

# **Downsize your energy bills:**

### Moving to a smaller home cuts energy bills

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The Intergenerational Foundation (www.if.org.uk) is an independent, nonparty-political charity that exists to protect the rights of younger and future generations in British policy-making. While increasing longevity is to be welcomed, our changing national demographic and expectations of entitlement are placing increasingly heavy burdens on younger and future generations. From housing, health and education, to employment, taxation, pensions, voting, spending and environmental degradation, younger generations are under increasing pressure to maintain the intergenerational compact while losing out disproportionately to older, wealthier cohorts. IF questions this status quo, calling instead for sustainable long-term policies that are fair to all – the old, the young, and those to come.

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### **Executive summary**

- Older households could cut their energy bills in half, or more, by downsizing, with larger houses saving £5,000 annually on energy bills.
- As many as 67% of all owner-occupied older households in England were considered under-occupied in 2021, meaning that they have two or more spare bedrooms
- Under-occupancy in owner-occupied homes in England increased from 39% in 1995/96 to 53% by 2020/21
- More than a third of owner-occupiers in England live in homes larger than 110 square metres, suggesting room for downsizing
- In 2021, there were 11 million individuals aged 65 or above in England & Wales, with an average household size of only 1.5
- If an older household downsized from a three-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of E to a onebed dwelling with an EPC rating of C it would, on average, reduce their energy bill from approximately £4,065 to £1,623, or by £2,442 annually
- If an older household moved from a dwelling with five or more bedrooms and an EPC rating of E to a two-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of B, they would, on average, save over £5,000 annually on energy bills
- If one million older households downsized from a four-bed to a two-bed of a similar dwelling type, the total annual saving on energy bills would be approximately £1.5 billion pounds or the equivalent amount of energy annually produced by 1,050 wind turbines
- If 250,000 older households downsized from an old, pre-1919 built house sized around 150 square metres to a newly built flat sized 75 square metres, the total savings on energy bills made by older households would be almost one billion pounds

### Introduction

As the UK is facing a cost-of-living crisis, in large part due to high energy costs and high housing costs, there is a case for under-occupying older households to downsize in order to lower their energy bills. This would relieve pressure on the housing market while also reducing the overconsumption of energy as a whole in the UK.

The Intergenerational Foundation (IF) has a long record of conducting research on the housing crisis in the UK.<sup>123</sup> Under-occupation has been identified as one of the major contributing factors to the housing crisis and acting on the issue of under-occupation should form a part of a wider policy agenda to solve it. The housing crisis is a major source of intergenerational inequality and injustice, and it is vital that all possible solutions to the crisis are fully explored.

Previous research undertaken by IF suggested that downsizing results in practical benefits such as lower utility bills.<sup>4</sup> Given the scale of the underoccupation problem in the UK against the backdrop of the energy crisis and increasingly unaffordable bills, the case for downsizing can be strengthened by showing how much money older generations could save on energy bills if they were to downsize.

This paper presents IF research findings on how much money downsizers could save on energy bills by analysing publicly available data and government resources. In this report, older households refer to households where the Household Representative Person (HRP) is aged 65 or above.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Wiles, C. (2021) Stockpiling Space: How the pandemic has increasing housing inequalities between older and younger generations. London: The Intergenerational Foundation: <u>https://www.if.org.uk/research-posts/</u> <u>stockpiling-space-how-the-pandemic-has-increased-housing-inequalities-between-older-and-younger-</u> <u>generations</u>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Wiles, C. (2020) Rabbit Hutch Homes: The growth of micro-homes. London: The Intergenerational Foundation: <u>https://www.if.org.uk/research-posts/rabbit-hutch-homes-the-growth-of-micro-homes</u>
<sup>3</sup> Kingman, D. (2016) Unlocking England's Hidden Homes. London: The Intergenerational Foundation:

https://www.if.org.uk/research-posts/unlocking-englands-hidden-homes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Leach, J. (2012) Understanding Downsizing. London: The Intergenerational Foundation: <u>https://www.if.org.</u> <u>uk/research-posts/understanding-downsizing</u>

