the quality and effectiveness of their heating systems and some remarked specifically on good thermal insulation of their homes.

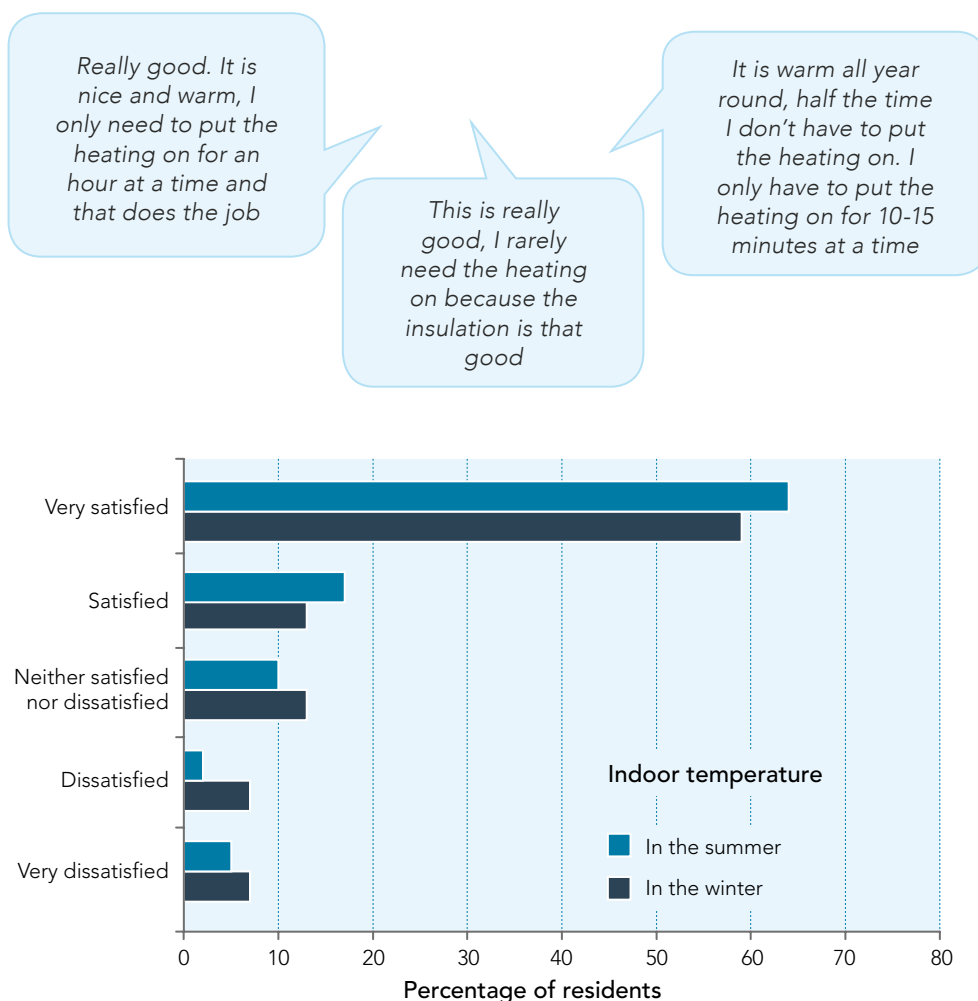


Figure 10 Residents' satisfaction with the winter and summer temperatures in their homes. Responses to question 'How satisfied are with the temperature in your home in the summer/winter?'
Base: 200 residents

While in recent years the *Quality Counts* survey has not included separate questions on satisfaction with summer and winter temperatures, it did consider both in the 2011 survey. Residents' satisfaction with summer temperatures was very similar in the *Quality Counts* 2011 survey and this current survey, suggesting that overheating in summer is not a significant concern among residents living in houses investigated in these surveys (ie built before 2014).

Satisfaction with winter temperatures, however, may be showing a slight decline since 2011 and it is concerning that 14% of residents are unhappy with the winter temperatures in their homes. Notably, dissatisfaction is only half as frequent among residents of apartments, suggesting that residents may be benefitting from the inherent energy efficacy of this type of home. The most common cause of dissatisfaction (apart from the obvious reference to being cold) was with the heating systems provided, which were referred to as problematic, inefficient and too expensive to run.

While this research did not set out to understand the distribution of heating technologies installed in the homes surveyed, it is very likely that a proportion of low-carbon heating systems were used in the homes instead of more conventional gas boilers (see *Sustainable technologies: the experience of housing associations*^[3]). Inevitably, residents unaccustomed to the newer technologies may struggle to use them correctly and this could be the cause of some dissatisfaction. About a third of those registering dissatisfaction with winter temperatures also found their heating controls difficult to use.

7.2 Heating controls

In the HCA *Quality Counts* reports^[2] the ease of operating the heating and hot water systems was not evaluated. However, correct use of controls is critical to the energy efficient operation of homes and this current research provided an opportunity to explore resident satisfaction with controls. Residents were asked how easy it was to use their controls and their feedback is shown in Figure 11.

