

Data note 2/2017

Landlord register data for Aberdeen City 2017

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Introduction

This note provides an initial analysis of data from the register of private landlords provided by Aberdeen City Council for August 2017. One authority, Renfrewshire, has previously provided UBDC with access to anonymised data from their register for the purposes of exploratory research and we published [an initial analysis](#) of that last year. This suggested the data were potentially able to provide a very reliable guide to the growth of the private rented sector (PRS) in that authority.

Now a second authority, Aberdeen City Council, has released a more limited extract from its register following a Freedom of Information request. The data are public and can be [freely downloaded](#) from the UBDC website. The purpose of this note is to compare these register data with other data on private renting in the city to assess whether the picture they offer is likely to be equally reliable.

Local authority level

The extract provided is a simple list of the postcodes of register entries, without addresses and with no other property or landlord information. There are 27,150 entries.

For the authority as a whole, we can provide some validation of the data by comparing them to various Census and survey sources.

At the 2011 Census, Aberdeen City had 102,200 households, of which 17,700 or 17.3% were privately rented. Scottish Government estimates of household numbers show modest increases for Aberdeen between 2011 and 2016 – up 3.2%. And annual surveys by Scottish Government - [the SSCQ dataset](#) - suggest the proportion renting privately rose to 19.6% by 2015. Combining those two, we get an estimate of 20,700 private rented properties in Aberdeen by 2016 (= $17,700 \times 1.032 \times 19.6/17.3$).

Our earlier analysis of landlord register data for Renfrewshire shows that many properties have more than one entry on the register because each owner has to register separately. In that authority, for every 1000 registered properties, there were 1230 register entries. In Aberdeen - where we have 27,153 entries - our best guess, therefore, is that these represent about 22,070

properties (= 27,150 x 1000/1230). This estimate for the total number of registered properties is **about 7% higher** than our combined Census/survey estimate.

Some of this discrepancy could be explained by the following:

- our register estimate is for 2017 but, in making our Census/survey estimate, we have only adjusted for household change to 2016 and for tenure change to 2015;
- the number of entries per property may be different in Aberdeen than in Renfrewshire; and
- the register lists properties that may not be currently let whereas the Census counts households in the PRS at that time.

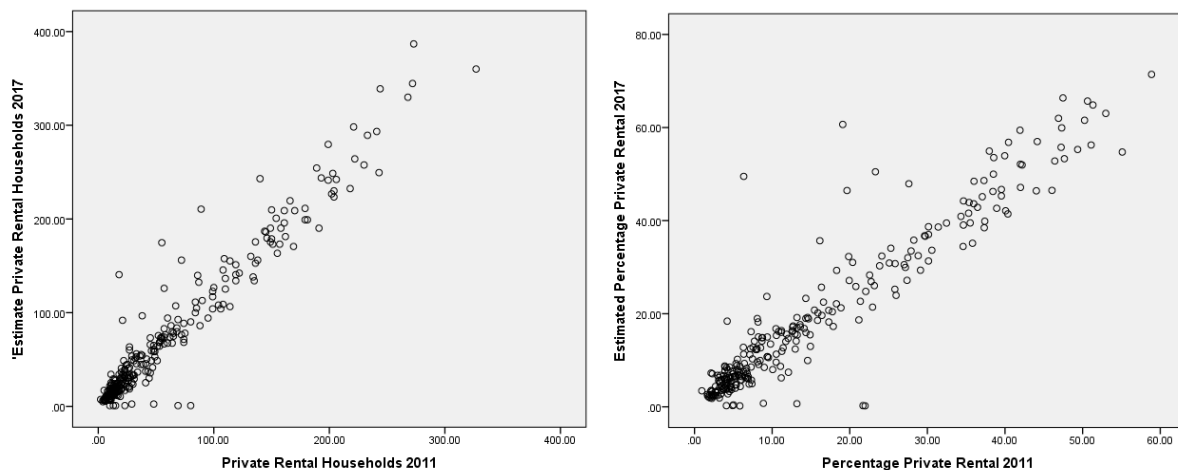
Given recent trends, the first and last point would both tend to lead our register-based estimate to be higher than the Census/survey estimate. The second point could lead to variation in either direction. There is also a fair degree of uncertainty in the survey estimates of the changes in private renting in the city since the Census due to the nature of sample surveys.

Datazones

Here we look at data for the Datazones in the City. These are standard units for producing small area statistics in Scotland, designed to have a population between 500 and 1000.

In Figure 1, the left panel compares the number of PRS households in each Datazone at the 2011 Census with our estimate for the number of registered properties in 2017; i.e. we scale the number of register entries down to allow for the difference between register entries and properties. The right panel shows the same as a proportion of all households (using the Census household numbers for simplicity). The main point that emerges is the very close relationship between the two figures: the areas that had most private renting at the 2011 Census have the most registered properties. The picture is strikingly consistent – as it was in Renfrewshire.

