How racism and discrimination affect
Black and Black Mixed heritage people's
access to social homes in England

MY COLOUR OUR SPEAKS BEFORE ME

MY COLOUR SPEAKS BEFORE ME

HOW RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AFFECT BLACK AND BLACK MIXED HERITAGE PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOMES IN ENGLAND

FOREWORD

WORDS BY VANESSA
PEER RESEARCHER

My name is Vanessa and I'm a Peer Researcher living in the West Midlands. Two years ago, my application for a social home was finally successful, so my children and I are now building a life in our forever home.

I got involved in this project because I was sick and tired of Black and Black Mixed heritage people being overlooked by the social housing system and slipping through the net. It's leaving children without homes – this is never acceptable in my eyes.

Black and Black Mixed heritage people face lots of barriers to getting a social home – whether that's racism, discriminatory policies, language barriers, or misinformation about your basic rights – lots of factors create a system that works against us.

Growing up I experienced the instability of bouncing from place to place as my mother struggled to get housing. It was the same story for my Jamaican grandparents, who were labelled aggressive because they didn't speak the Queen's English and could barely cover their housing costs. The government seemed to find ways to block them from getting a social home, which was daunting and traumatising.
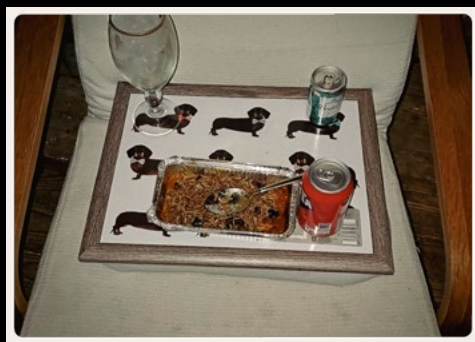
ABOVE:
PEER RESEARCHER PHOTOVOICE BY VANESSA
'... having our own space to relax, cook and enjoy meals means everything to me.'

Devastatingly, history has repeated itself. My children and I have moved between temporary accommodation, hotels, B&Bs, and sofa surfed while waiting for a social home. Our homeless journey lasted 15 years. The blatant discrimination that my grandparents faced still exists today, it's often just in a different form.

I love cooking, but the lack of cooking facilities in our temporary accommodation meant I had to live off take-outs or go to family members' houses to cook. It wore me down and led to multiple mental breakdowns. I've got learning difficulties so the constant rejection and mixed messaging from our local authority were even harder to bear. It felt like it took every ounce of oxygen from my body.

After years of struggling, I'm in a much better place, thanks to the security of a social home. Just like my picture shows, having our own space to relax, cook and enjoy meals means everything to me.

Being part of this project has given me the insight to better my personal life. I understand the policies better and can advocate for myself and others. My fellow Peer Researchers have been caring and non-judgemental, making me feel safe to ask for help, which I usually find difficult due to my past. I've felt accepted and understood and like I could achieve anything I want to do.

I don't like injustice. I always stand up to it, just as I've done as a Peer Researcher on this project. It's been a relief to learn that I'm not alone in struggling to access a social home, but it's also been heartbreaking. I'm angry because I know this harm can be avoided if policymakers urgently address it. I want the system to be more accessible for People of Colour, especially those with learning difficulties and language barriers. I also want experts by experience to build solutions for themselves, instead of having decisions made by those who haven't been forced to live like this.

My hope is that we improve access to social homes for People of Colour, breaking the cycle my family and other generations have experienced. I do not want my kids to go through the same struggles – I want the next generation to more easily secure their forever social homes.

WORDS BY MAIRI MACRAE
SHELTER DIRECTOR OF CAMPAIGNS,
POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

A social home offers people solid foundations to get on in life. Yet social housing in England is in desperately short supply, leaving record numbers of people homeless in temporary accommodation and 1.3 million households to endure the constant strain of being on the waiting list.

Systemic racism and discrimination intensify barriers to social homes for Black people and People of Colour. More broadly, the housing emergency in England impacts Black people and People of Colour most severely [1,2], leading to higher rates of homelessness [3] and poor conditions [4]. It is unacceptable that racism is still ingrained in the housing system, and urgent action is needed to dismantle these inequalities.

For that reason, in 2020, Shelter made a vital and overdue commitment: we must become an anti-racist organisation, actively fighting against racism and discrimination to defend People of Colour's right to a safe home. Following this strategic commitment, we developed an organisational plan to guide our mission to put racial justice at the heart of everything we do. This included a comprehensive review of access to Shelter's own housing advice and support services, which we published earlier this year alongside our latest strategic commitments for 2025–29.

This research turns our focus outwards, investigating what social housing providers and the national government must do to ensure equitable access to social homes.

Unfortunately, we cannot undo the wrongs of historic racism and discrimination in the housing sector [5]. But now the sector must disrupt its legacy by developing policies and practice that champion equity and justice.

This research is the product of a group of exceedingly talented, passionate Peer Researchers, all of whom identify as Black, Black Mixed heritage or of African descent, and have experienced the challenges of applying for a social home. They conducted peer interviews and captured powerful photos which shine a much-needed light on the injustices Black and Black Mixed heritage individuals face today in their pursuit of a social home.

We need a housing system built on the principles of inclusion, fairness and equity. At Shelter, we'll be campaigning to ensure this vision becomes a reality, and that starts with implementing the recommendations in this report to tackle systemic racism in accessing a social home.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Despite 'race' being socially constructed, it has profound implications for how people are treated in society and the opportunities they are given. Despite being an outdated concept, it is used to maintain hierarchies, privileging White individuals over all others.

The language used to describe one's 'race' or racial identity is therefore inherently fluid, subjective and deeply personal. Language also evolves over time, so terms used at one point might not feel comfortable at another point. From the outset, this research has focused on highlighting the systemic inequality and housing challenges experienced by people who identify as 'Black and Black Mixed heritage'.

However, the language of 'Black and Black Mixed heritage' does not comfortably capture how all Peer Researchers and interviewees identify. No singular term could achieve this given the subjectivities around language.

Our goal for this report as a project team of Shelter and Peer Researchers was to agree on language to use that, while imperfect, strives to be inclusive, clear, specific, and helps people to find and understand this research.

After much detailed discussion, we have opted for 'Black and Black Mixed heritage' (or B/BMH for readability) as we felt this term meets our goals most effectively. It is:

- widely understood and used across the sector and in other reporting
- understood by older and younger generations
- deemed comfortable for the majority of people who have contributed to this project

We fully recognise though, that this term does not work for everyone. Some felt that the language of 'White' and 'Black' does more to divide than unite us as human beings. We invite contributors and readers to substitute our terminology with the language they feel is most comfortable and appropriate.

Before the interviews, we discussed participants' preferences and adapted language accordingly. For example, some people preferred People of African descent, from the African diaspora, or people with African and Caribbean heritage.

