



Homes &
Communities
Agency

QUALITY COUNTS

Results of the Affordable Homes Programme
Quality Audits 2013/14

August 2014



Quality Counts 2013/14

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Summary

Each year the HCA undertakes a survey of residents and partner organisations to obtain feedback on the quality and design of homes funded under the Affordable Homes Programme (AHP). The survey results are combined with other evidence from project visits to produce quality audits (QAs) of a sample of occupied schemes. The subsequent 'Quality Counts' publication highlights key themes from the audits.

This Quality Counts report summarises the results of the 2013/14 QAs based on visits to 89 schemes in 75 local authorities and most importantly interviews with 195 residents.

Through the Quality Counts report, the HCA continues to

- disseminate key messages and lessons learnt from the visits and interviews
- play a role in identifying areas of design and quality that are important to residents and where future schemes may be improved
- monitor partner performance in terms of quality and resident satisfaction whilst ensuring compliance with agreed quality standards
- gauge the extent to which design and quality policy objectives have positively impacted upon residents

As in previous years, the 2013/14 results show that residents are, in general, happy with their new homes, whilst still leaving room for future improvements in specific areas. Typical resident comments include:

“Can't believe how great it is and the size of it”

“Would give it 5.5. It's amazing” (Out of 5)

“Minor niggles; very grateful”

When asked 'How satisfied are you with the overall quality of your home?' 72% of residents (of those who answered) gave a score of 5 out of 5 (where the highest rating was 5). Nationally the average score was 4.7.

Residents expressed high levels of satisfaction across all aspects of their new homes and the wider developments. The size, space and kitchens within the home were widely appreciated (though there were also negative views on size and storage, see below), as were private gardens when provided. Such positive results year after year, are a testament to the sustained efforts of partners in delivering affordable housing.

Equally, this report highlights specific areas where evidence from residents and partners indicates room for improved practice. This year's findings point to some of the same areas as have been highlighted in previous years, such as space, storage and thoughtful positioning of services, and some new issues such as the potential for overheating, effective refuse solutions and useable outdoor space for sloping sites.

Drawn from these findings, the key themes for 2013/14 covered in the report are:

- **Inside the home**
 - space, storage and location of services/fittings
 - noise transfer
- **Sustainability**
 - overheating and ventilation
- **Outside the home**
 - parking allocation
 - gardens on constrained sites
 - refuse solutions

As with previous years, partners highlighted that early engagement with a range of stakeholders and continued partnership working throughout the development process were key to delivering high quality schemes.

Looking ahead, as part of our commitment to delivering high quality, grant funded homes, we will continue to collate national feedback from residents, partners and local authorities and use the identified key themes to:

- produce a Quality Counts report highlighting areas of design quality which can be improved to raise resident satisfaction levels for their homes and immediate surroundings
- share good practice and lessons learnt through design workshops with our partners, promoting continuous improvement
- inform policy debates on housing quality

Introduction

Successful design can make a lasting difference to the quality of life of residents and the neighbouring community. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is committed to working with our partners to fund and support the delivery of well-designed homes and high quality, successful places through the Affordable Homes Programme (AHP). We support this by gathering feedback from residents and our delivery partners, analysed and published as Quality Counts.

Method

Each year we audit a sample of homes funded under our Affordable Homes Programme and its predecessors, and completed and occupied for at least a year. In 2013/14 89 schemes funded under the 2011/15 AHP and the earlier 2008/11 National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) were audited. The sample is representative of schemes funded by the HCA in England. Of the 2013/14 sample, 98% were general needs homes and 2% supported housing.

HCA design managers visit developments, carry out Building for Life assessments and interview residents to assess design quality. During the interviews, residents are asked to rate their satisfaction with their home and surroundings on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest level). Supporting comments are recorded. Additional feedback from registered providers (RPs) and local authorities is also collected. Evidence is combined to produce quality audits of each scheme.

Quality Counts is prepared by the HCA's Design and Sustainability team, analysing the set of audits to draw out key themes.

Dissemination

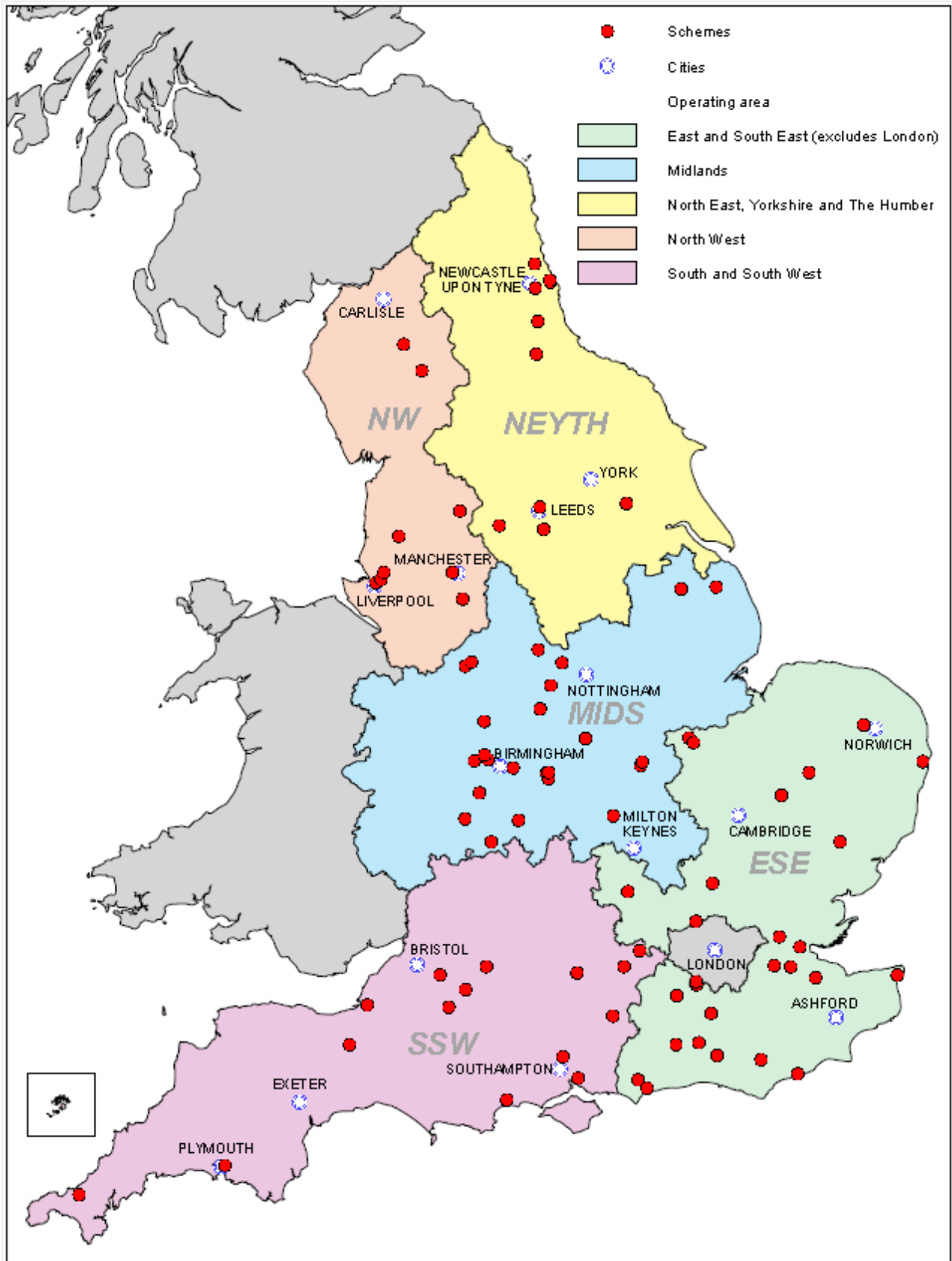
Each year we share the quality audit evidence from individual schemes formally with investment partners as part of their annual Compliance Audit¹ report. This report ensures that HCA policies, funding conditions and procedures are followed. National findings and key lessons from the quality audits are shared more widely with partners and stakeholders through Quality Counts and a series of associated design workshops.

Quality continues to count in the delivery of new affordable homes and neighbourhoods, underpinned by the new standards regime emerging from the government's Housing Standards Review (HSR). We will continue to assess schemes built under current and future programmes. The process will provide essential feedback to help improve the quality of homes, neighbourhoods and residents' lives.

Detailed findings are covered in the next section with a full breakdown of resident responses at Annex B, followed by a description of last year's HCA design workshops and a summary of feedback from our partners. We conclude with our plans for using feedback next year: learning from highlighted good practice and targeting areas where further attention is needed.

¹ <https://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/ourwork/compliance-audit>

Map of audited schemes



Key findings

As in previous years, resident feedback regarding their satisfaction with the quality of their new homes has, in general, been very positive. The question ‘*How satisfied are you with the overall quality of your home?*’ scored an average of 4.7 out of 5 and 72% of those residents who answered gave a score of 5 out of 5.

These figures remain consistent with results from earlier years and give a strong indication that homes build under the AHP are, in general, well designed for the needs of residents, including vulnerable people, and are completed to a good quality. Detailed resident satisfaction scores are presented in annex A.

Typical resident comments included:

“Like all of it. Very happy”

“Space for everyone, clean, area is brilliant”

“Peace and quiet”

“It’s close to town; good size. Looking forward to being able to decorate”

A number of residents note that their previous accommodation was unsuitable and of poor quality; with issues including a lack of their own accommodation, over occupation, temporary and shared housing, use of hostels and homes being old and not meeting modern building standards.

Figures 1 and 2 below set out in greater detail the responses obtained from residents focusing on which aspects of their homes and surroundings they particularly liked and those which they would improve.

What residents particularly liked

The specific elements of the home most frequently mentioned by residents are shown by figure 1 below. When asked what they liked most about their home, similarly to last year’s results, residents most often cited the size or space within the home; however a number of residents simply stated they liked ‘everything’. Residents also particularly liked their kitchens and private outdoor space such as rear gardens or balconies.

Elements of the home residents particularly like

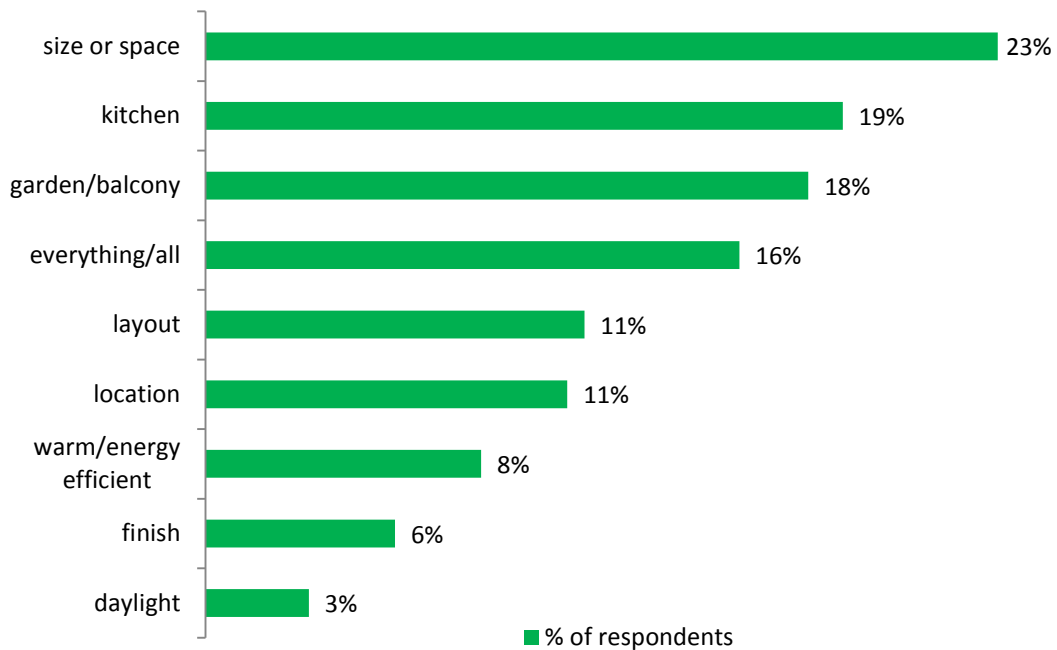


Figure 1: responses to “What features of your home do you particularly like?”