Figure 1: Private rented in Aberdeen's Datazones, 2011 and 2017

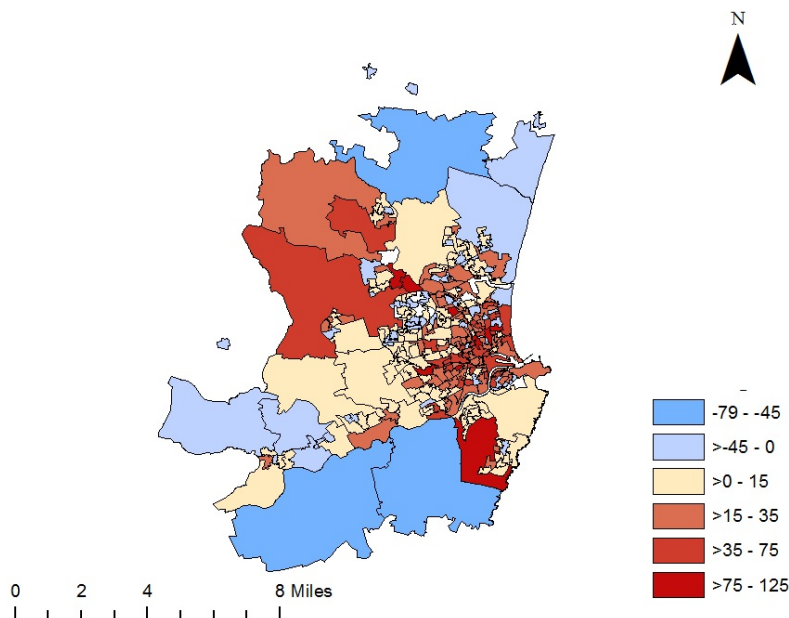


The chart has two other interesting features. First, the points above the main diagonal indicate areas where the number of registered properties in 2017 appears much greater than the number at the Census. One explanation is that these are locations where growth in private renting has been particularly rapid. We can see where these are on the map in Figure 2. Some fall in the inner city areas where the PRS is traditionally found, but others are in more suburban locations to the south or west of the city – locations that had little or no private renting in 2011. There is certainly scope for error in our estimates at the Datazone level. In some Datazones, the ratio of registrations to properties may be quite different to the average, for example. Nevertheless, this is a good basis for further local investigation.

Second, the points below the diagonal in Figure 1 indicate Datazones where the number of registrations in 2017 appears to be much **lower** than the Census estimate of PRS households in 2011. The areas with the largest differences (dark blue in Figure 2) all had zero or close to zero registered properties in 2017. These might be locations where landlords were failing to register for some reason, and this information could be used as the basis of further investigation or targeted enforcement activity.

Again, it should be stressed that errors can be a factor here. There were 200 register entries where the postcode could not be matched to any current or historic postcode for Aberdeen, for example - less than 1 per cent of the total but still a significant number, especially if several were for properties in the same Datazone. It is also noticeable that the three largest undercounts are all for Datazones on the more rural fringes of the authority. One explanation is that these may be locations with more agricultural tenancies, which are exempt from registration. If so, this is a reminder that landlord registration may provide incomplete coverage of the private rented sector even if compliance amongst those required to register is 100%. Of Aberdeen's 17,700 private rented households at the Census, 210 were tied accommodation (rented from an employer) (Census 2011 Table QS405SC).

Figure 2: Estimated change in number of private rented properties, Aberdeen Datazones 2011-17



In summary

The data contained in the landlord registration system provide a potentially powerful means of tracking the development of this dynamic part of the housing system. The legislation prevents local authorities from publishing the full details of all the entries but it does not prevent them from publishing summary statistics from these data for Datazones or other geographies as our FoI request has demonstrated. Nor does it prevent them sharing data with researchers on an anonymised basis.

Where we have been able to access such data, they appear to provide a very credible picture of the size and distribution of the sector, giving a close relationship with Census- and survey-based estimates. They would provide an excellent basis for a system to track the growth and development of the sector in Scotland in the years between Censuses.

The close relationship also suggests that the coverage of the registration system is very high. It is possible that coverage is lower than we are suggesting if, for example, the register has entries for properties that are not currently being let. We could investigate this further by linking records from the register to survey data but that would require access to more information than we have been given to date.

In Aberdeen we were provided with the simplest of extracts – a list comprising the postcode for each register entry. We were not able to undertake some of the more detailed analysis which was possible for Renfrewshire, e.g. on the scale of landlord portfolios. Nevertheless, the data would still form a very useful component of any efforts to track or monitor the growth of private renting locally. An FoI request that asked the authority to provide postcodes for each registered property would have been even more useful, perhaps, than one requesting the list of registered entries, at least for our purposes.