In some parts of the report, we use different terms to describe racial identities. For instance, we match the language used in datasets to present statistics accurately. All quotes from interviewees maintain the language used by individuals to respect their preferences. Plus, some findings speak more broadly to People of Colour or Communities of Colour. These terms are used to refer to a multiplicity of groups of racialised individuals who are non-White and who may share experiences of racism.

We also refer to 'race' in inverted commas to emphasise that it is socially constructed and does not exist in and of itself.

**THIS REPORT CONTAINS
DISCUSSIONS ON SENSITIVE ISSUES**

**Including racial discrimination, substance
misuse, death and grief, other forms of
discrimination and hate speech, domestic
abuse, and mental illness. These topics
may be distressing for some readers.**

We acknowledge the emotional impact
they may have and aim to approach them
with care and respect. The content
highlights the systemic challenges that
contribute to housing insecurity and the
lived experiences of those affected.

Readers are encouraged to engage with
the material at their own pace, and support
resources are available for those who may
need them.

DEFINING THE TERMS

To understand how racism and discrimination shape people's access to social housing, we need to be clear about the terms we're using. This section sets out key terms used throughout the report — some relate to policy and systemic issues, others explain the roles, experiences and methods that shaped the research.

ANTI-RACISM

The proactive dismantling of systemic racism and racist policies underpinning the white privileged society in which we exist. It addresses the specific harm and impact of racism on all racially marginalised communities and proposes equality of outcome, not just opportunity.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SOCIAL HOUSING

Institutional or systemic obstacles, practices, or policies that unintentionally or deliberately exclude certain individuals from accessing social housing (in no way is the barrier a shortcoming of the individual themselves).

CO-DESIGN

An approach involving a collaboration between lived and learned expertise in designing outputs or solutions (designing with, rather than designing for).

COMMUNITIES OF COLOUR

Used to refer to a group of people who are part of a community that does not identify as 'White'.

CURRENT/CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICIES

See the latest government national guidance on the allocation of social housing. In this project, 'current' policies refers to guidance and policies which came into effect after the Localism Act in 2011.

EXPERT BY EXPERIENCE

An individual with first-hand experience of systems/situations who has knowledge or understanding that people who have only heard about such experiences do not have (e.g., lived experience of racism/discrimination and the housing emergency).

LEARNED EXPERIENCE

Second-hand knowledge of systems/situations typically from supporting or working alongside people (e.g. in need of housing support, or experiencing racism or discrimination). Some people may have lived and learned expertise.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

First-hand experience of systems/situations, especially when these give the person knowledge or understanding that people who have only heard about such experiences do not have i.e. lived experience of homelessness or social housing.

PEER RESEARCHER

Use their lived experience and understanding of a social or geographical community to help generate information about their peers for research purposes. They may be involved in assisting with research design, developing research tools, collecting and analysing data, or writing up and disseminating findings.[6]

PEOPLE OF COLOUR

Used to refer to anyone who does not identify as 'White'.

PHOTOVOICE

A visual qualitative research method that involves participants using photography and storytelling to document and share their or others' experiences. This approach is particularly effective for highlighting the perspectives of marginalised or underserved groups.[7]

RACISM

The oppression, discrimination, marginalisation, fear, hate and/or prejudice faced by racialised groups, based on a socially constructed hierarchy that privileges and prioritises White people. Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalises racial inequities.

RACIST POLICY

Any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups. Policies include written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes and regulations that govern people. For example, the UK's right to rent policies disproportionately affect racially marginalised groups and sustain racial inequality.

SERVICE USER

Someone who has been in contact with a service, in this context, to receive help to resolve housing problems.

SOCIAL HOUSING

These homes have rents linked to local incomes and provide an affordable, secure housing option for people across the country.

SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDER

Social housing is provided by either housing associations (not-for-profit organisations that own, let, and manage rented housing) or the local council. This act which saw the government roll back on prior, stricter guidance, and marked a shift towards local authorities in England having more autonomy and discretion in determining their own social housing allocation criteria.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION (TA)

Local authorities offer 'temporary accommodation' while a household's application for statutory homelessness assistance is being considered, or as a stopgap while they wait for the offer of a settled home.

B/BMH

The acronym B/BMH will be used for Black and Black Mixed heritage.

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Photography by Shelter.

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MY COLOUR SPEAKS BEFORE ME

THE UNEQUAL IMPACT OF THE HOUSING EMERGENCY ON PEOPLE OF COLOUR

CHAPTER 1

People of Colour in England are more likely to be homeless, live in deprived neighbourhoods and poor-quality homes.

Black people in particular are more likely to experience homelessness, even when social and demographic factors are accounted for.[8] This shows that structural racism is embedded within the housing system.

HOMELESSNESS AMONG PEOPLE OF COLOUR

People of Colour, and Black communities in particular, experience higher rates of homelessness than White people. Despite representing only 19% of households in England, over a quarter (28%) of those seeking help with homelessness are People of Colour. Breaking this down by ethnicity:

- **Black-led households**[9] (11%)
- **Asian-led households** (7.5%)
- **Mixed** (3.5%)
- **Other ethnic groups**[10] (5.7%)

We know that migration status, and discrimination play a significant role in this inequality.[11] Homelessness rates are rising among people leaving asylum accommodation.[12] Most asylum seekers are from countries whose populations are majority People of Colour.[13]

'Hidden homelessness' refers to the experience of living in unstable or precarious conditions without being officially recorded as homeless. It is also more common among People of Colour:

- **Overcrowding:** 25% of Arab-led households are overcrowded, the highest of any ethnicity. This is followed by Bangladeshi (18%), Black African (16%), and Mixed White and Black African (16%).[14]

- **Sofa surfing:** Asian households as a whole are 5.5 times more likely than White households to experience sofa surfing.[8] However, there is significant internal diversity:

  ◦ Pakistani and Bangladeshi households face the highest risks of homelessness within the Asian category, experiencing more severe housing insecurity than other subgroups.

  ◦ Indian and Chinese households have lower rates of sofa surfing, with similar rates to White households.

"HOMELESSNESS RATES ARE RISING AMONG ASYLUM SEEKERS, THE VAST MAJORITY OF WHOM ARE PEOPLE OF COLOUR."

Black-led households are 12 times more likely to be living in temporary accommodation (TA) than White households.[15] TA is often cramped and in poor condition, sometimes unsafe. It's increasingly out of the home area, far from family, friends, school and community. TA disrupts people's lives and significantly damages the mental health and wellbeing of both adults and children.[16]

BELOW:
PEER RESEARCHER PHOTOVOICE BY SIMON: THE SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL HOMES DRIVES HOMELESSNESS.

This photo shows people sleeping after work hours in the office of a housing support service. The Peer Researcher, who was also experiencing homelessness at the time, asked why we don't utilise spaces like the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, and churches to shelter people experiencing homelessness?