What residents felt could be improved

When asked what could be improved, a number of residents stated nothing needed improving. The specific elements of the home which residents most frequently felt could be improved are set out in figure 2.

Those items most recommended for improvement were private outdoor space, such as gardens or balconies, followed by finishes and fittings, space for storage and the overall size of the home. The top three improvements cited during the previous year’s visits match these findings with gardens or balconies mentioned by 20% of residents, storage by 18% and finishes and fittings by 9%. This comparison indicates there is still work to be done to improve these areas of design quality. Other frequently mentioned issues related to noise, parking and issues with home boilers.

It is interesting to note that a number of topics appear in both the features liked by residents and those which they would improve. This could be due to the overall importance of these issues in terms of residents’ quality of life. For example, provision of space and levels of daylighting, if done well, enhance the quality of the home and are a valuable asset, however if executed poorly can have a great impact on the way the home is used and its quality.

**Elements of the home
residents would improve**

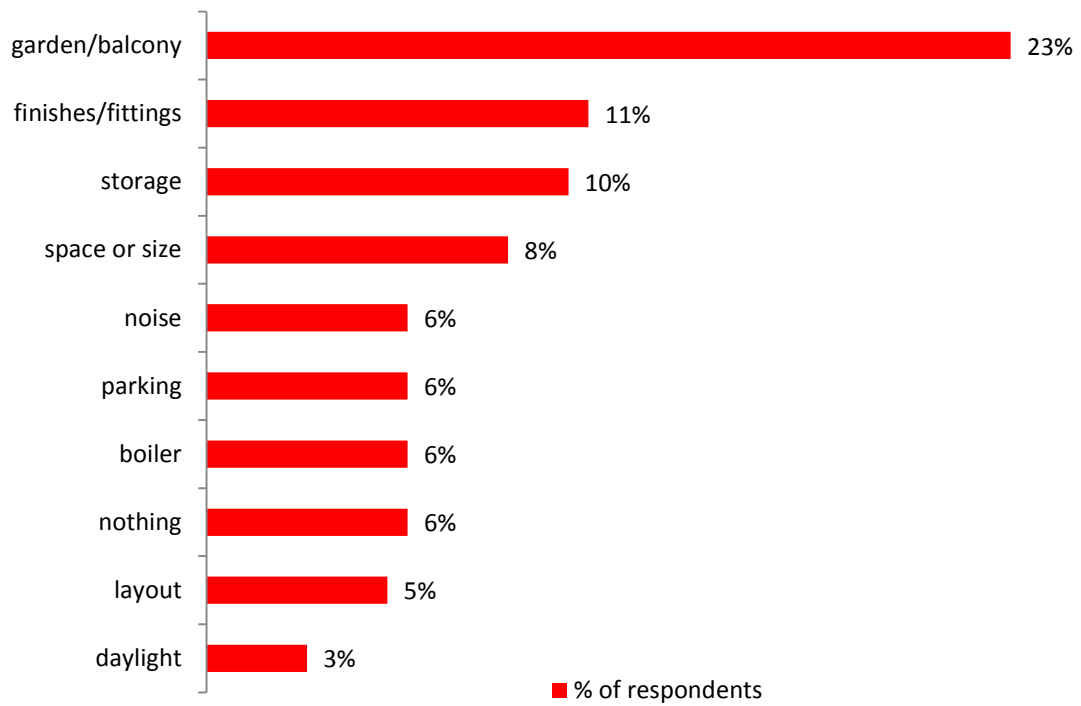


Figure 2: responses to “What features of your home could be improved?”

Inside the home

Space and size

Reflecting the results of last year's questionnaires, residents referred to space and size the most often when asked about positive features of their homes (figure 1). Individual comments indicate this aspect of quality is highly appreciated and 74% of residents gave their home 5 out of 5 (where the highest rating was 5) for the overall size of the home with an average score of 4.7 across all respondents.

Collated feedback indicates that many residents have moved from small or overcrowded accommodation and that the new Affordable Homes Programme funded homes often represent a big improvement. This is demonstrated by positive comments such as:

“Good size, new, the space we need”

“I like the amount of space; really wide hall; children play on landing”

“Love the Lifetime Homes features; never seen such a big house!”

However, internal space or size was also the fourth most common issue mentioned in terms of areas for improvement (figure 2), second in terms of issues inside the home. Internally, there were only a greater number of responses citing storage provision for improvement which is often linked to lack of space. When giving specific detail, many residents mentioned that provision of bigger kitchens with more dining space in particular would be an improvement.

“Space for a dining table”

“Bigger kitchen to fit a table in”

“Need much more room for dining; kitchen bigger so I could have a permanent table and chairs”

The question of whether an open plan layout or a separate kitchen is better is hard to answer and preferences differ according to personal taste. Having a separate dining room may be less efficient in terms of use of space than incorporating an area for eating in the kitchen or living area. If the kitchen is separate from the living space, then resident comments suggest a preference for eating in the kitchen, or at least providing an additional breakfast bar, to give a choice of where they'd like to eat their meals and additional flexibility of use. One resident mentioned the fact that they would prefer to dine in the kitchen as they don't like food dropping onto the carpet in the living room.

One partner commented on the lessons they had learnt:

“The incorporation of two downstairs living areas has been a positive for residents, however new home satisfaction surveys identified that the provision for two rooms impacted on the size of the kitchens. Resident feedback also highlighted that the living space in the 5 bed properties were a little small for the number of people in the property. These lessons have been applied to the neighbouring scheme.”

Overall, it is clear that a suitably sized dining area is considered important by residents, with layouts being able to fit sufficient furniture for the intended occupancy. This and other layout issues are set out in greater detail as part of the 2012/13 Quality Counts report¹.

Storage

Similar to previous year’s feedback, storage is still a key issue for residents. When asked ‘*what features of your home could be improved?*’ storage was the most often mentioned element relating to the inside of the home (figure 2). It also received one of the lowest resident scores, with 28% of residents scoring 3 or lower (out of 5). Several residents mentioned better storage and provision of built-in wardrobes as the main areas in which they believed their home could be improved.

“Lacks storage and would prefer more cupboards”

“Terrible. Nowhere to put things like brooms”

“Nowhere near enough; have to keep things such as kids’ stuff in the shed”

When asked specifically about storage, frequent comments suggest that often only one cupboard was provided and that this was not enough. Provision of access to loft space (where available), built-in storage in all bedrooms and spreading storage provision around the home all go some way towards addressing the need for more effective storage within homes to meet the needs of modern families. Research carried out by the Future Homes Commission² recognises this need for current residents and future generations.

Flexible and well positioned storage becomes easier to include when it is designed at the outset as part of a high quality layout which maintains good levels of space overall. This approach minimises additional cost but provides maximum benefits in the longer term, for example, a reduced risk of inappropriate storage such as appliances and bicycles located on balconies and greater levels of resident satisfaction especially in family homes.

¹ <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/quality-counts-2012-13>

² <http://www.architecture.com/Files/RIBATrust/FutureHomesCommissionLowRes.pdf>

Noise

Insufficient sound insulation is still a problem for many residents. When asked *'what features of your home could be improved?'* noise and sound transfer between homes was the third most often mentioned issue inside the home.

“Walls need more sound proofing”

“Less noise from upstairs”

“Better insulation for noise”

Noise or sound insulation also received one of the lowest resident scores, with 20% of residents scoring 3 or lower (out of 5). Quite a few residents mentioned that they could hear neighbours doors, stairs and music. Others reported being able to hear external noises such as traffic and children playing. Although some types of antisocial behaviour by neighbours will always be audible, adequate soundproofing for normal living conditions between adjacent homes and their immediate surroundings should be provided.

Compliance with current building regulations which cover noise transfer, should, in most instances be adequate. However when homes are constructed in close proximity to others, such as in blocks of flats, terraces or semi-detached properties consideration of home layouts and the placement of living areas and stairs can significantly improve reduction in noise transfer between homes at no additional cost. For example, one partner commented:

“Designed brilliantly to put stairs together at junction of semis”

Power sockets (fittings)

One element where a marked improvement has been noted compared to last year's audits is residents' response to lighting provision and the positioning of power sockets. These received very high scores, up from 68% last year, to 95% of residents scoring 5 out of 5 (where 5 is the highest). Although residents rarely mentioned this issue when asked what they liked most about their home, sockets and lighting are an important part of the home and its internal environment and can affect the daily use of the property, the positioning and use of furniture and the flexibility and efficiency of the layout.

The increase in scores and seemingly in the amount of sockets is welcomed, especially in light of the increased amount of electrical appliances within the average home. When asked about lighting and sockets, the majority of comments were positive and indicate good provision of fittings:

“Plenty of electric points, really good”

“Ample power sockets, excellent amount, can have any configuration”

“Plenty; don't need extension leads”

However, when asked what features of the home could be improved, some residents did mention the position and amount of sockets, indicating the importance of getting simple design considerations right.

Sustainability

There have already been major advances on the journey towards meeting zero carbon homes by 2016. In April 2014 changes to Part L of the Building Regulations came into force meaning that all new homes are now required to be on average over 30% more energy efficient compared with the 2010 requirement. The government estimates that these changes mean that residents can save on average an extra £200 a year on their fuel bills.

In addition, as part of the Queen's Speech, the government announced that it is bringing forward enabling powers under the Infrastructure Bill to allow off-site 'allowable solutions' which completes an important part of the zero carbon story.

As in previous years, the QAs provide an opportunity to explore the impacts of building more sustainably on resident comfort and satisfaction whilst considering the effect of behavioural use. A number of key findings are similar to those from previous years, however this year resident comments also point towards topics for concentration of future effort.

Energy efficiency and technical equipment

Residents often commented that their annual energy bills were now cheaper than for their previous accommodation, demonstrating clear rewards for home occupants as well as the environment from increased energy efficiency measures. This has largely been achieved by RPs adopting a 'fabric first' approach, which has now been mandated through the Fabric Energy Efficiency requirement set out in the recent update to Part L of the Building Regulations. With rising energy costs these measures help to tackle fuel poverty by reducing demand and consequently running costs. (Further detail regarding this approach is contained within the partner feedback section of the report).

Resident responses to questions regarding equipment and services provision to improve energy efficiency and environmental sustainability (boiler/ heating system and ventilation / fresh air), as well as the temperature of the home achieved average scores of 4.5 out of 5 (where 5 is the highest).

In addition, figure 3 below reports resident feedback on questions linked to environmental sustainability and technical equipment such as the home heating system. A high proportion of residents (73%) were aware of features to improve environmental performance within their home and the majority (84%) felt they had a good control of the temperature. Nearly two-thirds (63%) had someone explain the heating controls within their home.