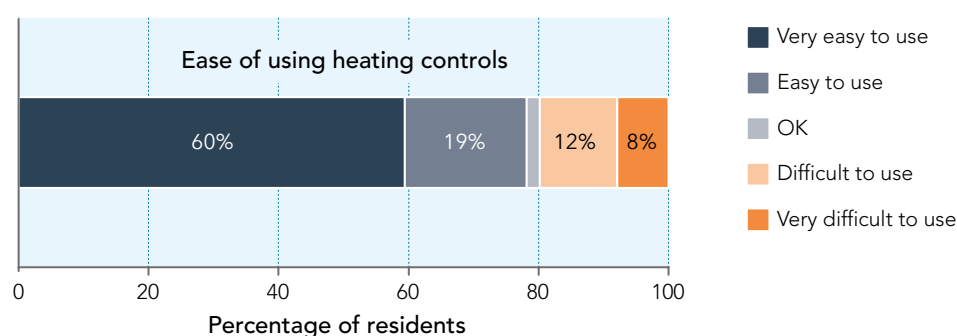


Figure 11 Residents' views on ease of use of heating and hot water controls. Responses to question 'Are the controls for your heating system and hot water system [five options]?'
Base: 200 residents

Although, the majority of residents said they had little difficulty using their heating systems, it is notable that a large proportion (20%) admitted to finding the controls 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to use (even after 3 to 4 years of occupation). From many of the comments given it appears that controls can be seen as over-complicated and, crucially, lack clear instructions for residents.

When the data is analysed against resident age it is clear that older people in particular find their controls difficult to use, however difficulty is also experienced by some younger people (Figure 12). Although the sample who had difficulty in using controls is not large, these findings support the growing

call for initiatives that improve people’s understanding of their controls and how they can be used to achieve greater energy efficiency (see *Home comforts: guidance on using ventilation, heating and renewable energy systems*^[4]). It also supports the view that homes should be provided with more intuitive controls that make effective operation as easy as possible for all, and particularly for the growing number of older people living independently.

They are just really confusing. Everyone in the flats say the same. They are too technical for older people. Even my son in law can't understand it. No instructions when you first move in

There are no instructions so it is very difficult. Even the engineer struggled with it

	Age 20-35	Age 36-54	Age 55 or over
Percentage of residents who find their heating controls difficult to use	11%	15%	38%

Figure 12 Percentage of residents (within different age bands) who find their heating controls difficult/very difficult to use. Responses to question ‘Are the controls for your heating system and hot water system [five options]?’
Base: 200 residents

7.3 Ventilation

Adequate ventilation is a key requirement for the health of occupants of homes and there is growing interest in the specification and installation of ventilation systems and the quality of indoor air. In this current survey, and in *Quality Counts* surveys, residents indicate high levels of satisfaction with the ventilation of their homes (Figure 13), with most respondents ‘very satisfied’.

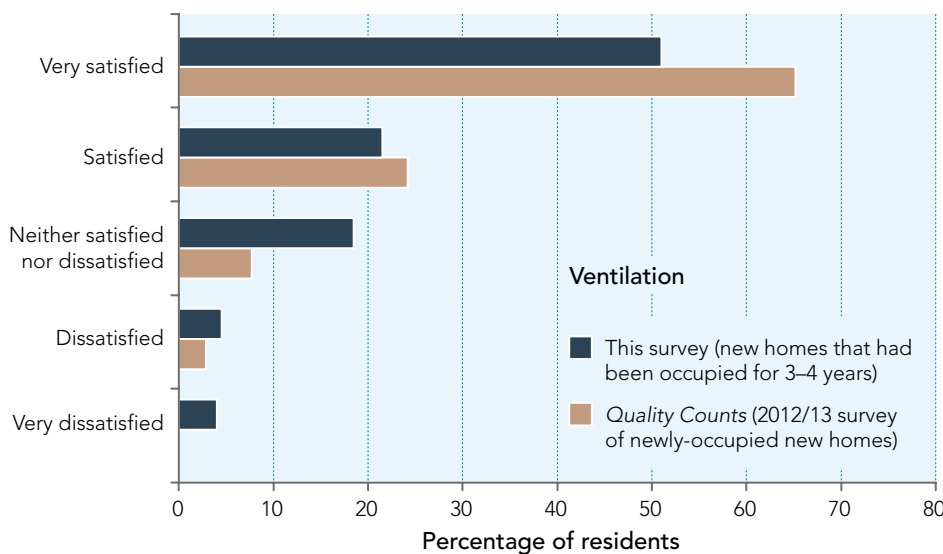


Figure 13 Residents’ satisfaction with ventilation. Responses to question: ‘How satisfied are you with the ventilation in your home, ie the circulation of fresh air around your home?’
Base: 200 residents

It's quite good, we have vents in the bathroom and kitchen and these don't let cold air in either, like some vents do

Everything is fine, windows and vents – the circulation is good

The current survey also explored the extent to which the easily-recognisable symptoms of poor ventilation (such as condensation, mould growth and lingering cooking smells) were apparent in homes (Figure 14). Despite the high levels of resident satisfaction with ventilation, the frequency of these symptoms (with over 50% of homes experiencing at least one symptom) does cast doubt over the adequacy of ventilation in many of the homes examined in the current survey.

Though some residents had made the connection between cause (poor ventilation) and effect (eg condensation and mould) many, either because of inadequate ventilation systems or lack of knowledge, were unable to ventilate their homes properly.