UNAFFORDABILITY AND POOR-QUALITY HOUSING

People of Colour are over-represented in the private rented sector,[17] where they are more likely to spend a larger proportion of their income on rent.[18] 38% of people of 'Other' ethnicity faced persistent low income after housing costs, followed by 25% of Black people, compared to 11% of White people.[19] This financial strain often pushes them into poorer-quality housing.

Recent economic modelling demonstrates that differences in age, region and tenure do not fully explain the fact that ethnic minority households spend more on poorer-quality housing. The report suggests that discrimination and a strong sense of belonging to certain neighbourhoods may constrain People of Colour's housing choices.[20]

Mixed White and Black Caribbean-led households have the highest prevalence of damp problems in their homes across all tenures (22%). This is followed by Black African (14%), Black Caribbean, Other, and Pakistani-led households (all 8%), which compares 4% of White British households.[21]

Non-decent housing refers to homes that are unsafe, in poor repair or lack proper heating and facilities, risking residents' health. Mixed White and Black African-led households are disproportionately represented in non-decent housing across all tenures:

• Mixed White and Black African households have the highest proportion (33%) living in non-decent homes.

• This is significantly higher than White British households, of which 18% live in non-decent homes.

• 24% of Mixed White and Black African households live in a non-decent home, the highest of any ethnic group.[22]

"BLACK-LED HOUSEHOLDS ARE 12 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION THAN WHITE-LED HOUSEHOLDS."

'When racism and discrimination intervene in the social housing process it becomes apparent.'

Simon, Peer Researcher

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination in the housing market further exacerbates the housing insecurity experienced by People of Colour and Black communities, contributing to their over-representation in poor housing conditions and TA.

Black and Asian people are more likely than White people to experience discrimination as a barrier. Previous Shelter research found that discrimination made it difficult for 14% of Black respondents to find a safe, secure and affordable home, compared to 2% of White respondents.[23]

ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING

A social home offers people solid foundations to get on in life. It is the only tenure which provides long-term security and rents which remain genuinely affordable over time (as they are tied to local incomes).

In England, there are 4.3 million social homes, housing 17% of the population.

Black-led households, particularly Black African and Black Caribbean households, are over-represented in social homes compared to the general population. However, at a national level, Black-led households are under-represented when compared to the proportion of Black-led households facing homelessness, as Figure 1 shows. Asian-led households are also under-represented in new social housing lets, by both general population and homelessness. By comparison, White households are over-represented among new social housing tenants compared to homelessness rates (80% and 69% respectively). As well as reflecting the disproportionate impact of the housing emergency on Black households and People of Colour, this raises questions about the additional barriers to accessing a social home.

The majority (87%) of tenants allocated social homes are UK nationals.[24] This contrasts widespread media narratives that claim migrants receive priority for social housing.[25] Recent migrants who are allocated social homes are often refugees granted permission to remain and may go on to become UK nationals.

Ethnicity breakdown of population, social housing lets and homelessness in England. Source: ONS, Census 2021, MHCLG, Social housing lettings 2023-24 and MHCLG, Homelessness tables 2023-24.

- ■ Proportion facing homelessness
- ■ Proportion of new social home lets
- ■ Proportion of population
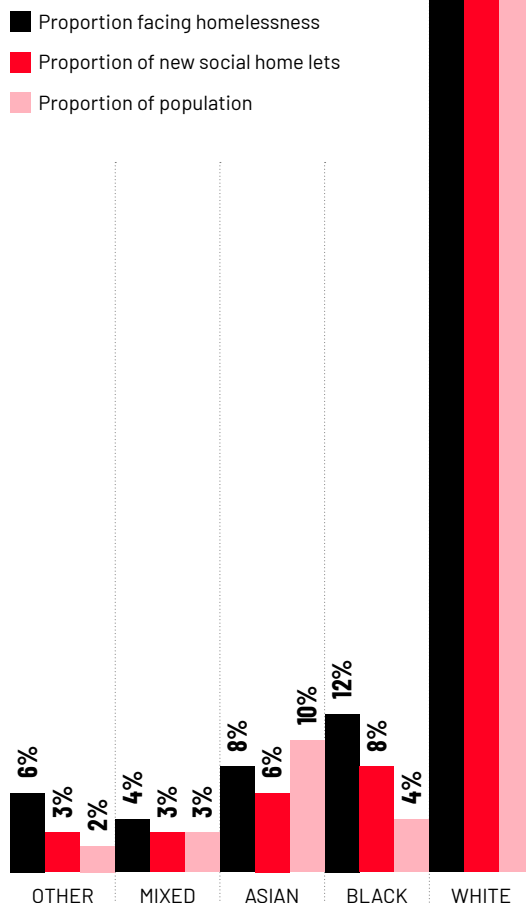
SUMMARY

This section sets out the inequalities faced by People of Colour in accessing safe, suitable and affordable housing in England. Black communities in particular face high homelessness rates which is not reflected in their access to social homes.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 2

This project specifically sought to answer:
how does racism and discrimination affect Black and Black Mixed heritage (B/BMH) people's access to social homes in England?

The research was conducted from April to December 2024 and adopted an anti-racist and participatory approach.

Peer Researcher, Dani reflects on the
peer research and photovoice methodology:

'Peer research is an important participatory research method, led by people with lived experience of the research area. This research methodology can create spaces that are less hierarchical than other methods, encouraging Peer Researchers to actively take part in leading, shaping, and conducting research.

"Peer led research moves towards a model of research that is meaningful, targeted and helps to collaboratively work for positive social change by creating spaces for communities to participate in research that affects them."

Peer research methodologies allow communities and organisations to coproduce. Projects that are reflexive, relevant, and meet the most urgent needs of the communities involved. By redistributing power and shaping safe spaces for those communities, we are valuing researchers that are experts by experience.

Peer Researchers, contributed to formulating interview questions and conducted interviews with a wide pool of interviewees. We gathered both qualitative and quantitative data which helped us to explore the research question objectively.

In addition to using peer-led research methodologies, we also used a participatory research method called photovoice. Experts by experience took a series of photographs that conveyed their experience related to how racism and discrimination affect Black and Black Mixed heritage people's access to social homes. Using photovoice gave an additional layer to the research using applied arts.

The photographs taken allowed us to open a dialogue that explored peer-led lived experience and key issues; enabling us to produce and document knowledge and assets rooted in community concerns. The community assets created by the Peer Researchers' photographs, can be used to further explore the research question, and/or reach stakeholders and policy makers.

By using a combined methodology of participatory research methods and organisational as well as academic research; in this project, we moved towards a democratic, peer-led, multi-layered, critical research approach.'

OUR APPROACH

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted with an anti-racist lens, prioritising studies published after the Localism Act 2011, given the act's profound impact in altering the social housing allocations framework we see today. This examined existing knowledge on the impact of current allocation policy on People of Colour. We included sources that centre People of Colour through authorship or methodology to examine the impact of social housing allocation policies on these communities.

2. STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP

A Stakeholder Advisory Group was formed with charities, academics, equality organisations and the Greater London Authority to inform project design and findings through mutual exchange of insights, experience and expertise.