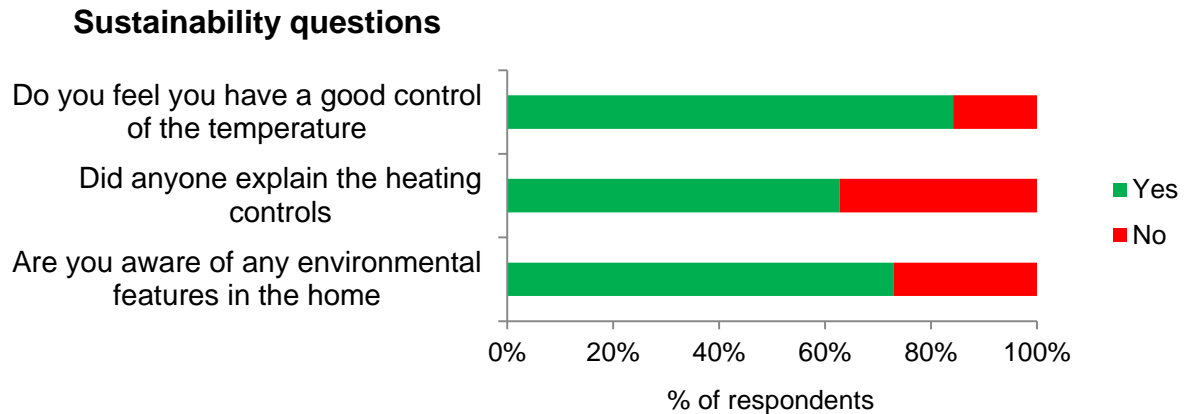


Figure 3: Resident feedback of sustainability features in the home

However, with over a third of residents (37%) not having controls explained, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Quite a number of residents complained about their heating systems being difficult to use and noted that assistance from RPs with problems and questions could be improved.

“No one explained. We went 2 weeks without any heating. Didn't get a manual and cannot use the timer”

“RP said someone would explain but no one turned up”

“It's the most complicated system on the planet! Not easy to get to the boiler - behind a shelf in kitchen cupboard; need to use a torch”

The results in figure 3 link to the number of residents who reported liking that their home was warm or energy efficient (8%) in response to the question “*what do residents particularly like?*” (figure 1). However it should be noted that 6% of residents cited boiler provision as an issue in response to the question “*what would residents improve?*” (figure 2).

Considering comments overall, as in previous years, the importance of adequate space for services remains, with location and accessibility being key considerations.

Residents are likely to require support to understand new technologies within their home and the impact of their behaviour on them. This is especially important where combinations of technologies are brought together within one home. Increased user focus will enable residents to gain the most out of the technology and services installed and benefit from the subsequent savings. The importance of users having the confidence to set controls correctly shouldn't be underestimated in terms of successful implementation of technology. One partner noted:

“We have had considerably fewer issues with the operation of ASHP's [air source heat pumps] and solar panels on this scheme due to the use of training days and seminars with residents on how to use the systems.”

Recent research to supplement these findings has been published by the National House Building Council Foundation: low and zero-carbon technologies in new homes – Learning from the experiences of consumers and on-site sales teams.¹

The work shows that occupants generally have a poor understanding of these technologies and through poor or incorrect operation may not be fully benefiting from them. It examines in particular the key role that sales staff could play in inspiring occupants in the effective use of these technologies.

Further learning is also provided from AIMC4: Lessons from AIMC4 for cost-effective fabric-first low-energy housing. Part 5: As-built performance and Post Occupancy Evaluation.²

Overheating

When residents were asked specifically about the temperature of their home during the year, responses were split. Many were happy and made positive comments with some referring to opening windows to control internal temperatures in summer.

“Lovely in winter and nice in summer”

“Didn’t overheat in the summer at all”

“Sometimes gets too hot, but we open a window”

However, a number of residents specifically referred to the fact that their homes were too hot during the summer months.

“Only need heating on for 1/2 hour to warm house up. Was very hot in summer, even with the windows open”

“Too hot in summer - couldn’t survive without a fan”

“We open windows, but very little breeze”

“Too warm in summer. Would have liked a window in lounge as can’t open back door because of toddler”

Whilst understanding that individuals have different perceptions of comfortable temperatures, these comments illustrate the need for awareness of the potential for homes to overheat as an unintended consequence of increased energy efficiency. This goes hand in hand with the importance of designing adequate ventilation strategies for new homes. These strategies should include the ability to open windows as well as appropriate mechanical solutions whilst ensuring that homes remain secure and users safe; and in addition, give consideration to appropriate solutions for clothes drying within homes.

¹ <http://www.nhbcfoundation.org/Publications/Primary-Research/Low-and-zero-carbon-technologies-in-new-homes-NF53>

² http://www.aimc4.com/filelibrary/files/AIMC4-Briefing-Paper-5_final.pdf

Recent publications to support these findings are referenced below:

- The Good Homes Alliance: 'Preventing Overheating: Investigating and reporting on the scale of overheating in England, including common causes and an overview of remediation techniques'¹.
- Zero Carbon Hub: 'Overheating in Homes – Where to start introduction for planners, designers and property owners'².

During the first year of design workshops, the issue of increased energy efficiency and overheating was raised with partners to gauge their level of understanding and to engage with relevant work being done.

Increased awareness of this issue throughout the housing sector is echoed by resident and partner responses and backed up by recent sector publications and research commitments (see above). As a result we have decided to revisit the topic of overheating and a number of the key design quality areas which accompany it, such as ventilation and clothes drying, within this year's design workshop series.

¹<http://gha.pht.surefirehosting.co.uk/downloads/pages/REPORT%20GHA%20Preventing%20Overheating%20-%20FINAL%20140217.pdf>

² http://www.zerocarbonhub.org/sites/default/files/resources/reports/Overheating_in_Homes-Where_to_Start_Introduction_for_Planners_Designers_and_Property_Owners.pdf

Outside the home

It is evident from residents' feedback that the external environment plays a large part in influencing their quality of life. Considerations such as scheme layout, orientation and the design of streets and open spaces can influence how satisfied residents are with their homes. Results and details of the Building for Life (BfL) assessments carried out for each scheme visited can be found in annex B.

Overall when asked, residents tended to give positive scores for external environment considerations. Generally they were satisfied with access to local public transport, schools, shops and open space which mirror the results of QA BfL assessments. It is recognised that partner influence can be limited in some instances where this type of planning matter is concerned, but these findings support the importance of partners developing positive relationships with planners at an early stage to achieve high quality developments.

Other examples of elements of the BfL assessments which received positive scores were streets being defined by well-structured building layouts and public and pedestrian routes being overlooked and therefore feeling safe.

Overall, the assessed BfL scores were broadly similar to the results of the schemes assessed for the 2012/13 report. Although minimum levels set out by AHP funding criteria have been achieved, it is worth focusing on the basic BfL elements that have not been met to assist in identifying work to be done to achieve better quality in future schemes.

Areas where performance could be improved relate to:

- highways not dominating
- public space being well-designed and managed
- streets being pedestrian friendly
- car parking being well integrated and supporting the streetscene

When asked about features of their home they particularly liked residents, where they chose to comment on external design, focused predominantly on the provision of private outdoor space and parking.

Private outdoor space

Where residents were provided with a suitable rear garden or balcony, they greatly appreciated these. They were one of the few external design elements that were frequently mentioned under the question '*What features of your home do you particularly like?*' (18% of residents) These are some of the residents' positive comments:

"I like the French doors off lounge and the privacy of the rear garden"

"Like the living room overlooking the garden"

"Like the back garden; enclosed and safe"

However, despite the results above and the internal focus of the question *'What features of your home could be improved?'*, private outdoor space was the single most mentioned element residents would have liked to see improved (23% of residents). Negative comments particularly focused on small size, poor levels of privacy, inappropriate levels/sloping sites and the provision and delineation of front gardens.

The most common complaint about private outdoor space was that there was not enough of it. Residents are very appreciative of their rear gardens and balconies, but often they are so compact that their use and opportunities for enjoyment are limited.

"Want a bigger rear garden"

"Garden size - is a bit small"

"Would like a bigger patio"

Another common issue with the rear gardens provided was a lack of privacy, which in many cases could be easily solved by higher panel fencing, as explicitly mentioned by residents.

"I want panel fencing at rear for privacy, instead of wire mesh"

"Fence being a bit higher between side neighbours"

"Lack of fencing for privacy"

In schemes where the ground was not level and this has resulted in sloping gardens, residents repeatedly expressed their discontent. In many cases this issue could potentially be easily improved with some design effort at an early stage of the project.

"I don't like the garden slope"

"Don't like the levels in the back garden"

"Would like a level garden"

Resident comments indicate the importance of outdoor space and its value to them. As housing sites become more constrained and sites which were seen as difficult to develop are brought forward it's important that design approaches to ensure private gardens are usable are considered at an early stage. This issue has also been identified within the partner feedback section of the report.

In response to the specific question regarding satisfaction with rear gardens or balconies, resident scores were relatively low, with 27% of respondents rating 3 or lower (out of 5). Many homes were not provided with a front garden, despite the many benefits green front gardens can provide, including visual attractiveness, social interaction and environmental advantages such as rain water absorption, increased air quality and biodiversity.

Several residents identified the front garden as a feature of the home where improvement would be welcome. Issues related mainly to the availability of gardens, their size and clear delineation between private and public space. Residents liked the idea of a space in front of their homes that was clearly visible as private with the added potential to achieve greater levels of privacy to ground floor rooms.

“Bigger front garden with a fence”

“Fence round front garden to provide separation from neighbours”

Whilst residents’ expectations of private outdoor space may differ, early consideration of design issues such as existing site levels and providing usable space, good size provision and consideration of privacy and security in terms of fencing solutions and the boundary between public and private space could be improved. Our findings indicate that the clear benefits of more high quality private outdoor space would be highly appreciated by the majority of residents.

Parking

Resident satisfaction relating to parking was relatively low, with 21% of respondents rating 3 or lower (out of 5). Issues with parking provision were also listed in the top 5 of topics residents mentioned when asked *‘What features of your home could be improved?’*

Although parking was often noted as sufficient, a range of problems were also raised, including a lack of visitor spaces and antisocial parking.

One approach to efficient use of the space available for parking is to maximise the use of unallocated and visitor spaces. Several residents noted they had private parking space but only used it for visitors:

“I don’t have a car, but have two allocated spaces in different locations”

“Parking was good when visitors came. I don’t have a car myself”

“I don’t have a car but my daughter can park outside when she visits”

However a lack of allocated spaces can lead to complaints that residents can’t park close to their homes or see their vehicle from their home.

Given this complexity, RPs should consider surveying occupants about their use of parking spaces and look to devise bespoke parking plans accordingly. Parking provision may change over time depending on occupants of schemes and their needs. (It is recognised that in some cases this is not always possible as a result of planning conditions). By reviewing housing management arrangements RPs may also be able to reduce antisocial parking by specific tenants.

Parking questions forming part of the Building for Life assessments carried out as part of audits also scored relatively low, with only 60% of positive answers to the question *'Is the car parking well integrated and situated so it supports the street scene?'* This indicates that the street design and the location of parking need further consideration in future schemes. The way parking is designed within the scheme is key to providing quality streets. This aspect of design is also covered by the two following BfL questions, which show similar results and scope for improvement.

- *Are the streets pedestrian cycle and vehicle friendly?*
- *Does the building layout take priority over the streets and car parking, so that the highways do not dominate?*

For good practice guidance on car parking, please refer to HCA's Urban Design Lessons¹, English Partnerships' Car Parking: What works where² and Space to Park³.