The ventilation system is too noisy, I don't use it that often

The ventilation isn't great without the windows open. The ventilation system doesn't bring in fresh air

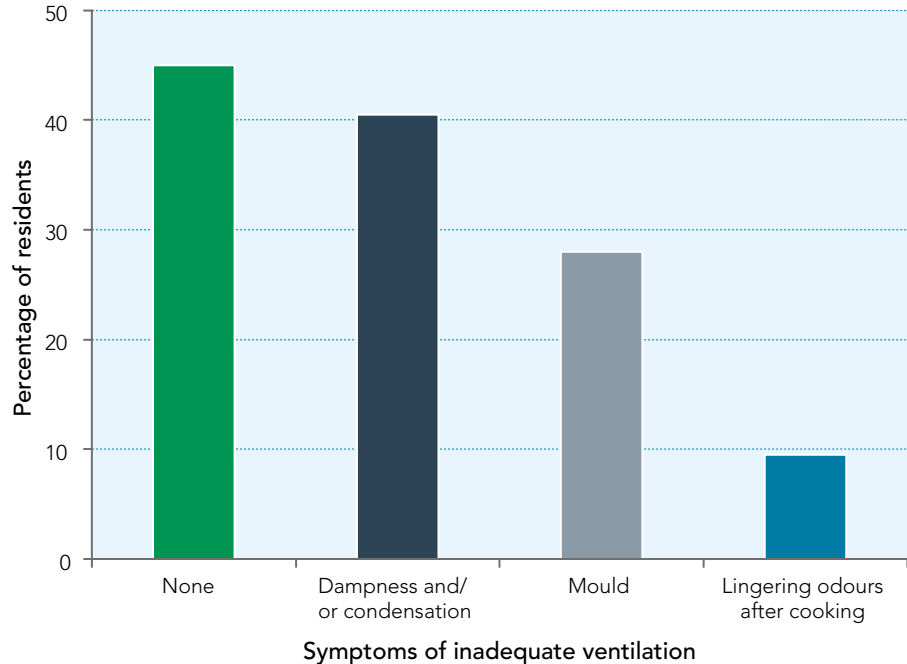


Figure 14 Percentage of residents recognising symptoms of inadequate ventilation. Overall, 55% recognised one or more symptoms. Responses to question 'Do you experience any of these [condensation, dampness, mould, lingering odours after cooking]?'
 Base: 200 residents

8 Windows

The *Quality Counts* surveys included resident satisfaction levels of doors and windows as a single category. Windows fulfil a number of distinct functions and can play a significant role in optimising the quality of life in homes and, therefore, were considered separately in this current survey. Residents were asked about their satisfaction with the design and fit of their windows (Figure 15). Most were satisfied and some offered positive insights.

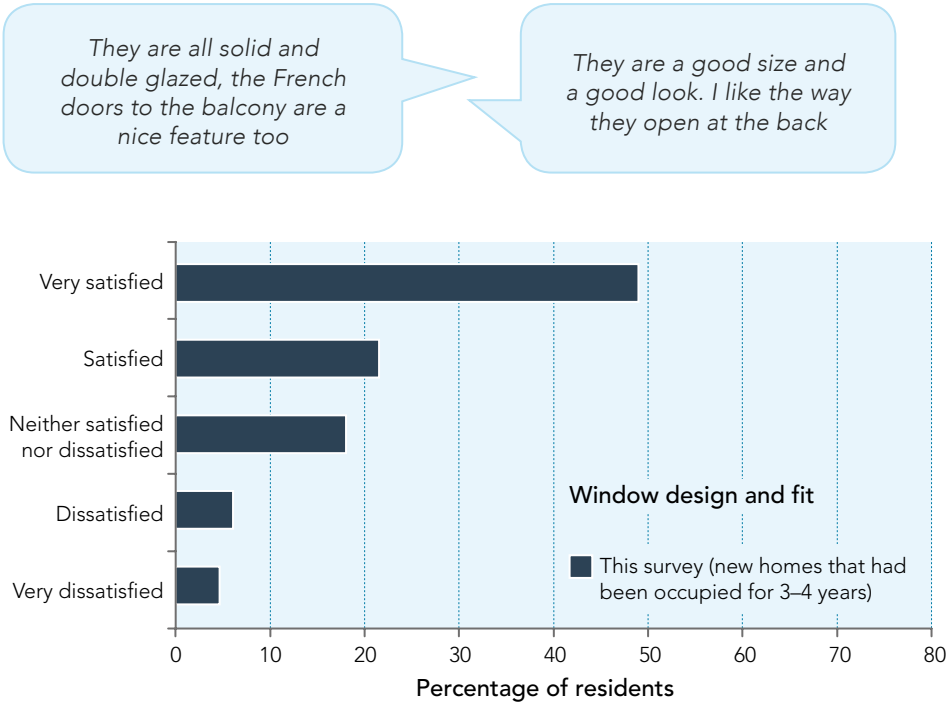


Figure 15 Residents’ satisfaction with the design and fit of their windows. Responses to question ‘How satisfied are you with the design and fit of your windows?’
Base: 200 residents

Residents were also asked how easy it was to open and close their windows, and to clean them. Most did not have problems, however, a significant number did experience difficulty carrying out these operations (Figure 16). Some residents highlighted the complexity of opening their windows.

I have never tried to clean them. It is too complicated of a system to open and close them and sometimes they can be quite stiff

Those who don't find their windows easy to open or close	Those who don't find their windows easy to clean	Those who don't find their windows easy to open/close and clean
14% of residents	13% of residents	8% of residents

Figure 16 Residents who do not find their windows easy to open/close, or clean. Responses to questions 'Do you find them (windows) easy to open and close as you want?' 'Do you find them difficult to clean?'
 Base: 200 residents

As well as responding to the specific questions (Figures 15 and 16), residents also made unprompted references to window-related issues. Some mentioned their windows when considering the layout of their homes, particularly to deficiencies in the pattern or amount of light entering their homes. When asked about the one thing that they would change in their homes, a significant proportion of residents (11%) again made reference to windows (Figure 5). In these cases, residents rarely touched on the technical qualities of the windows installed. Instead they referred to the absence of sufficient glazing, and a number were dissatisfied that their bathroom had no window.