3. PEER RESEARCHERS

A group of 16 Peer Researchers from Black and Black Mixed heritage backgrounds co-led the project. The research aimed to provide in-depth insights examining the specific and nuanced challenges that Black communities encounter and avoid flattening the diversity of racialised experiences. Peer Researchers were trained in research methods and supported through workshops, one-to-one wellbeing check-ins, and weekly reflective spaces.

Peer Researchers conducted photovoice and peer interviews in two phases to ensure they could build confidence in each methodology.

Phase 1. Photovoice:
Peer Researchers took 141 photos exploring their experiences and views on racism and discrimination in accessing social homes. Peer Researchers completed reflective logs and analysed the photos collaboratively in workshops.

Phase 2. Peer interviews:
Peer Researchers were consulted on the interview topic guide. Peer Researchers conducted 46 interviews with Black and Black Mixed heritage participants across England. All participants had experience of trying to access a social home, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. A full demographics table can be found in the Appendix.

Data was analysed thematically by Shelter researchers and refined in a co-analysis workshop with Peer Researchers and Shelter colleagues through collaborative discussions.

Policy recommendations were mainly identified by Peer Researchers and the Stakeholder Advisory Group, over the course of two half day workshops. The workshops were facilitated by Shelter's Policy Team and the recommendations below emerged from these discussions. **Further analysis will be required to better understand and define the specific mechanisms to implement the recommendations.**

"PRIORITISING A MORE INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE APPROACH HAS PROFOUNDLY ENRICHED THE RESEARCH."

ANTI-RACIST PRINCIPLES

Social research continues to be shaped by 'White racial' frames which privilege Whiteness and marginalise People of Colour.[26]

This is Shelter's first explicit attempt to adopt an anti-racist approach to research by adhering to six anti-racist principles. It has not been without its challenges and limitations. Nonetheless, prioritising a more inclusive, equitable approach has profoundly enriched the research.

SHELTER'S SIX ANTI-RACIST PRINCIPLES

1 TRANSPARENT

We share power, are transparent and accountable in decision-making, processes, actions and systems.

2 OPTIMISTIC

We identify how we can change things for the better rather than default to how we have always done things.

3 COURAGEOUS

We do what's right, not easy. We challenge each other and ourselves.

4 AMPLIFYING

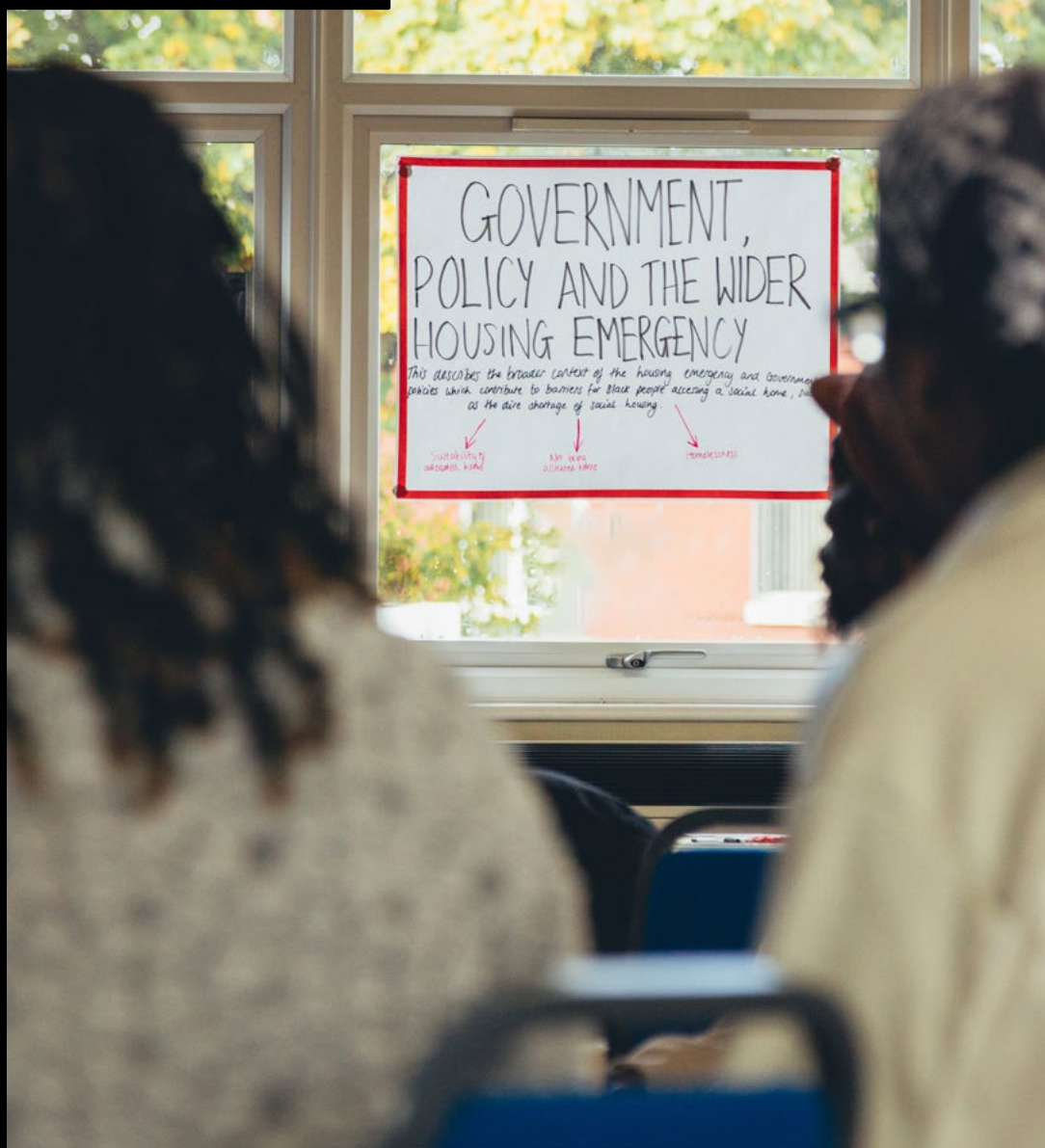We centre marginalised voices and lived experience.

5 LEARNING

We provide safety, space and time for growth and continuous improvement.

6 INTERSECTIONAL

We recognise racism intersects with other structures of oppression and adopt an intersectional anti-racist lens across our work.

HISTORIC BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SOCIAL HOMES FOR PEOPLE OF COLOUR

CHAPTER 3

People of Colour's access to a suitable social home today is shaped by a long history of systemic racism and discrimination within housing systems and across society more generally.

This chapter synthesises insights from the literature review which refers to People of Colour more broadly, and relevant reflections from Black and Black Mixed heritage (B/BMH) interviewees and Peer Researchers.