Resident and local community activities

As part of the questionnaire covering elements of the scheme which fall outside of the home, residents were asked *"How satisfied are you with resident and local community activities"*. Similarly to previous years, this topic achieved the lowest resident scores, with half of respondents scoring 3 or lower (out of 5). A high number of residents remained indifferent with 42% of residents 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (scoring 3 out of 5).

Resident comments, on the other hand, identified a range of well received activities:

"Halloween party held by RP (well-attended)"

"School, church, pub, fete, bonfire party, kids craft sessions"

"Always something going on, party for kids, fun bus, bbq, Halloween and summer parties, growing veg, cider making etc."

There are a number of potential reasons why this question receives low scores, making results hard to interpret. For example residents could be well informed but choose not to be involved or be poorly informed but like to be involved (and the number of respondents who specified they were not interested or too busy to be involved was similar to those who reported that they hadn't heard of any activities or that they would like to be involved). In addition, the scores could relate to either activity provision or levels of satisfaction with it. We will review these questions for future audits.

¹ www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/urban-design-lessons

² collections.europarchive.org/tna/20100911035042/http://englishpartnerships.co.uk/qualityandinnovationpublications.htm

³ www.spacetopark.org

Design workshops

At the HCA design workshops held across 2013/14 partners responded to the evidence presented in Quality Counts 2012/13 and looked at ways to bring about improvement.

'Housing Design - today and in the future', daylong events repeated across HCA's operating areas, met three objectives, to:

- give evidence on design performance by presenting findings from Quality Counts
- showcase good design and design research. Examples were chosen to highlight successful approaches to difficult issues
- set out the national context for design. Delegates considered Government changes to standards and discussed implications

By holding these as joint sessions with Nottingham, Sheffield, Bath and Brighton Universities, HCA and partners strengthened links with higher education and academic research. Exchanging practical experiences with long term research encouraged providers and universities to view housing from perspectives different to their own.

There were a number of highlights to the workshop series.

- Bath University's Professor David Coley gave sustainability new urgency with his provocative talk 'Are Buildings Evil?'
- participants joined in a live design review on a real site, illustrating how hard it can be to achieve good design and sustainability. The session showcased methods to help break deadlock when a project had stalled.
- HCA presented the latest government position on the Housing Standards Review and a quick fire session on how to respond to the new regulatory environment. Each event returned to this theme, adding detail as it became available and making reference to insights from previous workshops.
- built projects illustrating successful responses to common problems included Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Derwenthorpe with its variety of bin storage solutions, shared surface car parking and above average ceiling heights at the joint North East Yorkshire and The Humber/North West workshop.
- Blueprint/Igloo renewed the call for creativity and imagination in design and delegates visited the Green Street regeneration scheme and saw at first hand the value created through high quality design.
- Professor Flora Samuels explained Sheffield's project to articulate the cultural value of architecture. She supported the idea that proving value is critical and to do this evidence needs to be gathered. Post-build evaluation and rigorous learning plays as important role as recording people's views (see HCA's Home Design Stories and Quality Counts).¹

¹ <http://www.culturalvalueofarchitecture.org/#!/video/c1rlr>

- Affinity Sutton completed the workshop series with a detailed design analysis of its award winning projects, an explanation of its efforts to promote good design in a period of cost sensitivity.

HCA sought feedback on each workshop: 85% thought the content was relevant to their job and comments included “great to know that quality and quantity are at the heart of HCA work”. We acted fast on early constructive criticism that “the seminar was too broad-brushed at times and more detail on the future of standards and looking in more detail at actual schemes would be helpful” by including case studies and will continue to respond to feedback through the next series.

Partner feedback

The quality audit process also seeks feedback from investment partners and local authorities to gain a fuller understanding of what can impact on the quality and success of a housing scheme. The lessons and feedback from earlier years remain valid, however this year some additional points of interest have been noted.

Registered providers and local authorities were asked to fill out a questionnaire each regarding the schemes to be audited. We will use the detail of these responses to share relevant findings with policy colleagues, inform topic specific work areas and to help shape the development of quality audit procedures in future years.

Registered providers (RPs)

When asked for specific lessons learnt for future schemes RPs typically mentioned site specific details, delays and issues with contractors.

Design related lessons which may be transferable and relevant to other RPs included:

“Allowing residents to choose their own front door design and colours, and having choices for bathrooms and kitchens was very well received”

“The individual entrances for flats proved popular with residents, as did the size of gardens”

“The use of sun-pipes in the internal bathroom areas has also performed really well and gives good natural light during the day”

“The use of street scene parking and the open landscaping to the front of the scheme, along with the architectural detailing to the new build properties has worked particularly well”

“Greater consideration to be given to the impact of site levels on scheme design”

“If we had known the full impact of the gradient to the back gardens, log banking would have been procured prior to commencement of the development rather than finding retrospective solutions”

“The flat design provided by the developer has proved very popular with tenants as the individual access allows for enhanced privacy and private garden space. It also reduces the service charge for tenants as it reduces the need for complicated fire systems”

In response to the recurring problem of waste disposal which is often aggravated by increased volume of recyclables, partners have been making use of innovative solutions:

“We have utilised subterranean refuse bins and these have meant that the scheme is not littered with unsightly bins nor has a smelly bin area”

The importance of consultation and communication was emphasised by several RPs. Involving key stakeholders in early stages of the project, seeking pre-planning advice, and close partnership working throughout the development process were seen as central to a scheme’s success and smoothed the way for planning approval.

“Communication – if we hadn't been tenacious and kept the dialogue with the local community going we wouldn't have developed a scheme that everyone is proud of.

“Make more use of the pre-planning design review with all relevant stakeholders within the local authority to avoid design conflicts once planning consent has been achieved”

“The consultation process was of extreme value and this is something that we aim to achieve on all schemes”

“Opposition can be avoided by demonstrating that the community is not being destroyed through redevelopment, but enhanced”

“A community art project was used to build bridges. This included documenting local history and community identity and transferring people’s ideas and pictures onto the site hoarding”

Investment partners were asked questions about their approach to energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. Last year’s audits indicated that 53% of schemes adopted a fabric first approach, where improvements to the building envelope such as better insulation and airtightness are employed to reduce heat loss and energy demand before incorporating any low or zero carbon technologies. (This mirrors the approach taken by the Approved Document Part L 2014 published in March this year). This year 63% of schemes followed this strategy.

“We did achieve a small victory in being one of the first contractors to successfully demonstrate to Planners that a 'fabric first' approach would achieve their wider aim of reducing energy consumption, rather than using bolt-on technology which could fail/be removed.”

Local authorities

Local authorities were invited to take part in the HCA site visits and their supporting comments were recorded. Feedback overall was very positive, particularly as schemes provided much needed affordable housing for local areas. Close partnership working with local authorities and early consultation were repeatedly highlighted as the key to successful schemes. Several local authorities were particularly pleased with supported housing schemes.

“I’m very supportive of this new development; it provides a large number of new homes in a range of tenures and significantly contributes to alleviating housing need. Council members have been supportive”

“We are pleased with the development. We specifically required dining rooms. The developer has been fine to work with”

“This is a good example of a shared-ownership scheme giving young couples an opportunity to get onto the property ladder. The houses are of a very good build standard as are space standards. The shared ownership houses and affordable rent homes are pepper-potted across the development and are tenure blind”

The level of involvement from local authorities varied. Some were heavily involved in projects from the start with examples of the need for community consultation to address initial concerns and opposition from local residents.

“We carried out extensive consultation with residents to assist in preparation of the competition brief. This helped to ensure that the housing mix met local requirements. We held a limited competition inviting three parties to submit design proposals for the site. It was made clear that design quality would be given high priority in assessing the proposals”

“The scheme was very challenging – interrupting people's lives; extensive public consultation was required with existing residents and the surrounding community, but the resultant scheme has enhanced the community. The old scheme was very run down and there were anti-social behaviour issues, but now, there is none and hardly any re-lets – just 3 in the last 3 years”

“A proactive approach, which included Open Days, with opportunities to meet staff and former residents, were designed to address neighbouring resident concerns. All stakeholders were fully involved throughout the consultation process; importantly, the police, were very beneficial in helping the address resident concerns by being on hand to explain the implications and the benefits of having this scheme in their neighbourhood”

Conclusion

Through the process of carrying out quality audits and by sharing the results and lessons learnt the HCA aims to enhance future schemes, assist our partners and stakeholders in providing high quality housing and improve the quality of life of residents and their visitors.

Feedback from residents, HCA staff, local authorities and RPs has been generally positive. The new homes and streets funded by the AHP and developed by our investment partners provide homes for residents whose previous accommodation was often far from optimal.

The size of new homes was widely appreciated, as were the kitchens and gardens where provided. As well as highlighting areas of design that received praise, the report has emphasised several areas where there is room for improvement, such as the desire for more storage, better design in relation to noise transfer between dwellings, making sure residents are able to use their heating equipment and awareness of the potential for homes to overheat.

The quality of the external environment is also crucial to residents' experiences of daily life. Provision of adequately sized and well laid out private outdoor space could be improved, as well as convenient and sufficient parking space that is well integrated into the overall street design.

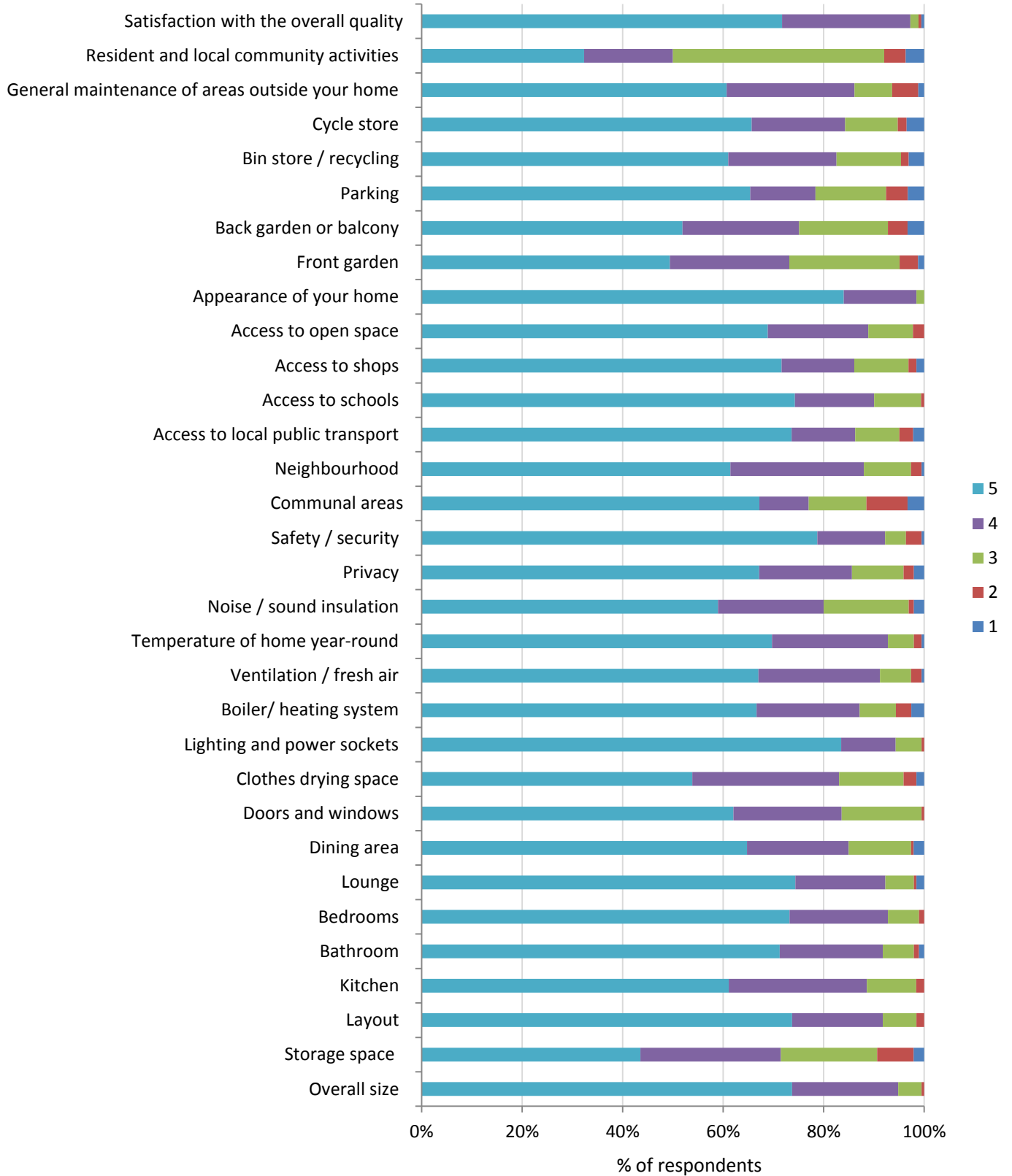
We will continue to monitor resident feedback and the overall quality of homes funded by the AHP and future programmes, through the annual quality audits. In the context of the new 2015/18 programme and the outcomes of the Housing Standards Review, this feedback will become increasingly important: to test whether we are building homes residents are satisfied with and that contribute to creating successful and sustainable places.