### **1**. The scale of under-occupation

Under-occupation has seen a steady increase in the past decades. Among owner-occupiers in England in 1995/96 under-occupation was at 39%. By 2020/21 under-occupation had increased to 53%.<sup>5</sup> In total, there were 8,165,000 owner-occupied households in England in 2020/21 which were under-occupied.<sup>6</sup> The English Housing Survey defines under-occupation as having two or more spare bedrooms.<sup>7</sup>

Under-occupation is mainly witnessed in owner-occupied households, as under-occupation in the privately rented sector in 2020/21 was only 13%, a decrease from 18% in 1995/96, showing the increasing pressure of housing costs faced by private renters.<sup>8</sup> Only 8% of households in the social rented sector are under-occupied.<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 shows the increased level of underoccupation in owner-occupied homes in England between 1995 and 2021.



#### Figure 1

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 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> English Housing Survey (2021) English Housing Survey 2020 to 2021: headline report
<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> English Housing Survey (2021) English Housing Survey: Home ownership, 2019-20

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> English Housing Survey (2021) English Housing Survey 2020 to 2021: headline report

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

Owner-occupiers of all ages also tend to live in much larger properties than their renting counterparts, as shown in Table 1.

#### Table 1

| Floor area                 | Owner-<br>occupiers | Private<br>renters | Social<br>renters |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| less than 50 m²            | 3.6%                | 18.8%              | 24.9%             |
| 50 to 69 m <sup>2</sup>    | 15.3%               | 33.1%              | 34.4%             |
| 70 to 89 m <sup>2</sup>    | 26.1%               | 27.6%              | 30.8%             |
| 90 to 109 m <sup>2</sup>   | 18.5%               | 11.2%              | 6.9%              |
| 110 or more m <sup>2</sup> | 36.5%               | 9.4%               | 2.9%              |

Source: English Housing Survey 2020/21, headline report Annex Table 2.1

As shown in Table 1, 55% of owner-occupiers live in dwellings larger than 90 square metres, while only 21% of private renters and 10% of social renters live in dwellings larger than 90 square metres. Over one third of owner-occupiers live in dwellings larger than 110 square metres, while this is only true for 9% of private renters and 3% of social renters.

Using recently released data from Census 2021, we know that there were 24.8 million households in England and Wales, an increase of almost 7% comparing to a decade prior.<sup>10</sup> According to the figures from Census 2021, there were 11 million individuals aged 65 or above in England and Wales.<sup>11</sup>

The English Housing Survey revealed that only 3% of older households in England planned to move in the next six months, although of those planning to move, 35% reported that downsizing was the reason for the planned move.<sup>12</sup>

In 2021, the average household size of all individuals was 2.38 in England and 2.32 in Wales.<sup>13</sup> However, for older households, the average household size in England was only 1.5 in 2020/21.<sup>14</sup> Of all older households in England that were owner-occupied in 2020/21, as many as 67% are considered under-occupied.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics (2022) Household and resident characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Office for National Statistics (2022) Demography and migration data, England and Wales: Census 2021. TS007 Age by single year

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> English Housing Survey (2022) English Housing Survey, Main report, 2020/21

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Office for National Statistics (2022) Households by household size, regions of England and GB constituent countries

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> English Housing Survey (2022) English Housing Survey, 2020 to 2021: older people's housing

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

In 2020/21 in England, 96% of owner-occupied older households had properties with at least two bedrooms, while 46% had three bedrooms, 21% had four bedrooms, and 5% had five or more bedrooms.<sup>16</sup>

Approximately 80% of all households with an HRP aged 65 or above were owneroccupiers in England in 2020/21.<sup>17</sup> Given that the average household size for those aged 65 or above is only 1.5, there is plenty of capacity for downsizing among older households.