HISTORIC POLICY SHIFTS SHAPED THE AVAILABILITY OF SOCIAL HOUSING

The chronic shortage of social housing limits access for all ethnic groups [27, 28]. This fundamental issue is rooted in the policy decisions of the past and is compounded for Communities of Colour, whose access is also shaped by systemic racism.[29]

Many B/BMH participants reflected on intergenerational differences in access to social housing. In stark contrast to current times, access in the post-war period of the 1940s-60s was considered more straightforward by some interviewees. This was because greater stock was available due to large-scale social housing construction after World War II.

'My parents came here in the sixties and eventually they got a four-bedroom council house… but in those days it was different. There was lots of housing about in them days [sic.]… There was enough to go around.' INTERVIEWEE

'Lack of availability and security of social homes is a new challenge that older generations did not appreciate in the same way.' CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

The Right to Buy policy introduced in the 1980 Housing Act allowed council tenants to purchase their homes at a discount. The policy marked a shift, transforming social housing into 'a stepping stone to aspirational homeownership', often 'at the expense of providing housing for those in need'.[30] While there have been recent reforms to the Right to Buy programme, the policy is credited with significantly reducing social housing stock.[31, 32]

Some Communities of Colour have been disadvantaged by this market-led approach as they were less likely than White households to have the income required to purchase their homes.[33] This has resulted in lower home ownership today, with Mixed White and Black African, Black Other, Arab and Black African households having the lowest home ownership rates (14%, 16%, 21% and 22% respectively).[34] Black Caribbean households have ownership rates of 31%, while White British (70%) and Indian households (68%) have the highest rates.[35] A lack of inherited property and assets among Black British families has limited wealth-building opportunities, heightened housing precarity, and perpetuated economic disparities.

'Poverty is inherited and passed into generations.' INTERVIEWEE

Despite the greater availability of social housing stock in the post-war era, overt and widespread discrimination, though illegal in practice, posed a significant barrier to People of Colour accessing social homes.[36] This contrasts with more covert 'slippery discrimination' that proliferates today (see P.46).[37]

SOCIAL HOUSING IS AT HISTORICALLY LOW LEVELS

The number of new social homes built over the last 70 years has dropped dramatically, from **200,000 homes built in the mid–1950s to under 10,000 in 2023/24.** Source: MHCLG, Table 1000 and ONS, housebuilding.

NUMBER OF SOCIAL HOMES BUILT: **200,000**

150,000

100,000

50,000

1950   1960   1970   1980   1990   2000   2010   2020
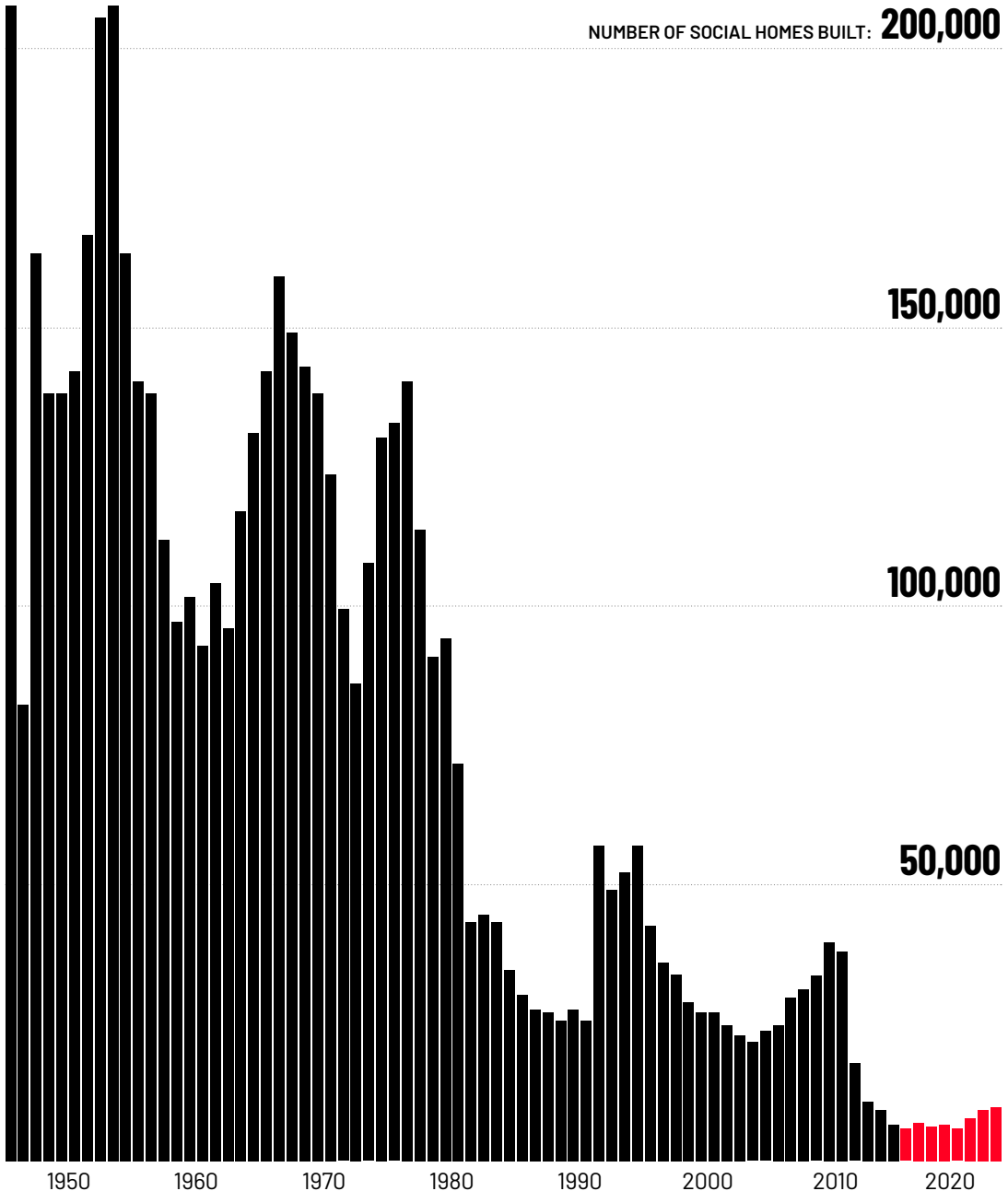
COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

