



# New Stats Reveal 1 in 10 Council Homes are Under-Occupied

Estimated 500,000 bedrooms stand empty as waiting lists increase

## **Press release**

**Date: 20 July 2010**

As council house waiting lists approach the 2 million mark, new figures from HomeSwapper suggest that over 10 per cent of social housing across the UK - more than 436,000 homes are under-occupied, with one or more rooms being left unused.

In the worst regions this figure rises to almost one quarter of all properties, placing increasing strain on landlords and contributing to ever-expanding waiting lists.

The research, which has been compiled from over 498,000 tenants listed on Homeswapper.co.uk, shows northern towns and cities to be the most affected by under-occupancy with Doncaster, Bassetlaw and Liverpool topping the list with between 20-25 per cent of stock classed as under occupied.

Despite significant overcrowding in the capital, the issue of under-occupied properties affects many parts of London. Barking & Dagenham, Lambeth and Greenwich were found to be the most affected areas, with the 14 per cent of their stock classed as under-occupied.

As a result, thousands of council tenants are living in the wrong sized property for their needs and suffering unnecessarily on council waiting lists. In total the research identified an estimated 500,000 empty bedrooms across the UK.

The figures have been released as the Government announces new plans to help social housing tenants move to find work and to address the 'under-occupation' of large council homes.

In response to these findings, HomeSwapper has developed an extensive real-time database of under occupied properties across the UK and can provide landlords with a regular update of the number of tenants living in properties that are too large for their needs.

The organisation which in the last year helped more than 19,000 families move home via a mutual exchange, received over one million visitors in June and 90 cent of tenants who use the service do so free of charge.

HomeSwapper's Head of Communications, Richard Blundell, said:

"Under-occupancy is a challenge and an opportunity within social housing. On Homeswapper.co.uk there are 177,218 under-occupied homes with tenants who actively want to move and downsize. So, as the largest provider of mutual exchanges in the UK, we are well placed to work with landlords to identify and tackle under-occupancy."

HomeSwapper is currently the biggest provider of mutual exchange home transfers which enable residents to move home by swapping their council properties. Two thirds of the UK's social landlords have signed up to the business and more than 19,000 families swap their homes with HomeSwapper each year.

There are currently 1.8 million households on council housing waiting lists and 2.3 million people living in properties officially classed as overcrowded in England – a figure expected to rise by 15% to 2.6 million within two years.

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### **Notes to Editors**

- A full copy of the under occupancy figures and tenant case studies are available on request
- National figures for under-occupancy are calculated by applying the rate of under-occupancy for homes listed on the site (10%) and applying this to the UK's estimated 4 million social rented properties
- The counties with the lowest rates of under-occupancy identified in the research are Surrey and Oxfordshire - both have 6 per cent of properties listed as under occupied
- HomeSwapper figures for under-occupancy by district are based on data gathered between 2007 - 2010

### Top ten regions for under-occupancy

<b>Region</b>	<b>% of homes under occupied</b>
BASSETLAW	<b>25</b>
DONCASTER	<b>21</b>
LIVERPOOL	<b>20</b>
NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE	<b>20</b>
BLACKBURN DARWEN	<b>20</b>
WEST LANCASHIRE	<b>20</b>
HIGH PEAK	<b>19</b>
CALDERDALE	<b>19</b>
LEEDS	<b>19</b>
BRADFORD	<b>19</b>