

# Who moves and where?

## A comparison of housing association tenants in London and northern regions

### Key findings

- Households in general are more mobile in London than in the rest of the country — but housing association (HA) tenants move less in London than elsewhere. Almost the reverse is true in the North — with general mobility around average but HA tenant mobility much higher than average.
- In both regions a majority of social tenants move within the same district. However amongst those who do move further away, those in London tend to stay within the same sub-region whereas those in the North are as likely to move over 50 miles as to a nearby district.
- There is considerable similarity between the household attributes of tenant movers in London and the North — they are generally younger, more likely to be employed and with higher incomes than non-movers.
- The disadvantaged, in terms of health and unemployment, and families tend to stay fairly close to home when they do move, especially in the North. Those that move across boundaries include smaller, better off households as well as some older single people moving to be near their families.
- Those moving into low cost home ownership (LCHO) in London are not a subset of tenants as a whole. They tend to be younger, better off and prepared to move a little further than the average tenant. In the North, on the other hand, those moving into LCHO have very similar characteristics to tenant movers.
- The reasons for moving are generally similar between the two regions and are mainly 'push' factors, related to housing and family circumstances. Some longer distance movers and those moving into LCHO also have aspirational and economic reasons for moving.
- Overall, the extent of similarity between the two regions, in terms of who moves, for what reasons and how far, is surprisingly high, especially given the very different economic and housing market environments.

### Introduction

This report compares the residential mobility of social tenants and households entering low cost home ownership (LCHO) in two study areas, Greater London<sup>1</sup> and the North of England<sup>2</sup>. The analyses mainly use Survey of English Housing (SEH) 2001 data and Continuous Recording of Lettings (CORE) General Needs and New Sales 2001/02 data<sup>3</sup>. We also look at the Existing Tenants Survey (ETS) data to compare the attributes of movers and non-movers.

London is well known as a high pressure area where it is difficult to meet even priority needs, let alone help tenants move to the localities where they would like to live. In contrast, the North is perceived as having far greater capacity to respond to tenants' wishes within the social sector, in terms of both location and dwelling attributes. In both areas low cost home ownership is seen as one way of meeting households' aspirations.

The objective of this Sector Study is to examine whether the mobility patterns in the two regions and housing market sub-

1. Greater London covers 33 districts including the city of London.

2. Throughout this Sector Study the 'North of England' refers to the standard governmental regions of the North West, Merseyside, Yorkshire and the Humber, and North East regions.

3. At the time the research was undertaken the most recent year of Survey of English Housing data available for use was 2001, 2001/02 CORE data was therefore used for comparability.

sectors are consistent with these perceptions, and in particular whether there is evidence that social provision and allocation systems vary between regions with such very different housing market conditions.

### How much mobility?

Analysis of the Survey of English Housing (2001) data<sup>4</sup> on mobility patterns and how they differ between tenures shows that:

- In 2001, 11.4% of the 3 million households in London moved house, a slightly higher proportion than amongst the 6 million households in the North (Figure 1). Mobility in both London and the North is above the national average of 10%.
- Housing association (HA) tenants are less mobile in London than across the country as a whole. HA tenants in the North, with the exception of Merseyside, are more mobile than average.
- HA tenants in both regions are more likely to move than local authority (LA) tenants — over 80% more likely in London, over 70% more likely in the North (again, excluding Merseyside).

#### (i) Distance moved

The Survey of English Housing allows an examination of how far households move and how this differs between tenures (Figure 2).

Households typically move quite short distances in England as a whole, with 58% moving less than 5 miles, 24% moving between 6 and 50 miles, and only 18% moving over 50 miles.

Social sector tenants generally move shorter distances than those in other tenures. However, HA tenants are more likely to move longer distances than LA tenants, partly because HA owned housing is spread more widely.

Among social tenants almost one third (32%) of Londoners move more than six miles, but only 6% move over fifty miles. In the North the proportion moving over 6 miles is lower, at around 20%. However, almost half of these move more than 50 miles — implying that if they make the decision to leave the immediate locality, social tenants in the North are more likely to move away completely than those in London.