BY SIMON

Exploring B/BMH collective resistance and legacy of Black activism against racial discrimination in housing.
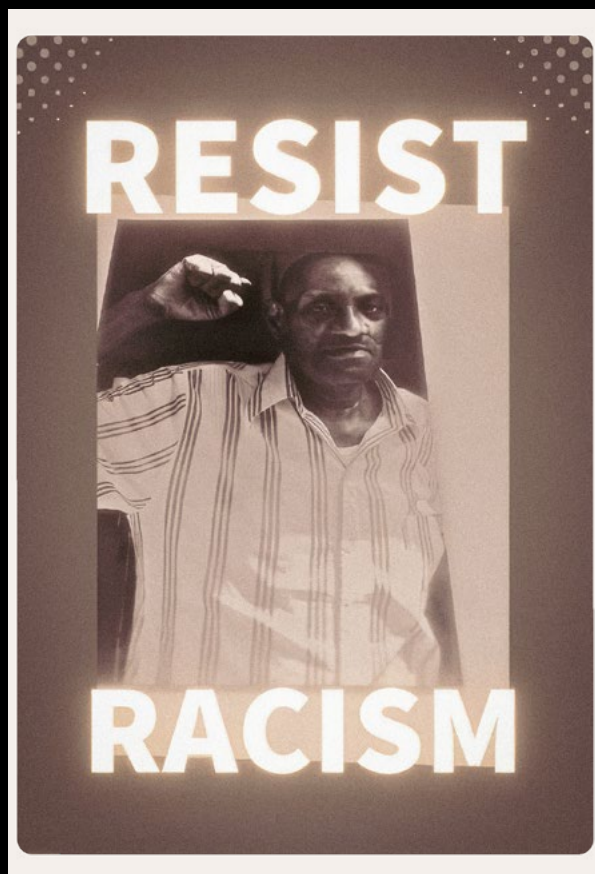
ABOVE:

Simon captures a photo of activist Darcus Howe (famed for being an Anti-Racist) in his local library, a place he passes regularly. The photo embodies community strength and the resistance of racism.

'We're gonna, we're gonna do it together as opposed to alone because we can do more together than we can do alone.'

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

BY JAMILA

'The photo below is of a building I pass once or twice a week and when given the exercise to capture photos through photovoice, this building drew my attention.

The building is unique as it has different dates in bold and is a building that is easily noticed. The building has different dates over generations and to me signifies the journey of Black people encountering racism throughout history, highlighting where we have been, where we are now, and what has changed.

Racism has definitely changed throughout the years, before racism was more blatant in your face, now it's discreet. However, it appears that racism is very much still a big issue we face amongst the human 'race'.

I grew up in social housing in a single parent household and this was due to factors of income, 'race', and family structure. Unfortunately, my mother would have been unable to afford buying her own property and would never have been in the position to do so due to discrimination and racism within society. There is a lack of security to secure general wealth. However, what I can say is that there weren't any difficulties for my mother in securing social housing back in the 1990s. I am now facing similar experiences, however I'm having challenges securing social housing due to the shortage of social housing.

Whilst I was conducting my interviews, an interviewee had been living in her flat for over 20 years and reflected on how the experience was easier back then. According to her, being allocated housing was not an issue. It was a straightforward process of informing the authorities and then being called for viewing and handed keys.

Her current accommodation is overcrowded and she wanted to proceed with contacting housing for a bigger space. However, when she was informed of the process she was immediately overwhelmed and felt the likelihood of her getting a suitable accommodation would be slim, as she wouldn't be deemed as homeless or urgent. She also felt that her Black heritage would put her at a disadvantage.'

ETHNIC SEGREGATION DUE TO RACIAL STEERING

Racial steering is an example of institutionalised racist practice. Racial steering became prominent in the post-war period and involves letting agents and social housing providers acting as 'gatekeepers' by placing People of Colour 'away from areas favoured by White people'.[38, 39]

Such practices contributed to ethnic segregation across the country,[40] and directly discriminated against People of Colour by pushing people into under-resourced areas.

'Generations of racialised communities can be disempowered by the housing system, having seen the struggles their elders have faced.' CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

These patterns of discrimination continue to shape housing allocation today. Many participants observed that B/BMH people continue to be allocated 'lower quality housing or being placed in a less desirable area' (as one interviewee put it). For instance, one participant faced difficulties getting a home in neighbourhoods she felt were 'reserved for the high and mighty' by her local council, and not allocated to B/BMH applicants. Another described the steering she has witnessed today as 'ethnic cleansing'.

"RACIAL STEERING BECAME PROMINENT IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD AND INVOLVES LETTING AGENTS AND SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS ACTING AS 'GATEKEEPERS' BY PLACING PEOPLE OF COLOUR 'AWAY FROM AREAS FAVOURED BY WHITE PEOPLE'."
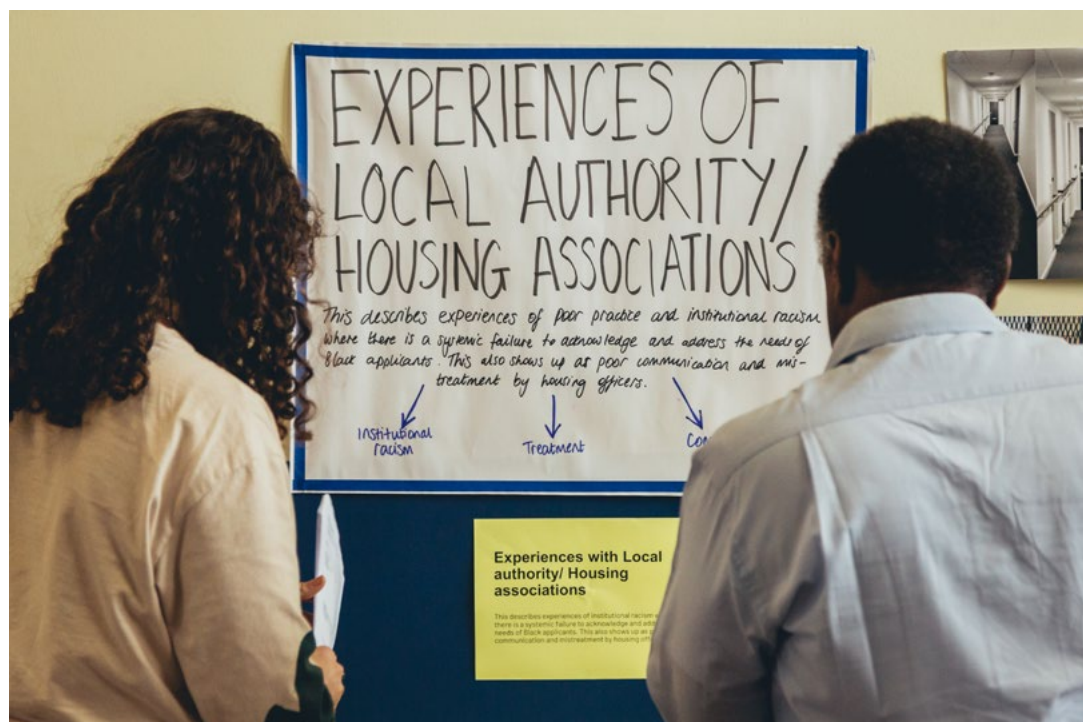
'Racism has definitely changed throughout the years, before racism was more blatant in your face, now it's discreet.'

Jamila, Peer Researcher

PAST MIGRATION AND ALLOCATION POLICY

The vast majority of social housing tenants in the past and present are UK-born. People of Colour who migrated to England and applied for social housing faced additional challenges accessing a social home due to increasingly restrictive allocations [41] and migration policies.