Data from Census 2011 revealed that out of 23,364,000 households in England and Wales as many as 16,133,000 were under-occupied and 1,062,000 were over-crowded.<sup>18</sup> Out of all under-occupying households in 2011, approximately one third, or 32%, were households with an HRP aged 65 or above.<sup>19</sup> Of the underoccupied households with an HRP aged 65 or above, 84%, or approximately 4,208,000 in total, were owner-occupied households.<sup>20</sup> Out of those 4,208,000 under-occupied properties, 2,706,000, or 64%, had an under-occupation of 2+ bedrooms.<sup>21</sup>

Under-occupation is a persisting issue, and one effect of high under-occupancy rates is an overconsumption of energy, leading to high energy bills. Of households which are currently under-occupied, 34% overconsume energy, while only 15% of households which are not under-occupied overconsume energy.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> English Housing Survey (2022) English Housing Survey, Main report, 2020/21

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013) CT0101 – Age by occupancy rating (bedrooms) by tenure

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013) CT0101 – Age by occupancy rating (bedrooms) by tenure

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2021) Energy Follow Up Survey: Household Energy Consumption and Affordability, Final Report

### 2. Energy bills, dwelling size and type

In the winter of 2022/23, the energy price cap is as much as 96% higher than during the previous winter. Even those who have not previously struggled to pay their energy bills are likely to feel the financial strain of higher energy prices. Following the Autumn Statement by the Chancellor on 17 November 2022, the updated energy price guarantee implies an annual energy bill of £3,000 for typical energy consumption levels starting from the beginning of April 2023. This means that even more people will struggle to pay energy bills as prices increase further.

As the price cap does not function as an actual overall cap but rather as a cap on unit costs, this means that households in larger dwellings, or those with high energy usage, will pay more than the average household. While the higher energy bills associated with large dwellings might have been affordable in previous years, with rapidly rising energy costs this is likely to cause a financial strain for many who have not struggled to pay bills in the past.

For example, using median energy consumption for differently sized dwellings in 2019, the government estimated that the annual energy cost in 2022/23 for a detached house with five or more bedrooms would be £4,500, while a three-bedroom semi-detached property would face an average bill of £2,670, and the bill for a one-bedroom flat would be £1,440.<sup>23</sup>

Ofgem has estimated that typical household energy use is 2,900 kWh for electricity and 12,000 kWh for gas.<sup>24</sup> The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) similarly estimates the median gas usage to be 12,140 kWh but shows that average use is much higher at 13,698 kWh due to five percent of consumers using more than 30,000 kWh per year and thus increasing the mean.<sup>25</sup> The government uses Ofgem's estimation of 14,900 kWh for its calculation of the annual energy bill for the typical consumer.

Analysis has shown that dwelling type, floor area, insulation measures, region and energy efficiency rating explain 48% of variance in gas consumption, while factors such as tenure or income do not explain much of the variance.<sup>26</sup> Of the individual factors, floor area explains by far the most of the variance, with energy efficiency rating a clear second place.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> House of Commons Library (2022) Domestic energy prices

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ofgem (2019) Review of Typical Domestic Consumption Values 2019: <u>https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/</u> <u>publications/review-typical-domestic-consumption-values-2019</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2021) Subnational Electricity and Gas Consumption Statistics: Regional and Local Authority, Great Britain, 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2021) Energy Follow Up Survey: Household Energy Consumption and Affordability, Final Report

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid



For a house of 110 square metres or more, the average energy usage per year is 211.7 kWh per square metre.<sup>28</sup> Since we know that 37% of owner-occupiers live in houses that are larger than 110 square metres, this suggests that there is capacity to massively reduce energy bills by downsizing.

In short, reducing floor area and having a better insulated and more energy efficient dwelling type are among the best ways to reduce consumption and bills. Figure 2 shows the difference in average energy consumption between dwellings of different floor areas.





Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. National Statistics, National Energy Efficiency Data-Framework (NEED): consumption data tables 2021. © Intergenerational Foundation 2022 www.if.org.uk

For gas consumption, which is the main source of heating energy in the UK, the analysis found that increased floor area is the main driver of higher consumption. In fact, dwellings with a floor area above 140 square metres used 3.3 times more gas than dwellings with a floor area below 50 square metres.<sup>29</sup> As Figure 2 shows, a dwelling with a floor area between 101 and 150 square metres uses on average 19,600 kWh annually, while a 51 to 100 square metres dwelling uses 14,800 kWh and a dwelling with a floor area of 50 square metres or less uses only 10,100 kWh.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> English Housing Survey (2022) English Housing Survey, Main report, 2020/21: Table DA7101 (SST7.1): Energy performance - dwellings, 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2021) Energy Follow Up Survey: Household Energy Consumption and Affordability, Final Report

The largest dwellings use much more energy; a dwelling with a floor area of 151 to 200 square metres uses 26,400 kWh and a dwelling over 200 square metres uses 34,200 kWh.

It follows that if one were to downsize from a dwelling in the 151-200 square metre range to a dwelling in the 51-100 square metre range one would, on average, only pay 56% compared to previous energy bills in the larger dwelling. If the same household were to downsize to an even smaller dwelling of 50 square metres or less, they would typically only pay 38% of their previous energy bill. Households living in dwellings below 50 square metres had an average total energy cost for the year of only 29% that of households which were above 140 square metres in size.30

Naturally, larger dwellings often have more bedrooms than smaller dwellings. Figure 3 represents an analysis of how energy usage differs between dwellings depending on the number of bedrooms, and the result is largely similar to that of energy usage in comparison to floor area.



#### Figure 3

Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. National Statistics, National Energy Efficiency Data-Framework (NEED): consumption data tables 2021 © Intergenerational Foundation 2022 www.if.org.uk

As can be seen in Figure 3, energy usage increases substantially the more bedrooms there are in the dwelling. While dwellings with one bedroom consume on average 9,800 kWh per year, this rises to 13,800 kWh for dwellings with two bedrooms and to 17,500 kWh for dwellings with three bedrooms.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid



At the top of the scale, dwellings with four bedrooms consume on average 22,700 kWh per year while dwellings with five or more bedrooms consume as much as 30,500 kWh annually.

Thus, downsizing from a four-bed to a three-bed would on average reduce energy usage by 5,200 kWh, or downsizing from a three-bed to a two-bed would reduce energy usage by 3,700 kWh, and downsizing from a two-bed to a one-bed would reduce energy usage by 4,000 kWh. Or, if one downsized from a four-bed to a two-bed, it would result on average in consuming 8,900 kWh less energy per year.

Dwellings with higher Energy Performance Certifcate (EPC) ratings consume less energy. See Figure 4.



#### Figure 4

Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. National Statistics, National Energy Efficiency Data-Framework (NEED): consumption data tables 2021. © Intergenerational Foundation 2022 www.if.org.uk

Energy efficiency ratings also have a large impact on gas consumption: dwellings with an EPC rating of E or below have 60% higher gas consumption than dwellings with an EPC rating of C or higher.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2021) Energy Follow Up Survey: Household Energy Consumption and Affordability, Final Report



#### Figure 5



Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. National Statistics, National Energy Efficiency Data-Framework (NEED): consumption data tables 2021 © Intergenerational Foundation 2022 www.if.org.uk

Additionally, the total annual energy cost for a household living in a flat are on average only 51% of that of households living in a detached dwelling.<sup>32</sup> Figure 5 shows how energy usage differs between households in different types of dwellings.

As shown by Figure 5, detached dwellings have by far the highest energy usage at 23,000 kWh per year, while purpose-built flats have the lowest average energy usage at 10,700 kWh per year. Converted flats have the second lowest average energy consumption at 13,700 kWh per year. Semi-detached dwellings had an average consumption of 17,700 kWh, closely followed by the average consumption of bungalow dwellings at 17,200 kWh. End-terraced dwellings consumed on average 16,200 kWh while mid-terraced dwellings consumed 15,300 kWh.