9 Sound insulation

Historically, sound transmission within homes and between attached homes has been a recognised cause of dissatisfaction among residents. In more recent years there is evidence that measures implemented through changes to Building Regulations to reduce noise transmission (in particular between attached homes) have been effective in reducing complaints about this category of noise^[5]. This positive picture is supported by evidence from *Quality Counts* surveys from 2008 onward that indicate high levels of resident satisfaction with the overall sound insulation of their new homes.

In the current survey the opportunity was taken to gain more detailed feedback on sound insulation (beyond the single generic measure of satisfaction obtained in the *Quality Counts* surveys). Residents' satisfaction with three categories of sound insulation was investigated:

- Sound insulation within the home
- Sound insulation between attached homes
- Sound insulation against neighbourhood/environmental noise from outdoors.

The levels of satisfaction for insulation against these categories of noise are shown in Figure 17. For reference only, satisfaction with overall sound insulation, published in the 2012/13 *Quality Counts* report for newly occupied homes, is also shown.

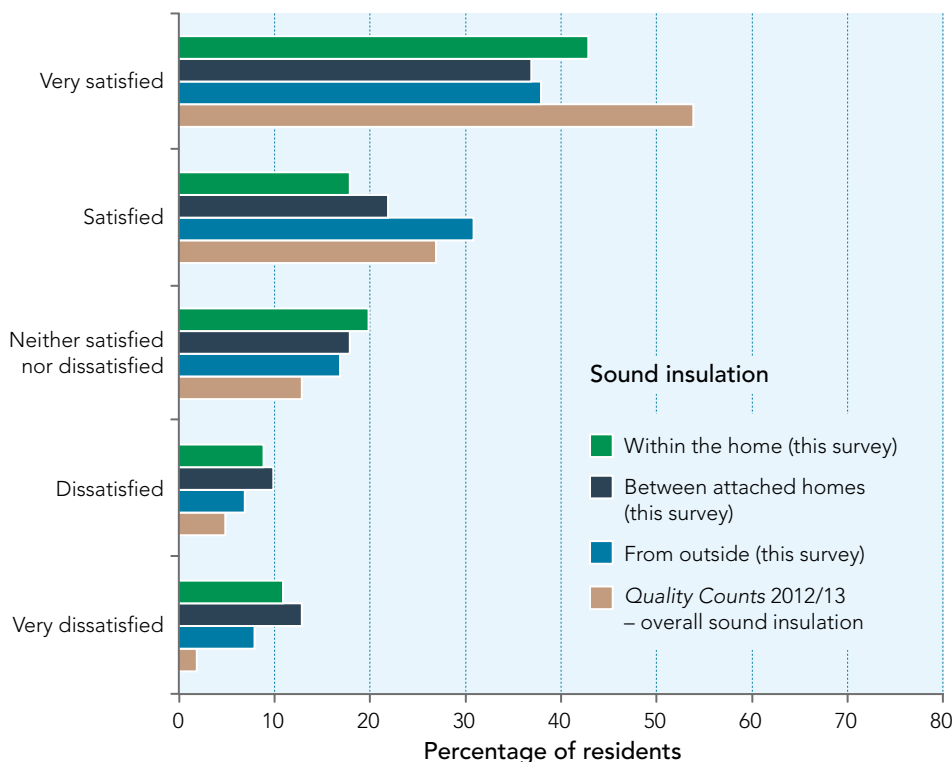
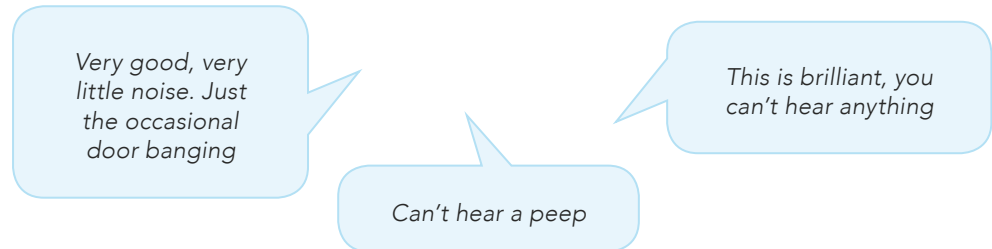
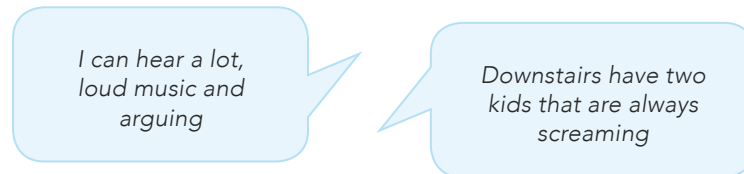


Figure 17 Residents' satisfaction for different sound insulation characteristics of their homes. Responses to questions 'How satisfied are you with the level of sound insulation (1) between different rooms in your home? (2) between your home and attached properties? (3) between your home and outside?'
Base: 200 residents

From Figure 17 it is clear that the overall majority of residents are satisfied with the sound insulation of the homes, whether related to sound in the home, or to sound entering from other homes or outside. Typical comments from residents, when responding on the quality of sound insulation from attached neighbours, included:



Alongside those who are satisfied, there is clearly a level of dissatisfaction with sound insulation amongst some residents. Overall, 28% of residents registered dissatisfaction with one or more of these categories of sound insulation. Some dissatisfied residents described the kinds of noise-related problems they experienced.