Feedback and lessons learnt from the quality audits have been used as the basis for a successful series of design workshops in each HCA operating areas over the last two years, which highlight key lessons and share good practice. These workshops will continue to be held throughout the duration of 2014/15.

Annex A - resident feedback

By score:

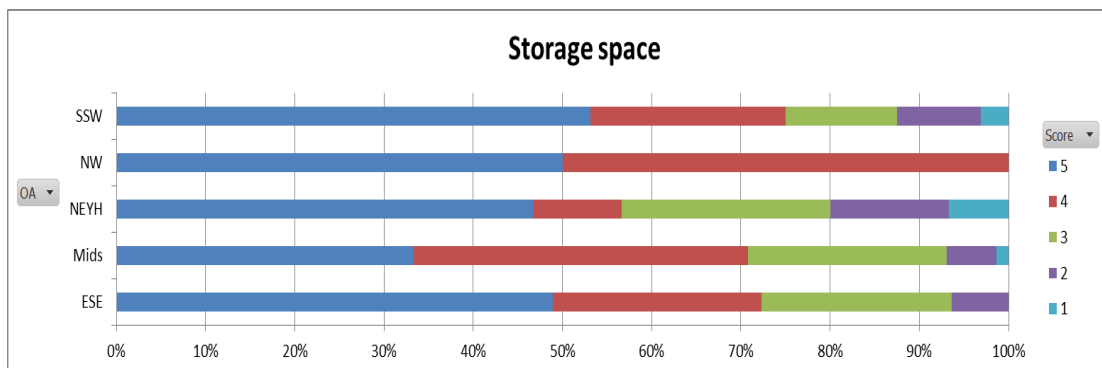
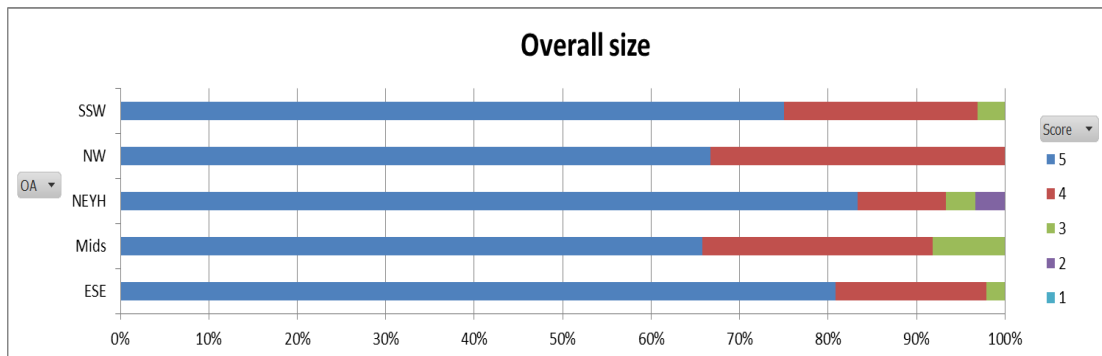
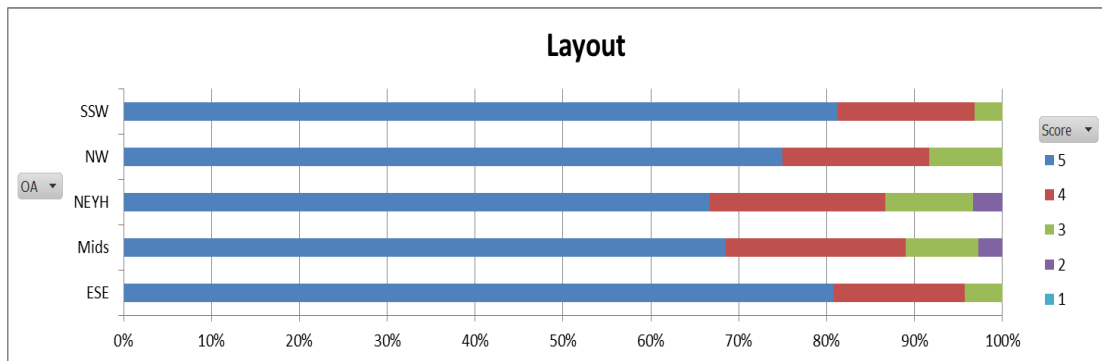
Topics of resident feedback:

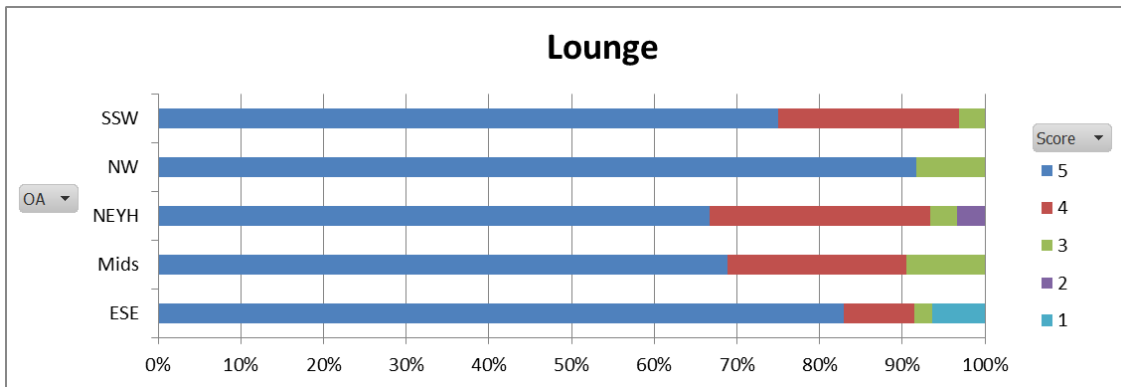
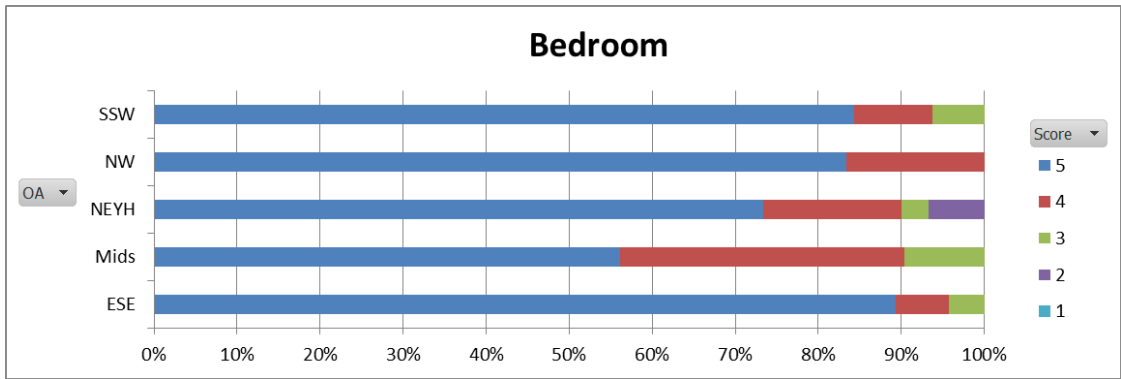
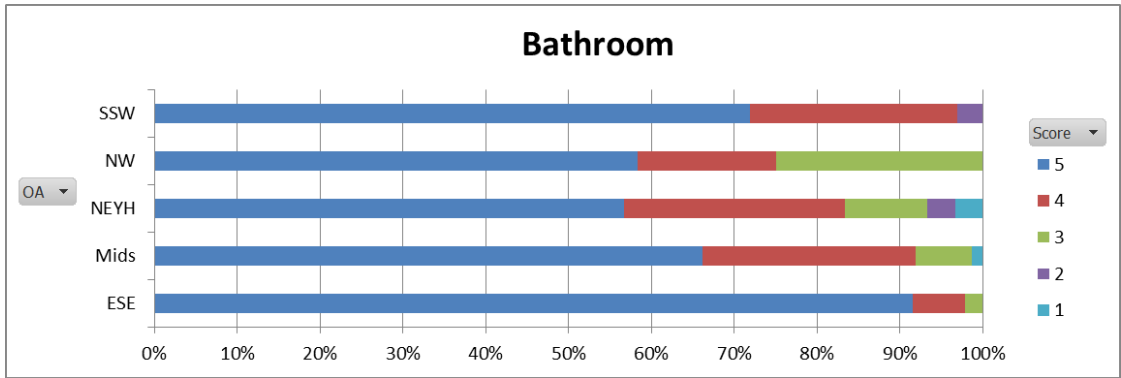
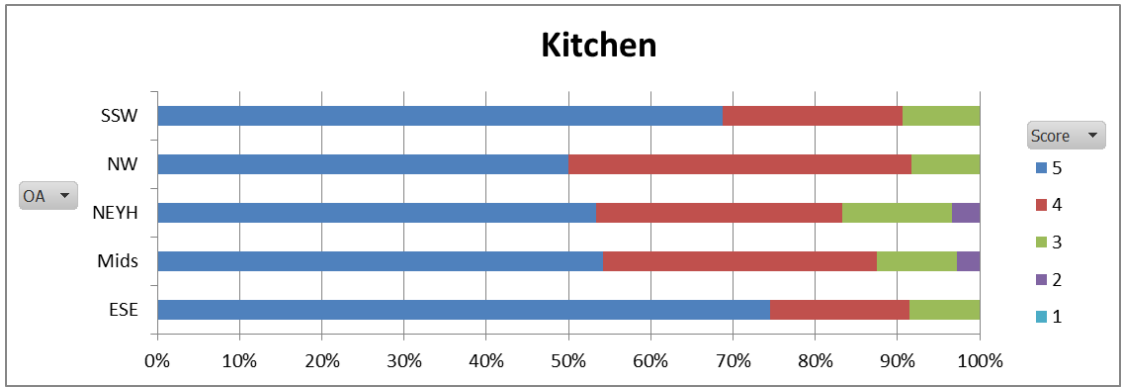