Although floor area and number of bedrooms explains more of the variance between different levels of energy consumptions than factors such as type of dwelling, the energy savings that can be made would be increased if one were to move into a smaller dwelling that is also a flat, which is also more likely to be newer and have better insulation. Out of all owner-occupiers in England, as many as 89% live in either a house or a bungalow rather than in a flat.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> English Housing Survey (2022) English Housing Survey, 2020 to 2021: owner occupier leaseholders



Although older dwellings in general are less energy efficient than newly built dwellings, there are nonetheless large differences in energy consumption between different types of dwellings built in the same year. For example, of dwellings built in 2017, average gas consumption per square metre (kWh/m2) was 99.2 for bungalows, 91.5 for houses and 65.8 for flats.<sup>34</sup> Properties built after 2012 use on average 58 kWh less gas per square metre comparing to properties built before 1919.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2019) Energy consumption in new domestic buildings 2015 to 2017 (England and Wales)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2019) Energy consumption in new domestic buildings 2015 to 2017 (England and Wales) Annex D

### 3. Potential savings on energy bills

Although many owner-occupiers are relatively wealthy and are not concerned about rising energy bills, this is not the case for all, as some of them will have low incomes despite having significant property wealth. As of 2020/21 in England, as many as 19% of owner-occupiers had no savings, while 10% only had savings of less than £5,000.<sup>36</sup>

Based on the recent energy price cap in place until the end of March 2023, the government estimates that the energy bill for the typical household will be  $\pm 2,500$ , which will rise to  $\pm 3,000$  by 1 April 2023. The energy consumption the government uses for this estimation is 12,000 kWh for gas and 2,900 kWh for electricity, or 14,900 kWh in total.

Given that many older households live in under-occupied and large dwellings with many bedrooms, the typical energy bill for older households that are owner-occupiers are likely to be much larger than the  $\pm 3,000$  "average bill". Many of those aged 65 and above live in properties with the lowest energy efficiency ratings, which increases their energy bills further. In England, only 38% of households with an HRP aged 65 or above lived in a dwelling with an energy efficiency rating of C or above, and only 2% lived in a dwelling with a rating of A/B.<sup>37</sup>

These examples illustrate estimations of how much different types of older households could save on energy bills by downsizing:

#### Example 1:

If an older household living in a typical four-bed dwelling downsized to a typical two-bed dwelling, their annual energy consumption would, on average, decrease from 22,700 kWh to 13,800 kWh. This would reduce their energy bill from approximately £4,570 to £2,778, or by £1,792 annually.

#### Example 2:

If an older household downsized from a three-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of E to a one-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of C, their annual energy consumption would, on average, decrease from 20,190 kWh to 8,060 kWh. This would reduce their energy bill from approximately £4,065 to £1,623 or by £2,442 annually.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> English Housing Survey (2022) English Housing Survey, 2020 to 2021: owner occupier leaseholders

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> English Housing Survey (2022) English Housing Survey, 2020 to 2021: energy

#### Example 3:

If an older household moved from a five-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of E to a two-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of B, their annual energy consumption would, on average, decrease from 35,190 kWh to 9,830 kWh. This would reduce their energy bill from approximately £7,085 to £1,979, or by £5,106 annually.

#### Example 4:

If an older household moved from a 150 square metre house built before 1919 to a newly built flat (built after 2012) sized 75 square metres, their annual energy consumption would, on average, decrease from 26,875 kWh to 8,235 kWh. This would reduce their energy bill from approximately £5,411 to £1,658, or by £3,753 annually.