It may be that, in some cases, very high levels of noise are being generated which are beyond the levels that Building Regulations are expected to deal with.

10 Security

Residents were asked how safe and secure they felt in their homes. Their feedback, shown in Figure 18, replicates almost exactly the very high levels of satisfaction with safety and security fed back in the *Quality Counts* surveys for newly-occupied homes. For the schemes in this current survey it appears that safety and security is an area of lasting high satisfaction, and a strong characteristic of homes built under the Affordable Homes Programme. Residents often rate security as one of the most important features of their homes (Figure 4).

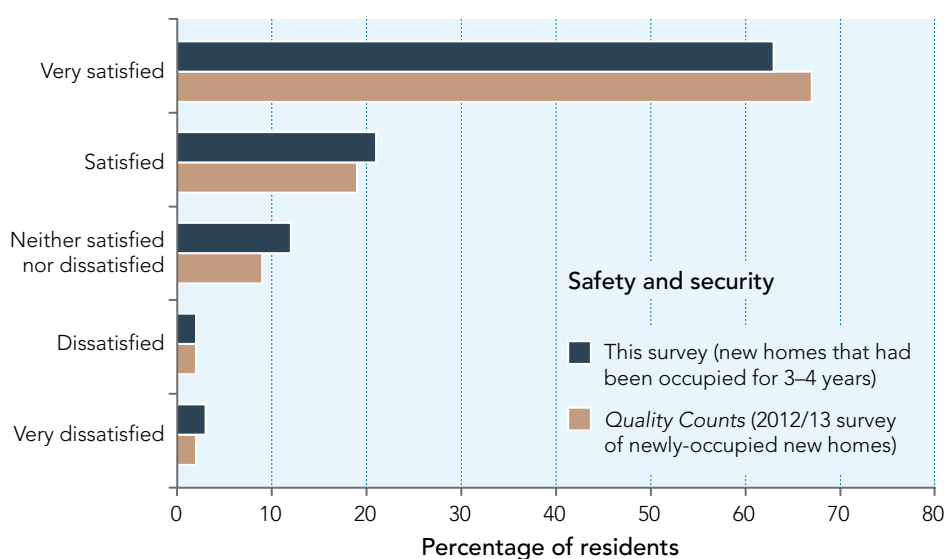
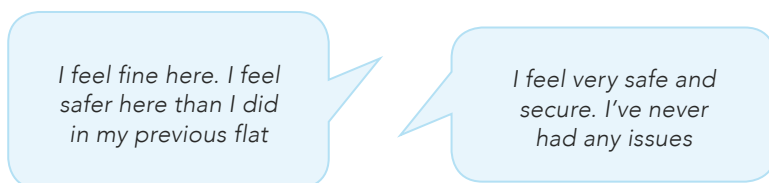


Figure 18 Residents' satisfaction with safety and security. Responses to the question 'How safe and secure do you feel in your home?'
Base: 200 residents

Many residents offered qualitative feedback. About 46% were able to communicate a general feeling of being safe or secure, but did not clarify if their satisfaction was related specifically to their own home, the scheme or the neighbourhood.



A further 16% offered more specific, positive feedback on security, with about half of these referring to safety features of their homes, often related to secure front doors and locks.

I feel very secure in my home. The coded keys for the front door are great, all the windows have locks on, there is a good door entry system with a camera, which is really good

Some made specific comments about how they felt safe and secure in their neighbourhood.

It's really safe; I can easily walk to the shops at night

Of the residents who were dissatisfied with security, one of the main concerns related to the external doors into apartment buildings. Sometimes these seemed to be providing a less than secure initial barrier against entry by uninvited people.

11 Outdoor space and parking

Balconies and gardens can play an important role in people’s wellbeing and contribute in an important way to people’s satisfaction with their homes. The evidence from this survey indicates that a majority of people remain satisfied with their balconies and gardens (their outdoor space) after a period of occupation (Figures 19 and 20). To enable broad comparison, Figures 19 and 20 also show the combined satisfaction levels for balconies and back gardens available from the 2012/13 *Quality Counts* report^[2].

11.1 Balconies

Forty two homes had private balconies and many residents were satisfied with design and layout, and size (Figure 19). When asked what made them satisfied or dissatisfied, 31 residents offered positive feedback, with about a third of comments indicating satisfaction with the size of their balconies.