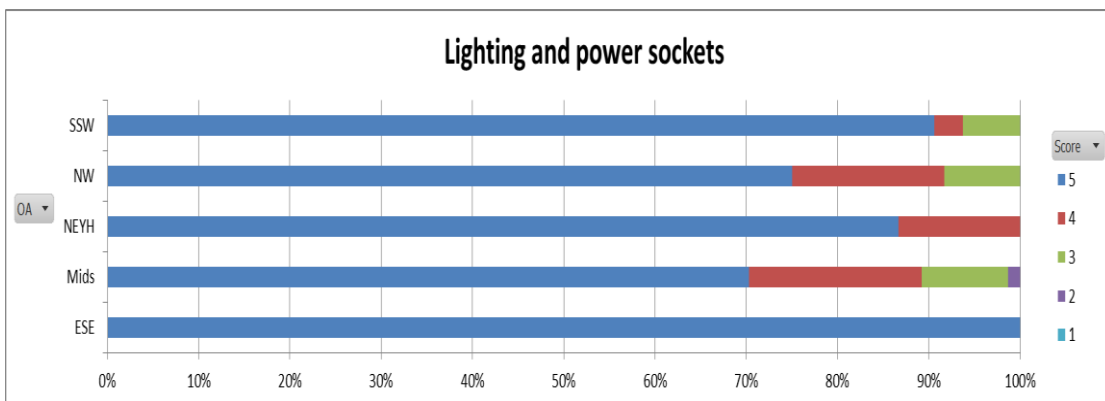
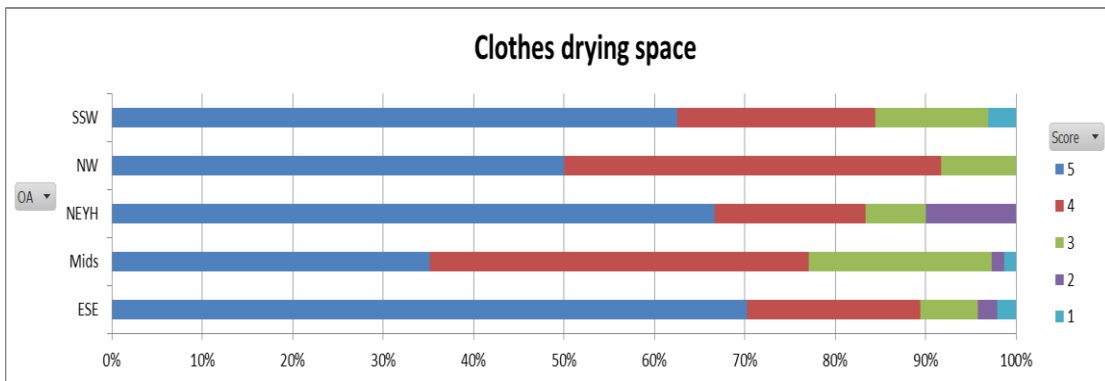
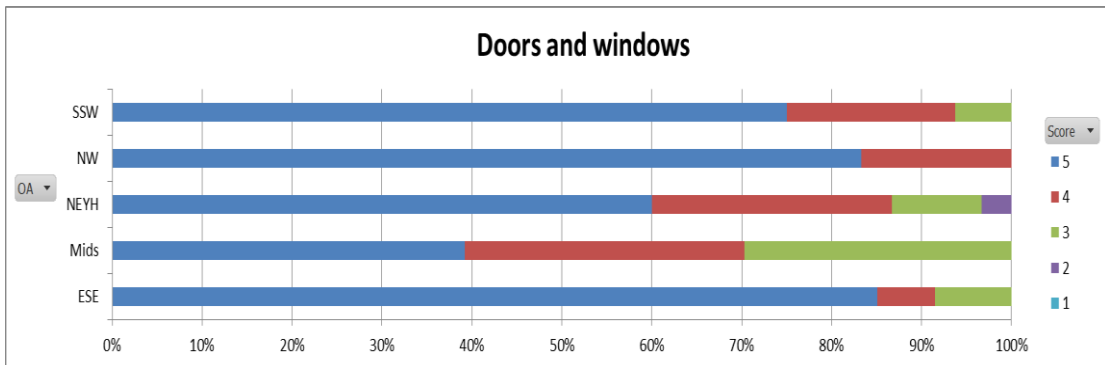
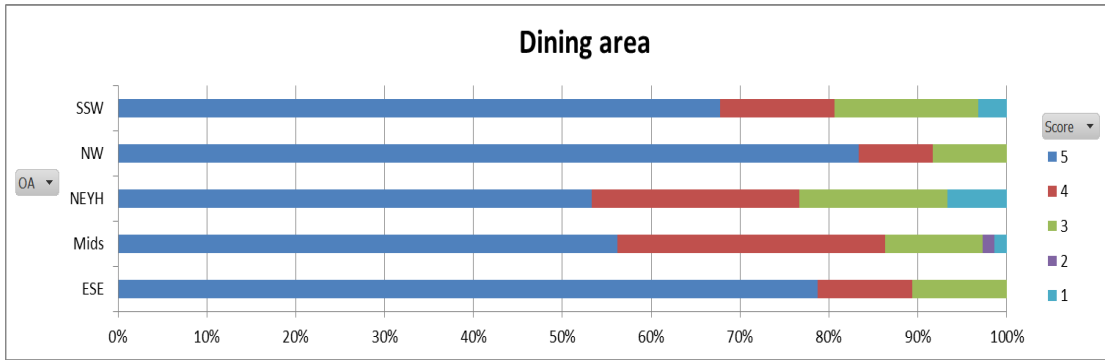
By HCA operating area:

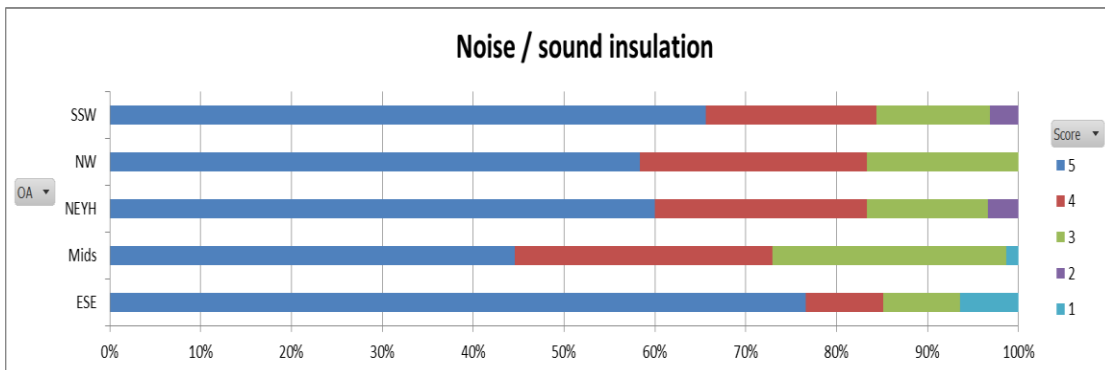
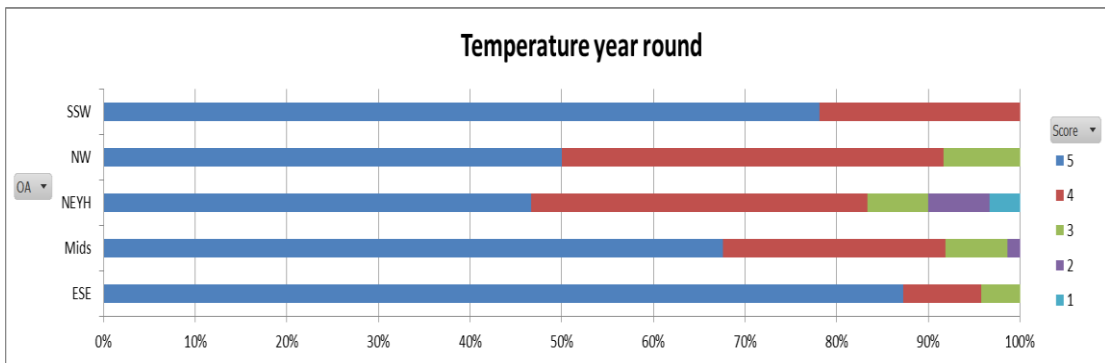
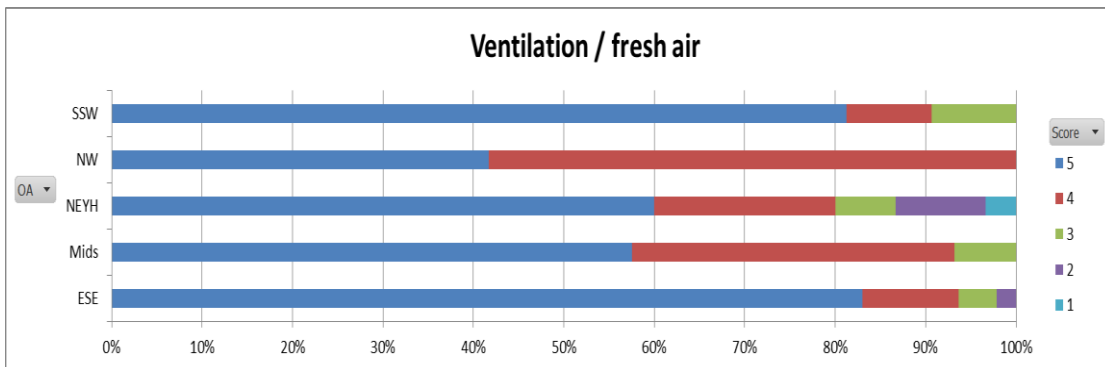
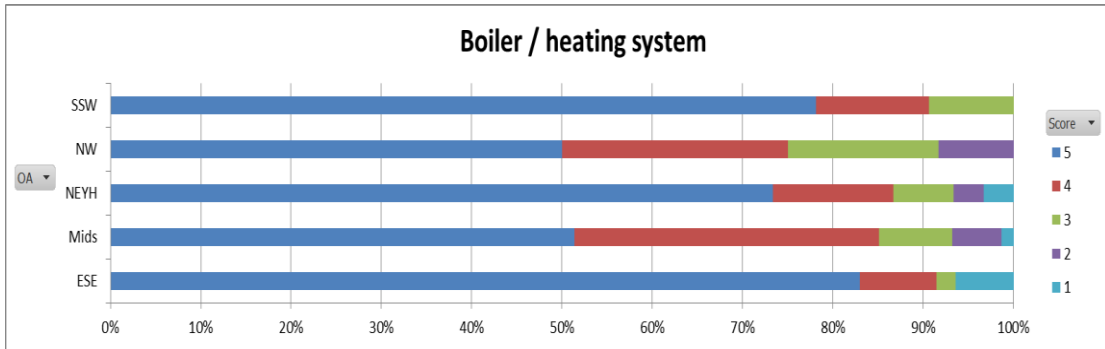
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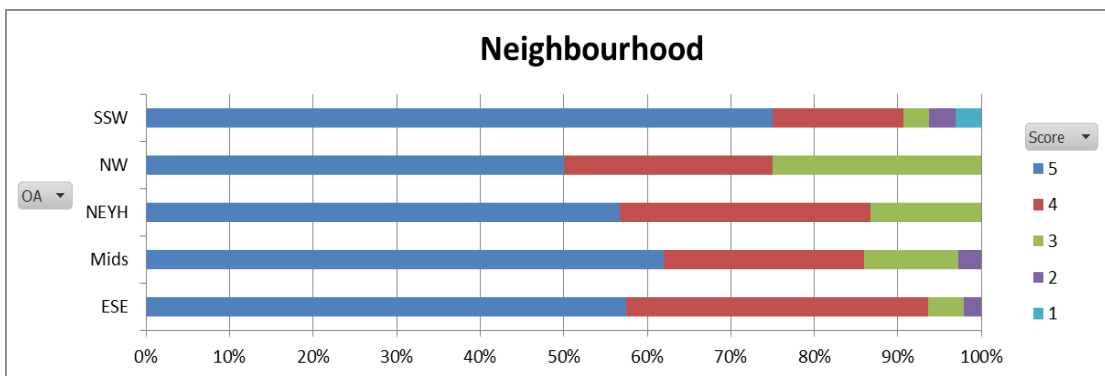
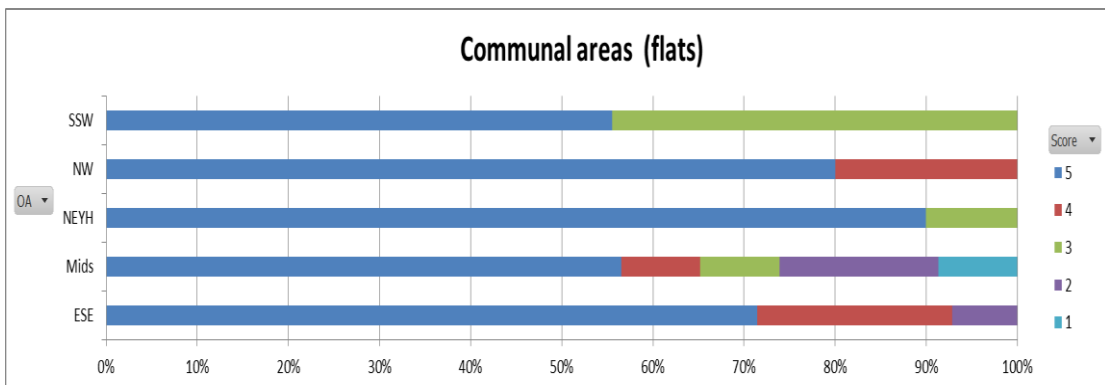
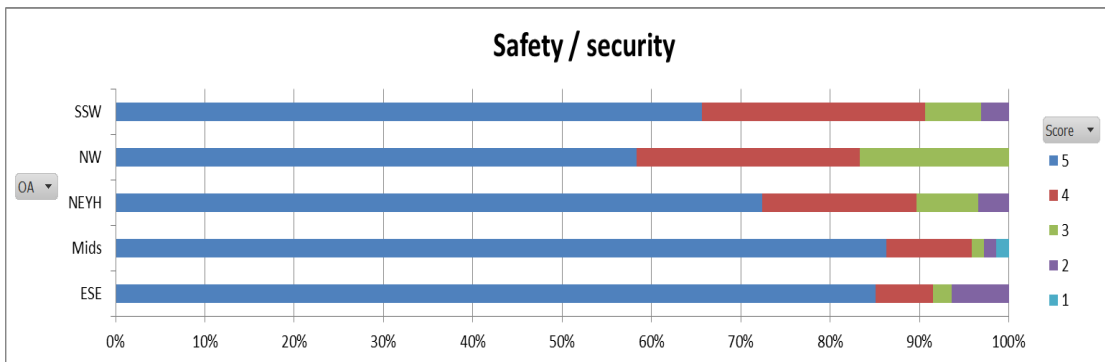
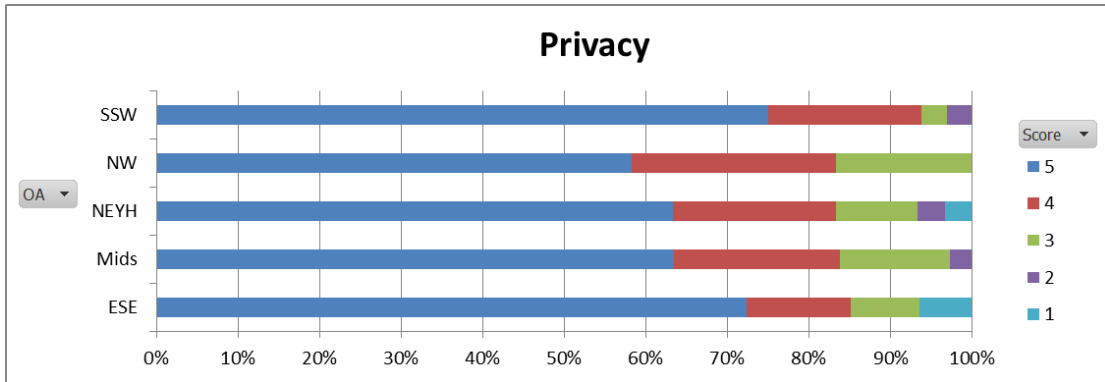
NW North West
 NEYTH North East, Yorkshire and the Humber
 MIDS Midlands
 SSW South and South West
 ESE East and South East

