

A business case to help support your case for the resources to purchase the Excess Cold Calculator (XCC)

Policy background

The Housing Act 2004 places a duty on housing authorities to take appropriate enforcement action where serious hazards are identified in residential properties and a power to take action to deal with less serious hazards.

One of the most common complaints from both tenants in the private rented sector and owner occupiers is of their home being cold or of problems in paying their fuel bills. Such complaints may be the result of their homes suffering from the hazard of Excess cold. Guidance issued by the Secretary of State - "Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) Guidance" - requires these housing related hazards to be assessed in accordance with the HHSRS. Where such an assessment determines that a hazard is sufficiently serious, mandatory action is required and the landlord or owner is then notified of the most appropriate action to be taken.

The benefits of using the Excess Cold Calculator (XCC)

Investigation of Excess cold hazards is complex due to the number of technical items that need considering. BRE¹ have produced an online tool known as the Excess Cold Calculator (XCC) to help with such investigations.

The XCC is specifically designed to assist Environmental Health Practitioners and Technical Officers in the assessment of Excess cold hazards in UK dwellings. When provided with details about a house, flat or bedsit and its occupants the XCC provides an estimate of the likely gas and electricity costs and an assessment of the adequacy of the heating system. The tool can then be re-run with modifications to test the impact of possible improvement measures, such as packages of insulation and heating system improvements, to help consider suitable remedial action and assist in the calculation of the cost-effectiveness of such action. This provides valuable supporting evidence for Officers' decisions on the presence of Excess Cold hazards and in justifying any requirements for mitigation measures.

Officers have already used the XCC tool as part of the live pilot, which was only available to Local Authorities. Based on this, we consider that purchasing the tool will help with both educating and persuading landlords of the need to upgrade heating systems where necessary. In cases where formal action is required an XCC report provides evidence, underpinned by highly respected BRE expertise, which can be appended to the formal statement of reasons explaining the Council's action. It is hoped that such a report will

¹ The BRE Trust invest in research projects for the public benefit and all profits from BRE are gift aided to the BRE Trust. The calculations embedded in the tool are underpinned by BRE's long experience of measuring and modelling building energy consumption to support government programmes and for industry.

The XCC was developed by BRE with support and advice from the Chartered Institute of Environmental health (CIEH)

significantly reduce the likelihood of a landlord appealing to the Residential Property Tribunal (RPT) the cost to the landlord of such an appeal is £150. The cost of preparing for the tribunal in LA officer time can amount to as much as £7,000. The cost of XCC is based on the size of the LA's private sector housing stock averaged at £1,000. In the longer term it is hoped that the XCC will be used throughout the private sector housing section department to promote consistency in Excess cold assessments. Using the calculator is intended to aid officer confidence in the results. In the future it is hoped that the calculator will aid CO2 measurement.