- If 100,000 older households (approximately 150,000 individuals) were to downsize from a five-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of E to a two-bed dwelling with an EPC rating of B, the total savings on energy bills for that generation would be around £510 million annually
- If one million older households (approximately 1.5 million individuals) all downsized from a typical four-bed dwelling to a two-bed dwelling, the total savings on energy bills would be as much as £1.8 billion annually
- If 250,000 older households downsized from an old, pre-1919 built house sized around 150 square metres to a newly built flat sized 75 square metres, the total savings on energy bills made by older households would be around £940 million annually

Additionally, one can estimate the energy savings not only in pounds, but also in the equivalent kWh in terms of carbon savings. If one million older households (approximately 1.5 million older individuals) all downsized from a typical fourbed dwelling to a two-bed dwelling, the total kWh savings in terms of how much older generations would have reduced their energy consumption would equal that of the annual energy production of 1,050 wind turbines according to estimations.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency, Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator. Available from: <u>https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator</u>

Downsizing also enables the improvement of the UK housing stock, since homes that are vacated by people who are moving to smaller properties become available for improvement works. For the larger property being moved out of, the improvements may come in the form of splitting the house into flats or by better insulating the property and therefore improving its energy efficiency. Additionally, for the smaller property the downsizers are moving into, it is possible to use the capital raised from selling the larger home to upgrade and improve the new one, if necessary.

Approximately 15% of English homes and 23% of Welsh homes were built before 1900, and older dwellings are likely to be less energy efficient than newer dwellings.<sup>39</sup> Only 42% of assessed English dwellings and 37% of Welsh dwellings have an EPC rating of C or above.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, in some instances improvement works may be required to achieve the estimated annual energy savings as described in the examples if one does not move into a dwelling that already has an EPC rating of C or above.

Only 19% of people in Great Britain were considering making energy efficiency improvements to their homes, and out of those not considering making any improvements, the most commonly cited reasons were the belief that their homes were already energy efficient enough, it costing too much money, or not owning their home.<sup>41</sup>

Another reason cited for not planning to do improvement works is the disruption such works cause, with 28% saying it is "too much hassle".<sup>42</sup> It is understandable that having workers in one's home, potentially needing to find temporary accommodation elsewhere, and cleaning up after the completion of the works may deter some from carrying out insulation and improvement works. Therefore, the best time to undertake energy efficiency improvement works is at the point of transaction, when there is a higher likelihood of available capital and a timeframe in which the property is empty.

Thus, downsizing leads to reduced energy bills for the downsizing household, but also for opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of dwellings on two fronts; both the property moved out of, and the property the household moves into. There is an urgent national need for improving and insulating the existing housing stock, and the process of downsizing can speed up this process by creating windows for improvement works, reducing overall consumption of energy in the UK, and therefore contributing to reaching Net Zero goals.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Valuation Office Agency (2021) Council Tax: Stock of properties, 2021. Statistics on the stock of domestic properties by Council Tax Band and property attributes in England and Wales

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Office for National Statistics (2022) Dataset: Energy efficiency of Housing, England and Wales, country and region

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Office for National Statistics (2022) Age of the property is the biggest single factor in energy efficiency of home

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Kingfisher (2022) Tackling the UK's energy efficiency gap: UK Homes Efficiency Report 2022

### 4. Conclusion

Under-occupation remains a problem in the UK, and older households could be incentivised to downsize in order to save on energy bills. Although an increase in downsizing alone is not enough to solve the housing crisis, it would help to relieve pressure in the housing market in the present. In addition to incentivising downsizing, the government must also build more social housing with secure tenancies, construct more affordable owner-occupier housing, and build-to-rent institutional housing. Policy should also disincentivise buy-tolet investment and change planning laws to allow an increase in building high density housing with good connection to transport links.

This report demonstrates that older households could save large amounts of money on energy bills by downsizing, as it is likely to cut their bills in half, if not more, depending on their circumstances. This would simultaneously free up under-occupied properties and lead to more supply of properties that would be suitable for, say, young families. By downsizing, older households would not only save large amounts of money on energy bills, but also contribute to improving the intergenerationally unjust housing market young people in the UK have to navigate.



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