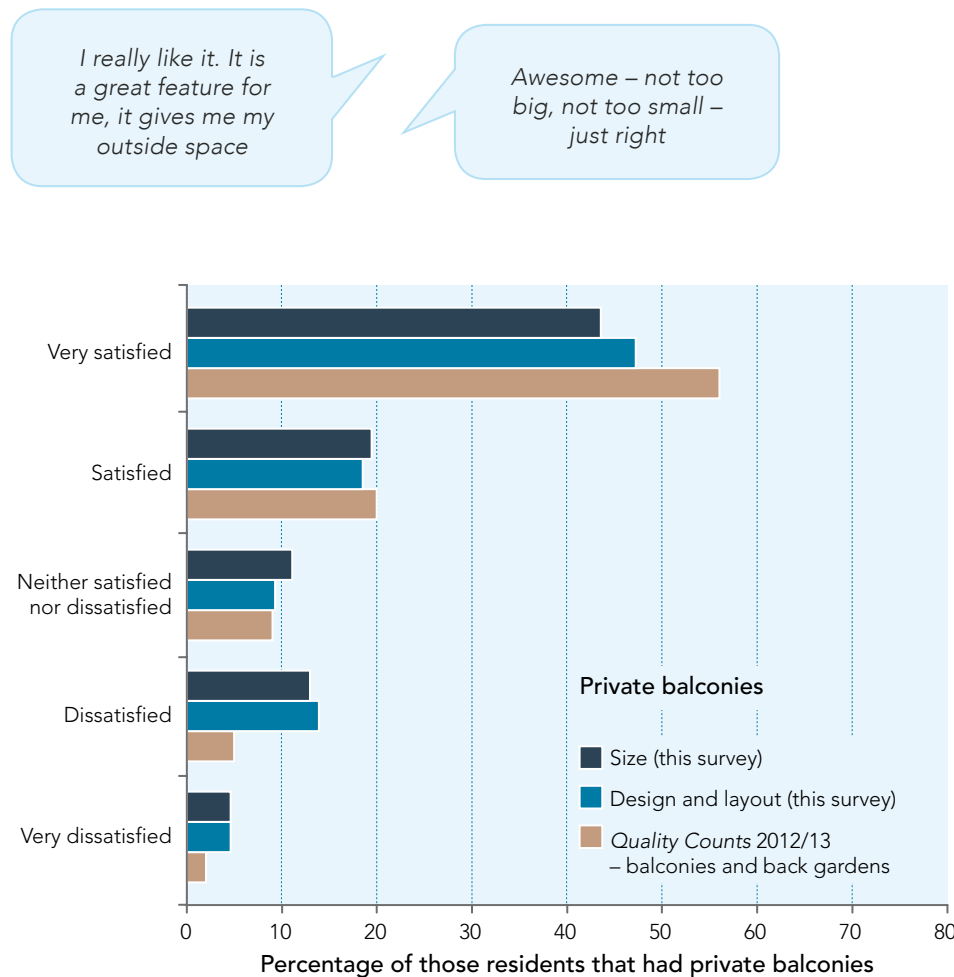


Figure 19 Residents’ satisfaction with balconies. Responses to questions ‘How satisfied are you with the size/design and layout of your balcony?’
Base: 42 residents who had private balconies



However, quite a large percentage of residents (about 19%) were dissatisfied with their balconies (Figure 19). Reasons for dissatisfaction among residents included size, layout and lack of privacy.

11.2 Gardens

Gardens with good design and planting have the potential to increase levels of satisfaction over time as plants mature and gardens develop. Well-designed communal gardens can encourage social interaction and cohesion within communities, and indirectly improve satisfaction with homes.

This report considers only back gardens as these provided a good sample of both communal and private gardens. Very similar levels of overall satisfaction and dissatisfaction were fed back from residents with either communal or private gardens. Resident satisfaction with the design and size of their back gardens are shown in Figure 20.

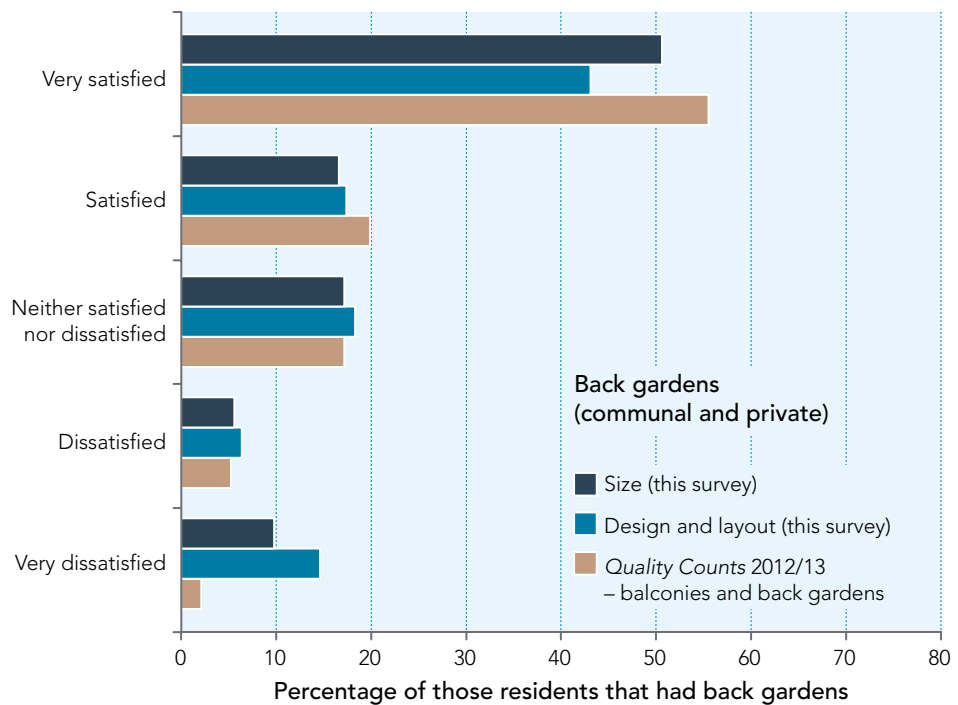


Figure 20 Residents' satisfaction with back gardens. Responses to questions 'How satisfied are you with the size/design and layout of your back garden?'
 Base: 162 residents who had back gardens

Communal back gardens

Of the 53 residents who had communal back gardens, a total of 40 offered comments, including some positive feedback.