1940-60s (post-war)

INEQUALITY AND THE FIGHT FOR RIGHTS:

- Post-war migrants often lived in sub-standard housing due to poverty, lack of knowledge about housing rights and overt racial discrimination.
- Social housing policies became more restrictive, with:
  ◦ local authority residence requirements (mandating applicants live in an area for a certain period before being eligible for social housing)
  ◦ differentiation of migrants based on origin, status and rights[42]
- Grassroots groups, e.g. the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD),[43] the Indian Workers Association, and Brixton Black Women's Groups, resisted racist violence and discriminatory housing practices in the 1960s. This prompted legislative changes (e.g. the **Race Relations Act 1968** which outlawed racial discrimination in all areas of public life, including housing).

1970s-2000

PROGRESSIVE TIGHTENING OF MIGRATION AND SOCIAL HOUSING POLICIES:

- Immigration status was linked to restricted access to public funds in 1980.[44] This laid the foundations for the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition affecting 2.6 million people,[45] disproportionately People of Colour.[46]
- **Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993** excluded asylum seekers from social housing by requiring individuals to remain in temporary accommodation (TA) until their claim was determined.[47]
- **Housing Act 1996** and **Asylum and Immigration Act 1996** made it a statutory requirement to exclude people seeking asylum or persons subject to immigration control from housing registers.[48]
- Post-2000, the Home Office took responsibility for asylum seekers, further formalising the link between social housing access and immigration status.[49]

Increasingly restrictive policies have thereby entrenched the exclusion of migrants from social housing.

"POST-2000, THE HOME OFFICE TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS, FURTHER FORMALISING THE LINK BETWEEN SOCIAL HOUSING ACCESS AND IMMIGRATION STATUS."

"PEOPLE OF COLOUR WHO MIGRATED TO ENGLAND AND APPLIED FOR SOCIAL HOUSING FACED ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES ACCESSING A SOCIAL HOME DUE TO INCREASINGLY RESTRICTIVE ALLOCATIONS AND MIGRATION POLICIES."

THE RISE AND FALL OF BME HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Black Minority Ethnic (BME) housing associations were an innovative and empowering means for Black and People of Colour to address the racial discrimination repeatedly ignored by the mainstream social housing sector.[50, 51, 52]

Initiatives date back to the 1930s, with African – and Indian-run residential premises offering accommodation to People of Colour in housing need,[53] e.g. the West African Students Union.[54] BME housing associations grew rapidly from 1980 to the early 1990s.[55]

Yet their prominence has been falling since the 1990s as organisations struggled to remain viable against larger, more commercial housing associations.[56] Mergers during the last fifteen years were necessary to enable their survival.[57, 58]

BME housing associations have faced criticism, such as concerns about the ability of merged groups to authentically represent and remain accountable to the communities they claim to serve.[59, 60] More recently though, there have been calls for dedicated funding to revitalise the BME housing sector to address housing inequity faced by People of Colour.[61, 62, 63]

SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined how policy decisions across many decades have disadvantaged racialised groups trying to access a social home in England.

The chronic shortage of social housing, compounded by the Right to Buy policy, particularly impacts Communities of Colour.

Racial steering, systemic racism and restrictive migration policies have further limited access.

Despite the rise of BME housing associations to combat discrimination, their prominence has declined.

CURRENT POLICY BARRIERS TO ACCESSING A SOCIAL HOME

CHAPTER 4

There are numerous barriers in current allocation policy that applicants must overcome to be allocated a suitable social home in England.

These can be directly or indirectly discriminatory to some Black and Black Mixed heritage people.

This chapter highlights five current policy barriers to accessing a social home:

1. **NATIONAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR 'PERSONS FROM ABROAD'**

2. **LOCAL QUALIFICATION CRITERIA**

3. **PRIORITISATION ON THE WAITING LIST**

4. **OFFERS OF ACCOMMODATION**

5. **PRE-TENANCY CHECKS**

1

National eligibility test for 'persons from abroad'

The first barrier to overcome is statutory eligibility requirements, set by the government and uniform across England. If an applicant is ineligible, it's unlawful for local authorities to allocate them a social home.[64]

This includes people who are subject to immigration control or not 'habitually resident' in the UK and Ireland Common Travel Area. There are exceptions in the regulations, including those granted refugee status, with leave to remain on humanitarian grounds, or via refugee resettlement schemes (e.g. from Afghanistan and Ukraine). European Economic Area (EEA) citizens and their family members with settled status are usually eligible.

The eligibility test for 'persons from abroad' is inherently discriminatory on the basis of nationality. The test is also likely to have discriminatory effects on the basis of 'race' and ethnicity.

Some participants in this research highlighted experiences of excessive questioning and heightened scrutiny regarding their evidence of British citizenship compared to their White peers, despite growing up in England. They described an uneven 'burden of proof' built into the allocations process when determining eligibility, reinforcing patterns of discriminatory racial profiling in decision-making. This echoes evidence of racial profiling by immigration officers and the lasting impact of immigration legislation on racialised communities.[65, 66]

Frequent amendments to legislation, regulations and statutory guidance have made the eligibility test for social housing very complicated. This could disproportionately impact recent migrants who already face language barriers and a lack of access to the information needed to navigate the system.[67]

It is difficult for individuals to enforce their rights. Although legal aid is available once the local authority has reached its final decision, there are very few specialist providers able to do this work and individuals have to be financially eligible.

'You wait for social housing — they wait for so long, they are really bad. [People are placed] in temporary accommodation or hotels for years. [As for us], we are now in our third year, and we don't even know [what's happening or when it will end].'

Ahmed, Peer Researcher

2

Local qualification criteria

The second barrier to accessing a social home is meeting local qualification criteria. The Localism Act 2011 encouraged local authorities to set their own allocation policies to address local housing need, taking into account local homelessness and tenancy strategies.[68]

This localist approach has led to a messy patchwork of local entitlements.

As there's no comprehensive research on local qualification criteria, it's difficult to assess on a national basis the impact of local allocations policies on B/BMH applicants.[69]

The table below reviews the potential discriminatory effects of the most common local qualification criteria.