#### (ii) Moves across administrative boundaries

##### a. Moves within the same district

It is also possible to examine mobility patterns among HA tenants and those who entered LCHO by analysing CORE (2001/02) data on whether people move within the same district or cross administrative boundaries<sup>5</sup>. This shows:

- Some 75% of moves by HA tenants in London are within the same district (Figure 3) compared to 87% to 90% in the North.
- For LCHOs, there is evidence of longer distance movement in some regions in that slightly lower proportions of households move within the same district — 68% in London. However, this is not always the case in the North, as Figure 3 demonstrates.

##### b. Moves between districts but within the same region

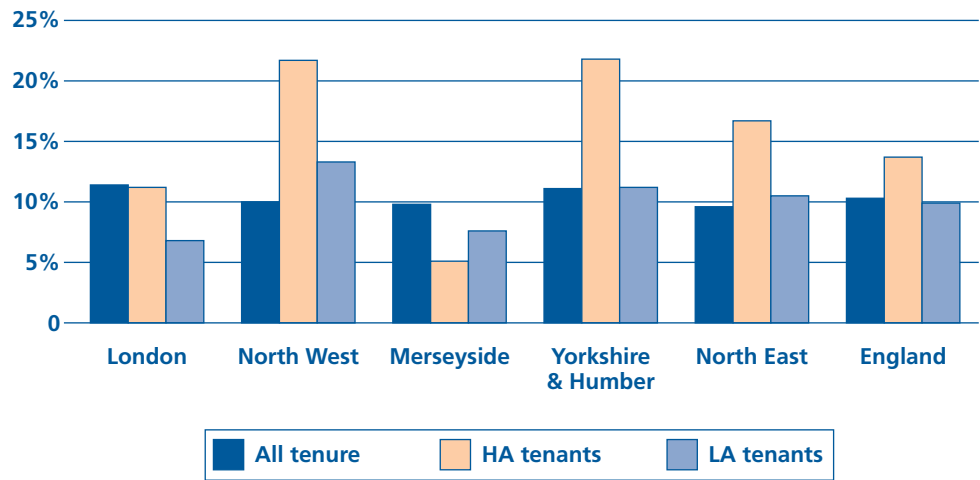
A higher proportion of social tenants move across district boundaries but stay within their region in London than in the North (Figure 4) — around 15% in London and less, often far less, than 10% in the North. This is once again almost certainly related to locational patterns of HA ownership and perhaps to the extent of partnership working among providers.

LCHO is seen as one way of encouraging movement in the affordable housing sector. In London 23% of movement by those

4. The data are based on a random sample of 19,736 households living in England.

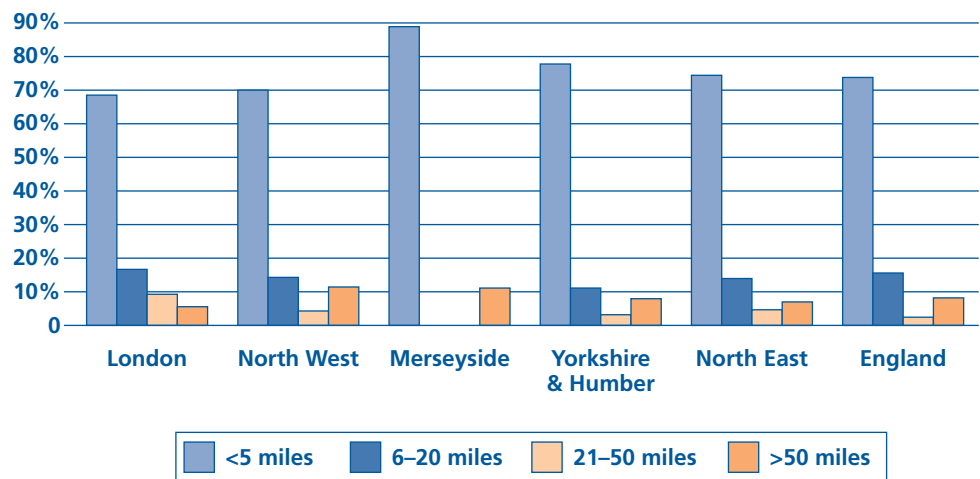
5. The data for tenants are based on the population of 78,415 HA tenant households who moved during the period 1 April 2001 to 30 March 2002. Those for LCHO are based on 2,738 households who entered LCHO over the same period.