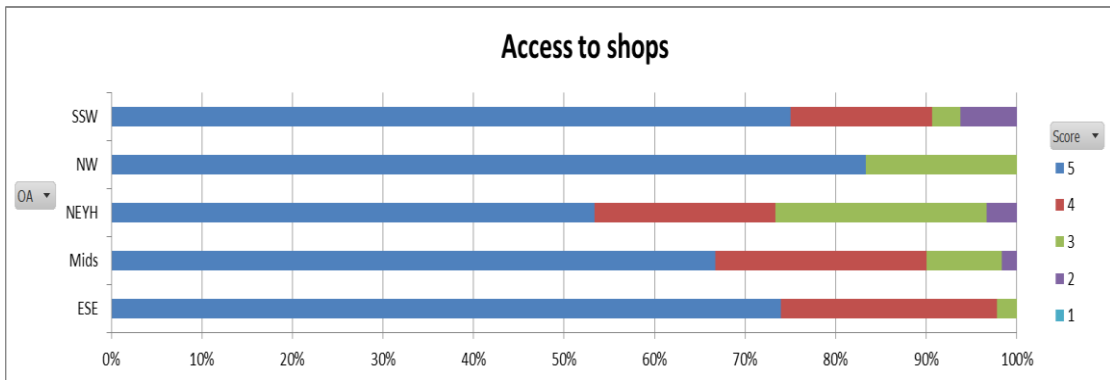
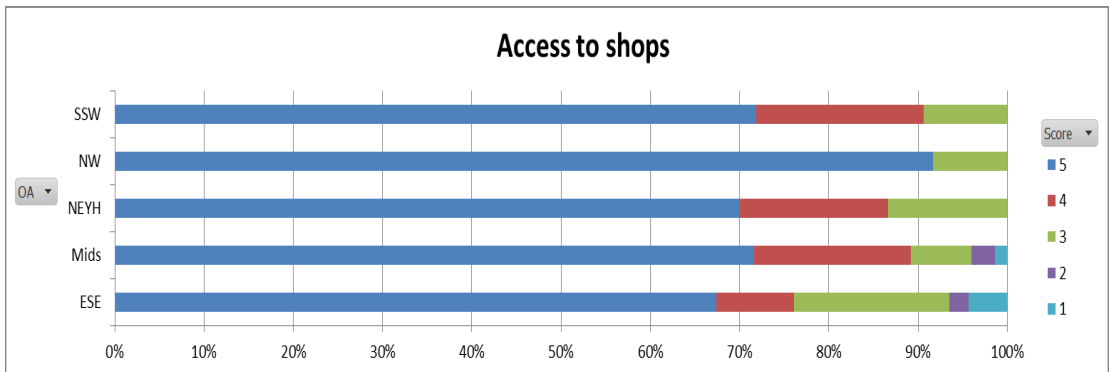
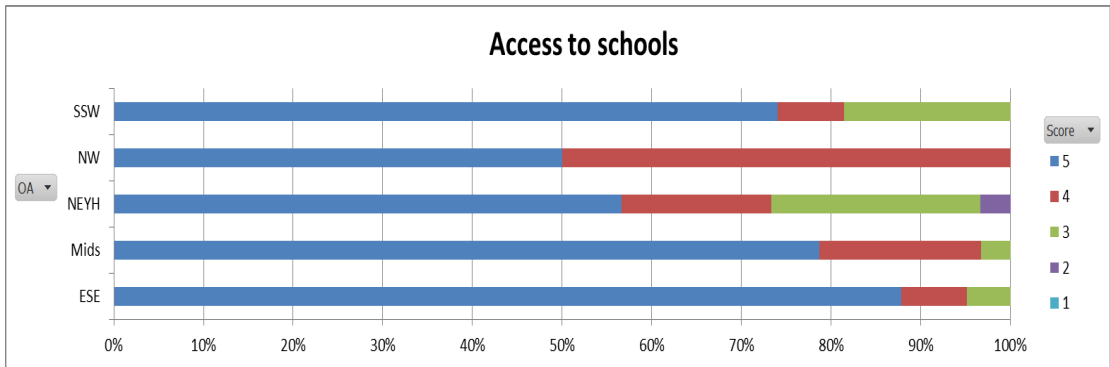
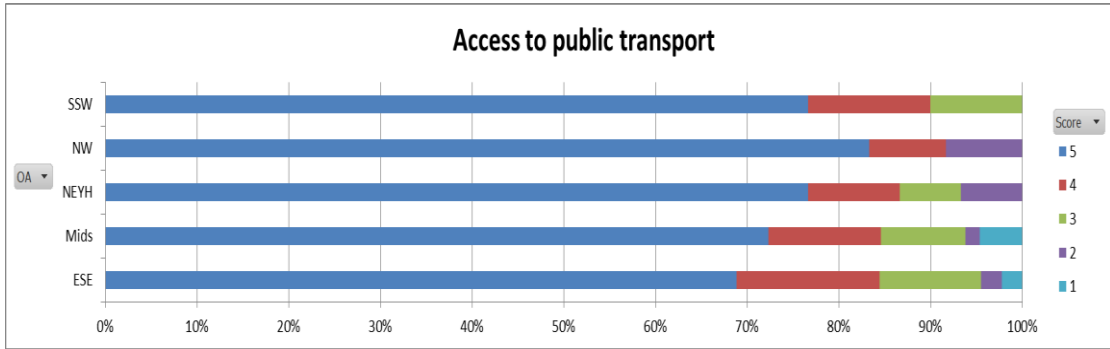