It's nice, quite peaceful

It's a lovely design – you can't fault it

Those who were dissatisfied mostly had concerns about lack of maintenance or the lack of anywhere to sit.

No seating in the communal area. I would like to go down and read a book

Gardener does not come enough, there's leaves and rubbish – not really a proper garden

Private back gardens

In this survey, 86 residents had their own back gardens and the majority offered feedback. Of the favourable comments, most related to satisfaction with the size of the garden.

I have no problems at all with it. It is a great size and I like the layout

It's good – I use it a lot in the summer

Things that dissatisfied people about their gardens related mostly to problems with the quality of the ground and inconvenient slopes.

It was left on a slant. Lots of bricks and rubble that needed to be removed

11.3 Parking

Satisfaction with parking was polarised. Levels of satisfaction are lower and dissatisfaction higher than for any other aspect considered in this survey (Figure 21). When compared with the 2012/13 *Quality Counts* report^[2] it appears that parking is an increasing problem for residents. With the number of cars per household increasing steadily in recent years this trend is not unexpected.

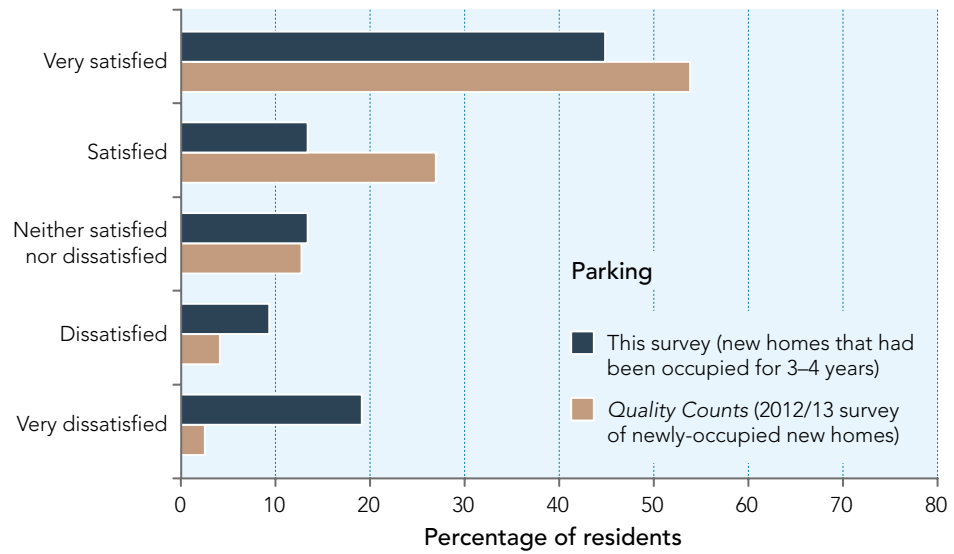


Figure 21 Residents' satisfaction with their own parking space. Responses to question 'How satisfied are you with the parking space that is available to you?'
Base: 194 residents

Just over half (55%) of the residents in this current survey were satisfied with parking and some offered positive feedback.

I'm happy, we have two parking spaces which is really handy

Pretty good, we have blue badge parking so we are lucky

However, a large number were dissatisfied (29%), and the main reasons for dissatisfaction included:

- Inadequate number of parking spaces for residents: 12%
- No spaces at all: 9%
- Lack of visitor spaces: 5%
- Non-residents occupying spaces: 4%.

A significant number of residents simply could not park near their homes. Many felt that the allocation of parking spaces for each resident or a permit arrangement would ease the problem. The following comments highlight the growing problem of parking on some schemes; it is clear that for many, parking was a major issue.

There certainly isn't enough parking for everyone here. It is the main concern/issue with living here

This is very disappointing, people just park where they want. People who don't even live here, park here

12 Satisfaction with the broader aspects of the scheme

A key measure of success for scheme designers and planners is whether, as a whole, a housing development is appreciated by the residents. In this survey there was an opportunity to obtain insights on how well schemes were regarded once they had bedded in for a few years. The survey investigated views on the visual appearance of schemes and how well they met the needs of residents.

Most residents registered satisfaction with the appearance of their schemes (Figure 22) after living there for 3 to 4 years.

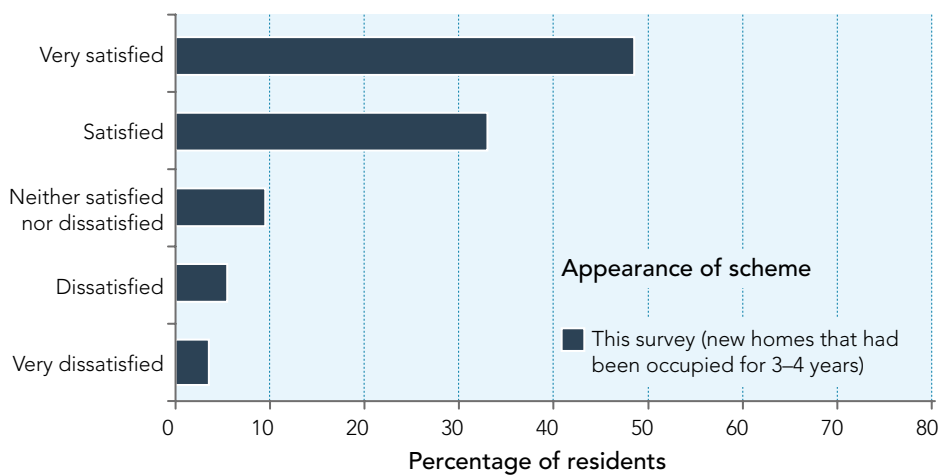


Figure 22 Residents' satisfaction with the appearance of their scheme. Responses to question 'How satisfied are you with the appearance of your scheme, ie the way it looks overall?'
Base: 200 residents

Structured qualitative feedback on good or bad aspects of scheme appearance was not obtained in this survey. However, in support of the overall high level of satisfaction, only two residents identified improvements in appearance as something important to them. Further evidence for the success of these schemes is shown in Figure 23, which highlights that most residents believe that:

- Their schemes fit well alongside nearby properties
- Their schemes meet the needs of residents.