**Figure 1**  
Residential mobility  
by tenure



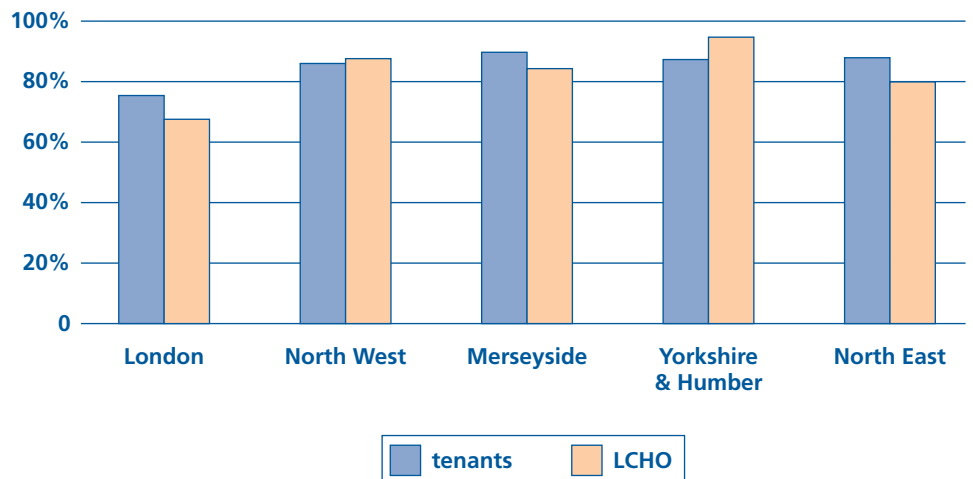
Source: Survey of English Housing 2001

**Figure 2**  
Distance moved by  
region: social tenants



Source: Survey of English Housing 2001

**Figure 3**  
Movements in the  
same district



entering LCHO is across district boundaries, and there is some evidence that this movement is towards lower cost areas.<sup>6</sup> Of the Northern regions, the North East stands out with 18% of moves being between districts. Elsewhere, however, proportions are very low. Thus the data provide some evidence that the objective of giving households greater locational choice is being realised — at least in some areas — but also that, not surprisingly, economic pressures are of increased importance in these decisions.

### **c. Moves between regions**

Only 2% of moves by HA tenants are made into London from other regions, reflecting the extreme difficulty of obtaining social and low cost housing in London (Figure 5).

In the Northern regions, between 3% and 4.5% of moves are made into each region. It is noteworthy that Merseyside has a much higher in-mover proportion (7.8%) for LCHO than other regions.

Although the numbers involved are very small, the picture in terms of out-movers is rather different (Figure 6) — with a larger number of moves out than in and more out-movement from London than the North (7% for HA tenants and nearly 8% for LCHO movers in London compared to 2.1% and 3.8% in the North).

There are no clear connections between the high demand areas of the South and the low demand areas of the North either for tenants or LCHO. There are only tiny numbers of moves between the Northern regions and London.

### **Who moves?**

A rather different question is whether different types of household move in the two regions and in the two tenure groups. CORE data can be used to identify the relevant attributes of HA movers.

The attributes of movers are broadly similar in both London and the North. In both

areas movers tend to be younger, have larger families, higher incomes and are more economically active than non-movers. The main difference between the two regions is that movers in London are relatively better off, as compared to non-movers, than their counterparts in the North, whilst in the North the proportion of single person households is slightly higher.

The Existing Tenants Survey<sup>7</sup> provides basically the same picture. In general there is little difference in terms of movers and non-movers between the two regions. Movers are more likely to be younger (especially in the North), come from black and minority ethnic groups (especially in London), have higher incomes, and be in work (especially in London). Movers in the North are more likely to be couple or lone parent households, and less likely to be in work.