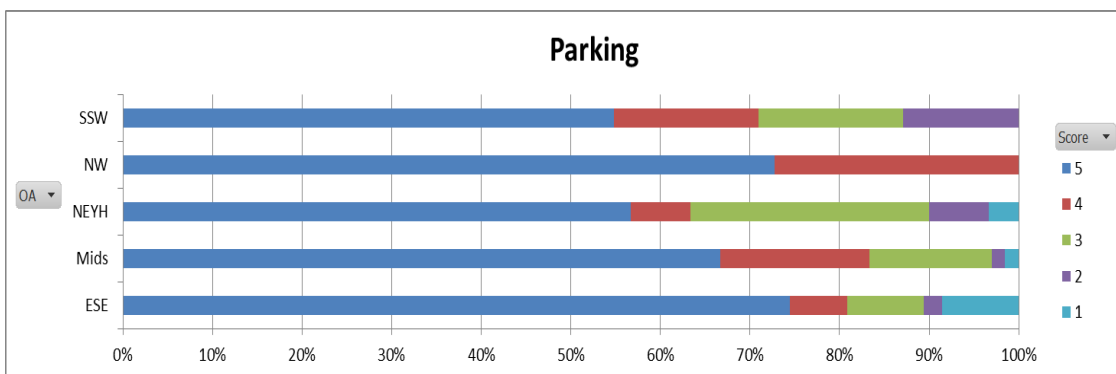
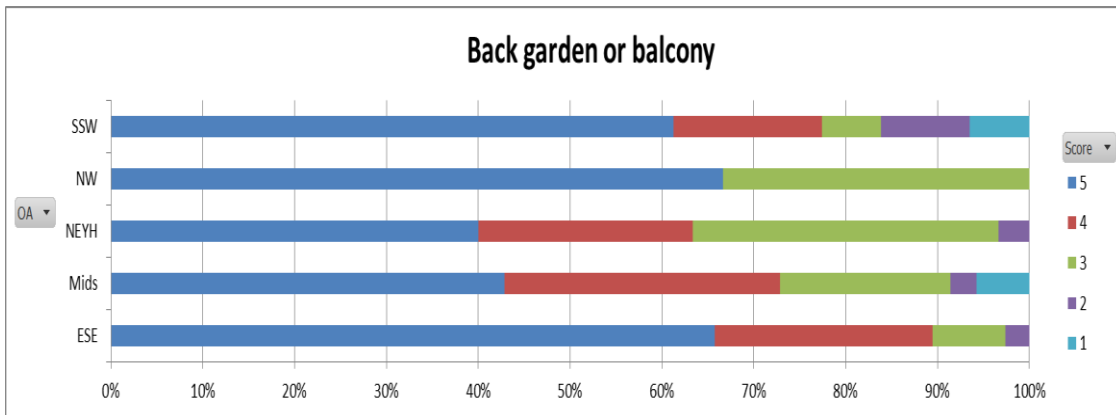
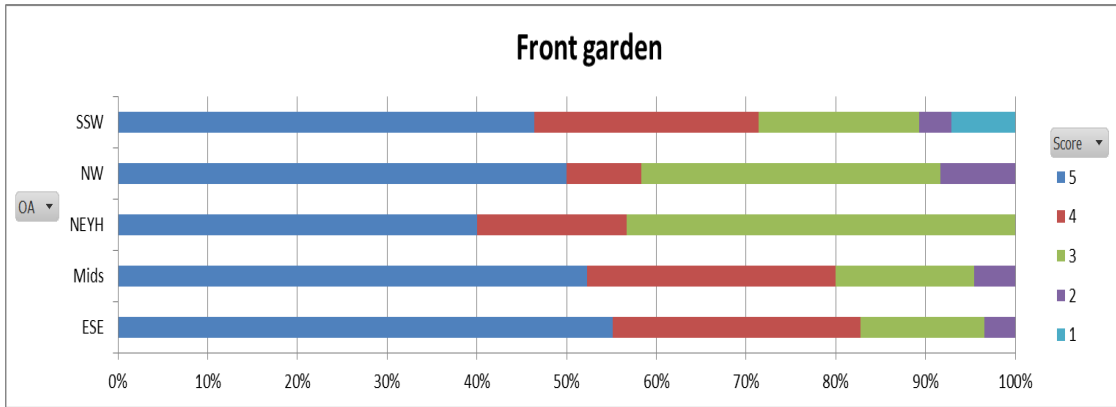
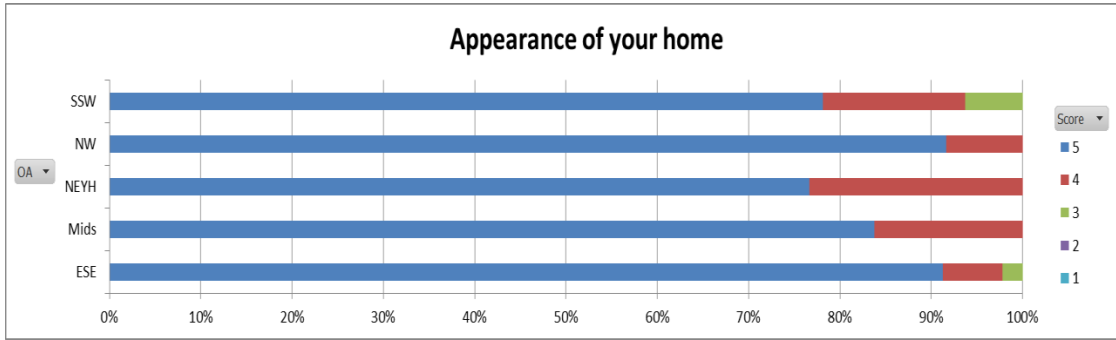


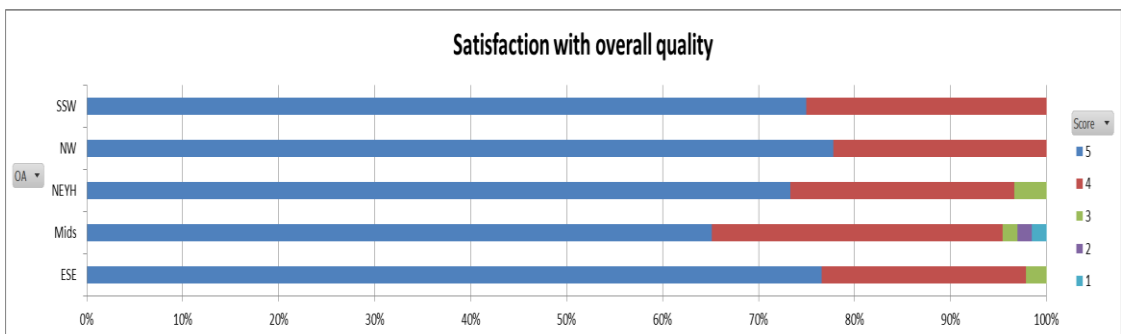
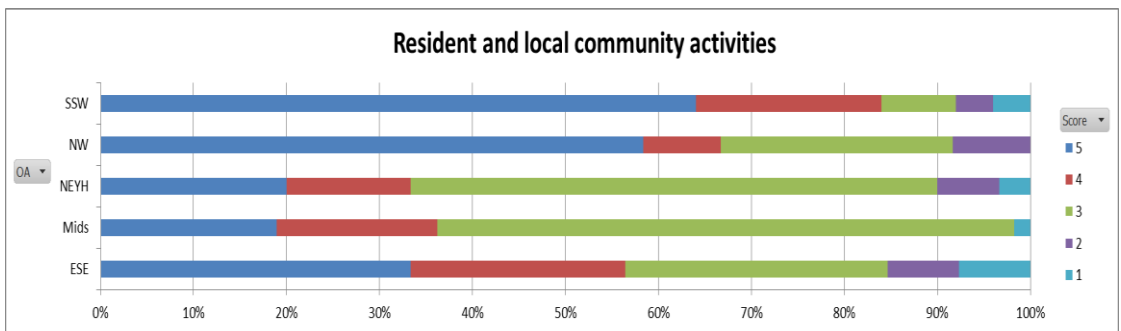
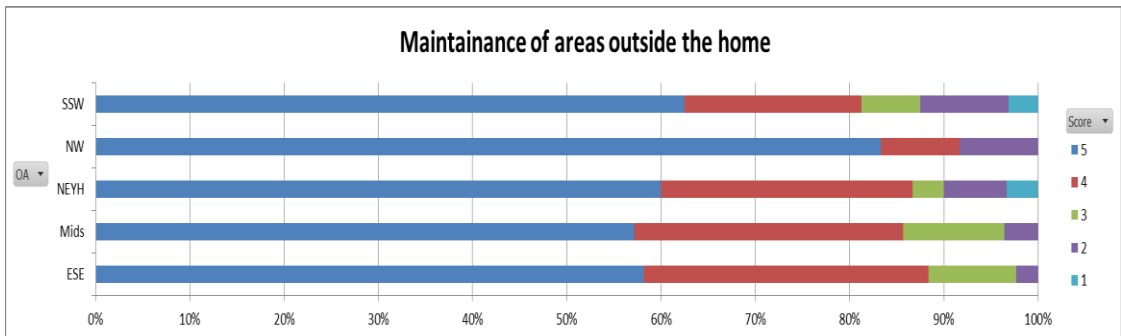
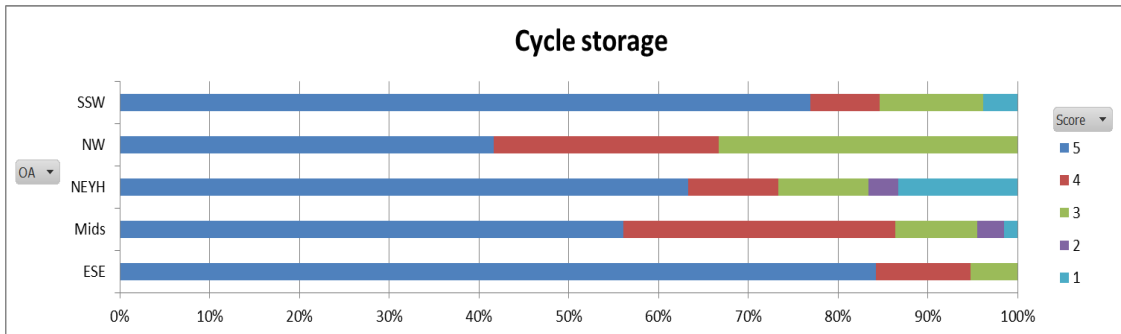
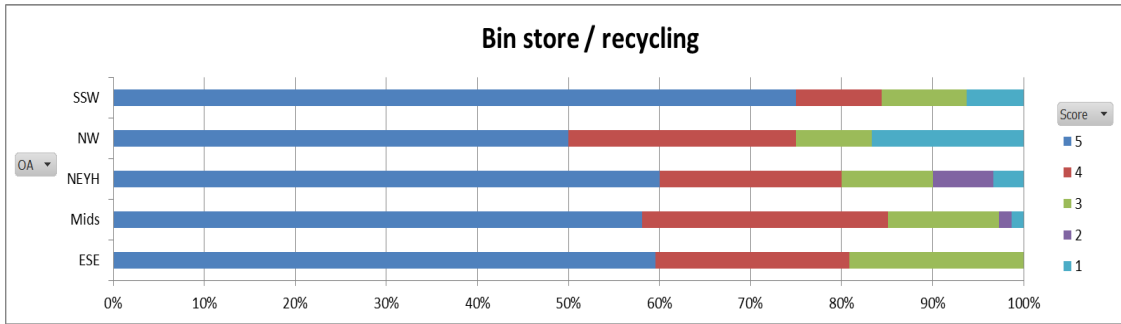












Annex B - Building for Life assessment

Building for Life (BfL) is a design quality assessment tool and has been included in the quality audit to gain a better understanding of the design of the external environment in new housing schemes. HCA Design Managers undertake an assessment on each scheme as part of the quality audit, based on a site visit and discussions with investment partners and local authorities. Assessments are scored against 20 Building for Life criteria¹. Scores of 1 are given when a scheme meets the criteria, zero if the scheme does not meet the criteria or it is not applicable, and 0.5 if the scheme partly meets the criteria. The graph on the next page sets out the national results from the quality audit assessments.

It is recognised that RPs may not always be able to influence the external environment when providing homes within a fixed masterplan, but certain improvements may be possible. The HCA publication *Urban Design Lessons*² sets out a number of key lessons learnt in respect of good practice housing layouts and the design of external environments. Further urban design case studies and good practice can be found in the HCA and Studio REAL's *Urban Design Compendium*³.

As part of the continuous improvement of the quality audit process we will seek to use the Building for Life 12⁴ assessment criteria in future years as appropriate.

¹ wearchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110107165544/http://www.buildingforlife.org/criteria

² www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/urban-design-lessons

³ http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/urban-design-compendium?page_id=&page=1

⁴ <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/knowledge-resources/guide/building-life-12>

Building for life scores



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