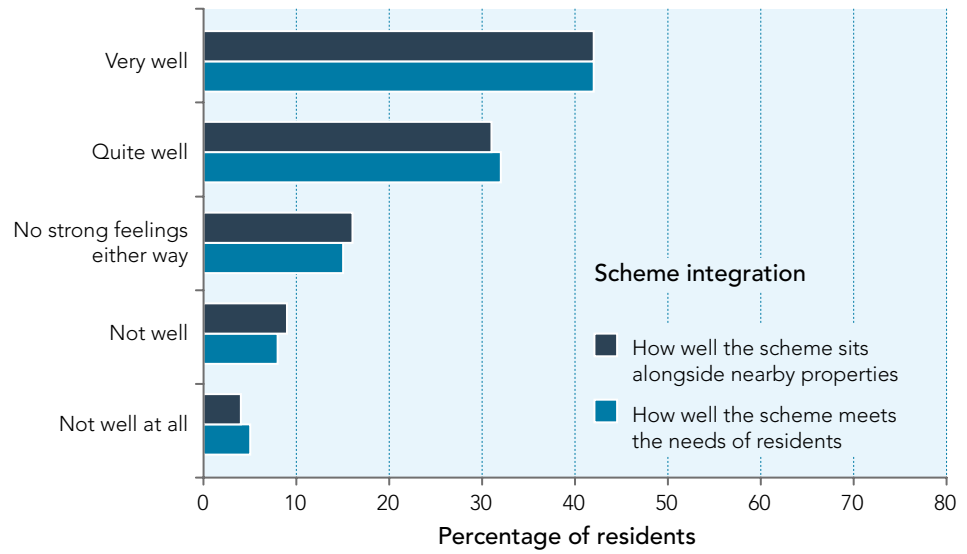


Figure 23 Residents' views of how well their scheme integrates (appearance) with nearby properties and meets the wider needs of residents. Responses to questions 'How well or not do you think the design of the scheme works with the other properties around them?' 'How well do you think the design of the scheme reflects the needs of the people living here?'
Base: 200 residents



13 Main conclusions

In this survey, housing association residents fed back high levels of overall satisfaction with their homes. Whether measured on quantitative ratings of satisfaction, or comparison with their previous home, residents are mostly very content with the new homes they have occupied for 3 to 4 years. This finding supports equally positive views from other housing association residents at the start of their occupation of new homes (as reported in the HCA *Quality Counts* reports^[2]). Together these studies provide good evidence that, overall, residents' needs are being well-addressed by homes designed and constructed under the government's Affordable Homes Programme.

Resident satisfaction is high (over 75% satisfied) and dissatisfaction very low (below about 5% of those responding) for a number of fundamental attributes of homes, specifically internal layout, size, and safety and security. These appear to be the most important considerations for residents when they rate overall satisfaction with their homes (where 80% were satisfied and less than 4% dissatisfied). Where residents have the highest levels of dissatisfaction, in areas such as parking (over 28% dissatisfied) and storage space (26% dissatisfied), this did not seem to influence their judgement of the quality of their homes as a whole.

While residents are largely satisfied with the spatial design of homes, observations on the operation of homes highlight some challenges for design. On ventilation, while most residents indicate satisfaction with air circulation in their homes, over 50% identified symptoms of poor ventilation, suggesting that ventilation strategies may often not be proving effective in practice. Also of significance is the fairly high proportion of residents (approximately 20%) who find their heating controls difficult to use, and who may be therefore unable to gain the benefits from the efficient systems installed. These observations contribute to the ongoing debate on how the design and operating guidelines of heating and ventilation systems (and particularly controls) can be improved to support residents to run their homes efficiently and effectively.

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- 2 *Quality Counts*. Results of the Affordable Homes Programme Quality Audits: 2008/11 Audit, published December 2011; 2012/13 Audit published May 2014; 2013/14 Audit published August 2014; 2014/15 Audit published October 2015.
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Affordable homes

Residents' views of quality

This research, jointly supported by the NHBC Foundation and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), investigates residents' views of the quality of affordable new homes. It measures resident satisfaction after 3 to 4 years of occupation, evaluating a wide range of design aspects.

Through comparison with the findings published in the HCA *Quality Counts* reports (which investigate residents' initial views of their homes) this research found enduring high satisfaction levels for key aspects of design, such as size, interior layout and security.

While the research draws attention to some opportunities for improvement in design, residents' overall satisfaction with affordable homes remains very high in the early years of occupation.



The NHBC Foundation, established in 2006, provides high quality research and practical guidance to support the house-building industry as it addresses the challenges of delivering 21st century new homes. Visit www.nhbcfoundation.org to find out more about the NHBC Foundation research programme.