### **a. Tenant movers within the same district**

CORE data can be broken down by type of move. Again the similarities between London and the North are considerable, although a higher proportion of movers come from traditional households in London, while intra-district movers (as compared to non-movers) in the North tend to be single people with similar incomes to non-movers. These differences almost certainly reflect the different economic and housing market pressures in the two regions.

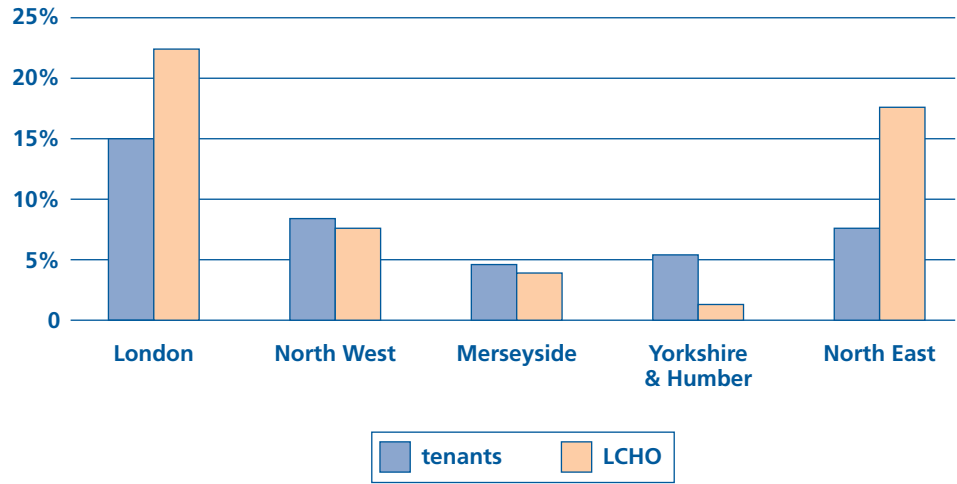
### **b. Movers between districts**

The attributes of those who move across district boundaries are also similar for both study areas. These movers are more likely to be single, in full-time employment and have slightly higher levels of disposable income than movers in general. The main difference is that movers in London are more likely to have been homeless than those in the North. The pattern of between-district moves in part reflects supply characteristics; in particular the relative availability and turnover of smaller units, as well as the

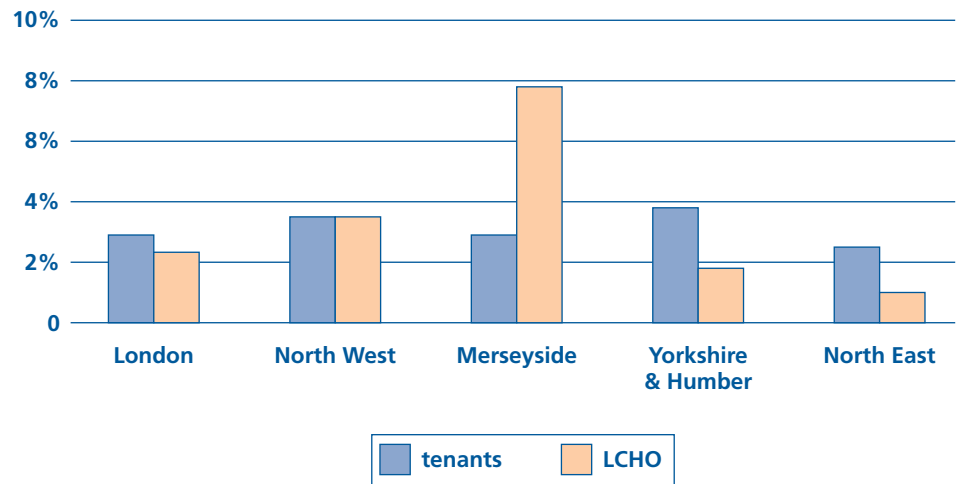
6. See Sector Study 25, 'Who moves and why' Patterns of mobility in the housing association sector in London, Housing Corporation, June 2003.

7. The Existing Tenants Survey includes four districts in London, three districts in the North West, three districts in Yorkshire and the Humber, three districts in the North East, and two districts in Merseyside. The total sample is 3,755. It distinguishes between tenants who have moved within the previous 12 months and those who have not.

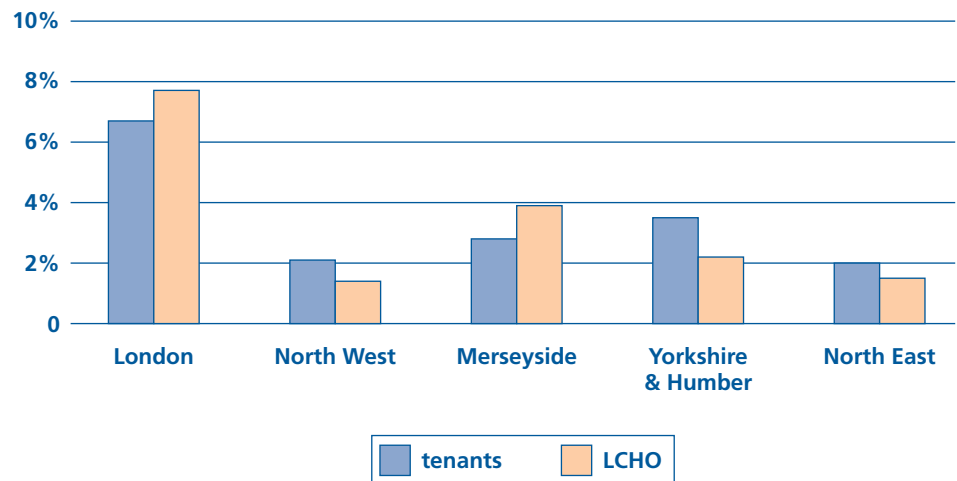
**Figure 4**  
Movements across districts but within the same region



**Figure 5**  
In-movers from other regions



**Figure 6**  
Out-movers to other regions



extent to which small units are concentrated in the HA sector. It is worth mentioning once again though, that the numbers involved are small at less than 3,000 each year.

### **c. Movers between region**

In both study areas, those who move across regional boundaries tend to come from single person, childless, older, retired or economically inactive households, and are more likely to be white. Those who move out of London in particular have much lower levels of income than the average mover. This contrasts with the North where in-movers have below average incomes compared to other movers. Again, London movers crossing regional boundaries are more likely to have experienced homelessness than those in the North, whilst those in the North are more likely to come from other tenures.

### **d. Movers into low cost home ownership**

Households entering LCHO in London tend to be rather younger and better off than tenants, with greater capacity to afford the costs and to take on the risks associated with owner occupation. In the North, on the other hand, there is no clear difference between those entering LCHO and tenants movers.

In both study areas, LCHO movers within the same district and across district boundaries are more likely to be single or couple households, and younger and more economically active than other movers. Those in London tend to be younger and to have relatively higher incomes than those in the North.

LCHO households moving into London from another region — a tiny number — are more likely to be older, retired and have lower incomes than out-movers — reflecting in particular, moves by elderly households to be near their families. In the Northern regions, there are no consistent differences in the attributes of in-movers and out-movers, other than that those crossing regional boundaries tend to have slightly higher incomes than those moving

between districts but remaining in the same region.

### **Reasons for moving**

Overall, the opportunities for social sector housing tenants to move are far more constrained than for those in the private sector, even where, as in the North, housing association tenant mobility is above the overall average. In particular, moves within the social sector tend to be driven by housing need rather than by job-related or aspirational reasons. Evidence from the Survey of English Housing suggests that the major reasons for those moving into and within the social sector remain 'wanting a larger house or flat', 'need for independent living' and 'family/relation related reasons'.

For HA tenants, reasons to move vary little between London and the North, although they do differ slightly between short distance and long distance movers. For same district/region movers the reasons are mainly push factors to do with current conditions — so accommodation related reason such as 'overcrowding', 'the need for independent living' and personal reasons tend to dominate. The relatively small numbers of inter-regional movers have rather different reasons for moving, reflecting a mix of aspirations and need. These include 'desire to move near family, school or work' and 'desire to buy a house' as well as health related reasons.

Evidence from the Existing Tenants Survey supports this general picture with the main reasons for moving given as 'overcrowding', 'problems with health or being disabled', 'moving near to family, friends, school or work' and 'problems relating to relationship breakdown'.

Mutual exchange tenants give similar reasons.<sup>8</sup> Even when organising the move for themselves social tenants are most likely to move for house and area-related reasons, with almost half stating they moved to obtain more suitably-sized accommodation, often in what they perceived to be a better area. Only 10% of tenants suggested that they moved for job-related reasons.

8. Jones, M. and Sinclair, F. 'Doing it for themselves: Mutual exchanges and tenant mobility', The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002.

### **a. Movers within the same district**

Movers within the same district are typically motivated by their current housing conditions. In London, 'overcrowding' (18%) is the most important reason, followed by 'the need for independent living' (10%) and 'health and disability' (9%). In the Northern regions 'overcrowding' is also important (21–25%), followed by 'family breakdown' (13–17%), and 'the need for independent living' (10–13%). Thus for this group, which is by far the largest group of movers, there are very few differences between London and the lower demand areas in the North.

### **b. Movers between districts**

For inter-district movers in London, accommodation related reasons again dominate. They cite 'the need for independent living' as the main reason, followed by 'overcrowding'. The situation is different in the North where 'to be near family, school, or work' and 'relationship breakdown' as well as 'wanting to buy a house' are the most significant reasons — suggesting that both economic and locational reasons are often more important than the inadequacy of current accommodation.

### **c. Movers between regions**

Those who move into London and out-movers from London cite 'desire to move near family, school or work' as the most important reason for moving (31% and 36% respectively). A 'need for sheltered accommodation/warden' and 'health and disability' are also significant. In other words even inter-regional moves are about necessity rather than jobs or aspirations.

In the Northern regions, the reasons for inter-regional moves do not differ from those for inter-district moves. This is somewhat surprising as a higher proportion of households move longer distances but probably reflects the extent of availability across regions. In other words once a household has decided to move out of a district the opportunities are similar both in the home region and in others.

Overall, apart from those entering LCHO,

who clearly stress the capacity to buy, most reasons given point to 'push' rather than 'pull' factors — hence the emphasis placed by social landlords on prioritising needs.

## **Conclusions**

The extent of differences in the pattern of movements, and indeed in the reasons given for moving between London and the North, is relatively small considering the very different housing markets in the two areas. Movement in London is clearly more difficult overall and the attributes of movers reflect these greater pressures — but only in a limited way. Rather the picture is of a relatively homogeneous sector with similar approaches to tenant mobility across the two regions.

The vast majority of moves by HA tenants in both regions are short distance, mainly within the same district. The main reasons given are housing conditions, particularly overcrowding and the need for independent accommodation. Those who move across district boundaries tend to do so for family and housing reasons often related to housing need rather than employment opportunities or other economic reasons. One interesting distinction is that in London such moves tend to be to nearby districts, whilst in the North (excluding Merseyside) a higher proportion move further away.

The group entering LCHO are, at least in London, clearly different from HA tenants. They are rather younger and better off than tenants, better able to meet the costs and take on the risks associated with owner occupation. However, in the North those entering LCHO hardly differ from social tenant movers. In both regions, the main reason for moving is, unsurprisingly, desire to become a homeowner.

There is evidence of some preparedness to move across administrative boundaries where the opportunity arises — particularly with respect to LCHO in London but also in inter- and intra-regional moves in the North. Those moving into LCHO have a slightly greater choice of locality and in London tend to move to lower cost areas. Even so, such moves are still most likely to be within the same district.

Traditionally, social tenants have been the dominant driver, even in areas where the housing market is relatively in balance and not withstanding new initiatives such as LCHO. The extent to which this lack of mobility is because of who lives in the sector, many of whom probably have little wish to move, or because of continued administrative constraints is less clear.

#### Further information

This Sector Study was prepared by researchers at the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, University of Cambridge. [www.dataspring.org.uk](http://www.dataspring.org.uk)

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