LOCAL QUALIFICATION CRITERIA	DISCRIMINATORY EFFECTS
No home ownership, other high-value assets or savings [70]	This can mean people who own their own home but are severely overcrowded (because they can't afford to buy or rent a home that's large enough), won't qualify for a social home. Black and Asian households are over-represented in larger family households,[71] and overcrowding.[72] It can also affect survivors of domestic abuse who need to move to a safe home. Mixed 'race' people, and Mixed White and Black Caribbean people in particular, experience the highest rates of domestic abuse.[73]
Local residency or local connection tests requiring applicants to have lived in the area or have a work or family connection for a certain number of years	Statutory guidance recommends a minimum residency of two years,[74] though this varies and many authorities require five. Local residency criteria can exclude recent migrants, including refugees, gypsy Roma and traveller communities.[75] Also, it can exclude households who are homeless in TA outside their home area: Black households are over-represented in TA, and People of Colour are more likely to be placed out of area.[76, 77, 78]
No history of rent arrears	Affordability issues impact Black and People of Colour private and social renters more than White renters.[79] Structural inequality means higher poverty rates among Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Black households than White.[80] Inadequate housing benefit increases the risk of arrears, with the household benefit cap disproportionately impacting People of Colour.[81]
No history of anti-social behaviour (ASB)	Harrison and Phillips note that 'discriminatory practices might arise in the control of anti-social behaviour or the treatment of young people in housing'.[82] ASB criteria can affect survivors of domestic abuse where the perpetrator is causing the ASB, as well as those escaping serious youth violence or grooming by criminal gangs. Black children are more likely to be impacted by serious youth violence due to factors such as institutional bias.[83]
Positive behaviour, such as being in employment	Black and Mixed households are less likely to be employed than White households.[84]

3

Prioritisation on the waiting list: reasonable preference

If people meet the national eligibility test and local qualification criteria, they will be able to get onto the local waiting list for a social home. However, the next hurdle is prioritisation within the list.

Local authorities must give 'reasonable preference' to certain categories of people, including people who are homeless, at risk of violence, occupying unsatisfactory housing conditions (e.g. overcrowding), need to move on medical or welfare grounds (e.g. disability), or at risk of hardship.[85, 86] Some applicants with an urgent need are also entitled to 'additional preference'.[87]

Other than this, statutory guidance gives great flexibility to local authorities on how they prioritise applicants.[88] Some councils prioritise based on time spent on the waiting list.

However, in practice, even applicants who should have reasonable preference may still have little realistic chance of being allocated a home because, however long they've waited, other applicants will continue to join the list ahead of them.

'You waste your whole life just waiting… there's nothing for you.' INTERVIEWEE

There is no data comparing time spent on waiting lists by different ethnic groups. However, repeatedly B/BMH participants reported 'being pushed to the back of the queue' and longer wait times than White applicants. The slippery nature of discrimination meant this was not always possible to evidence.

'One of the most frustrating aspects of this scenario was the feeling of being constantly deprioritised. Every time I checked my application status, I was either told that there were no available properties or that my case was still under review. I felt like I was being pushed to the back of the queue, [it was a] very bad experience and I couldn't help but wonder if my 'race' was playing a role in how my application was being handled.' INTERVIEWEE

'Honestly, the people that I saw that they allocated those houses [to]… I made [an] application before them, [but] they are [al]located houses more sooner [sic.] with people that were [pre]dominantly White people. So I have nothing to justify that action than [it's] because I'm a Mixed Black person. That is why I have not been treated fairly.' INTERVIEWEE

Another interviewee felt 'there is something systematic' happening where a minority of White applicants in her small block have been given direct offers from the council and moved sooner 'when their situation isn't any different to their neighbour who is Black'. Meanwhile, Black neighbours, sometimes in worse housing situations, are persistently overlooked: 'This system is discriminatory, it's not fair, it's racist.'

TIME AT STANDSTILL

BY JAMILA

Exploring themes on time, resilience
and navigating the system.
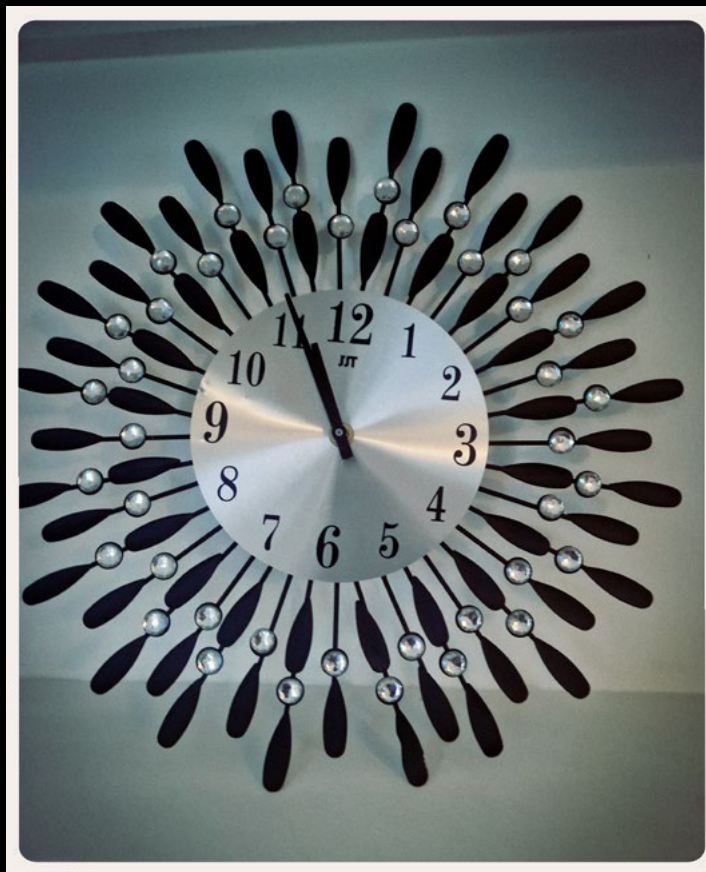
ABOVE:

The clock symbolises the time and
patience required to navigate the
social housing system.

It also represents the past, present,
and future: we know racism has
occurred in the past and the present,
and we hope for change in the future.

'Hoping for that change, striving for that
change because it could be really difficult…
as associated [with] this clock… you have
to exercise that patience because no matter
if you want something to be dealt with at a
certain time, I feel like the challenges we face,
especially as a Black person, it would most
likely take longer than another, non-Black
person… I'm just hoping for a positive future.'

④

Offers of accommodation

Once applicants have overcome the above hurdles and are on the waiting list with a high priority, there may be further barriers to being allocated a suitable home.

Legislation requires that social housing providers offer applicants a degree of choice in their allocation schemes.[89] However, the ability of People of Colour to exercise choice is limited given the scarcity of suitable social homes.[90, 91, 92]

Some social housing providers operate a choice-based lettings (CBL) scheme as an alternative to making direct offers.[93] Under CBL schemes, vacant homes are advertised and applicants bid for the homes they are interested in. The home is usually allocated to the bidder with the highest priority who matches the criteria for the home.

Evidence suggests that People of Colour are housed in more deprived areas under both direct offer and CBL schemes,[94] but CBL schemes can be more empowering and transparent. In recent years local authorities are returning to direct offers.[95] These can lead to discrimination or disadvantage for People of Colour, such as receiving a direct offer of a home in a neighbourhood notorious for racism or without access to essentials, such as Halal food shops or mosques.

For anyone, relentless online bidding can harm mental health. One interviewee juggled early starts for work with an online bidding portal that opens at midnight, which gradually deteriorated her mental health through routine loss of sleep. Reliance on digitised allocation schemes may also leave some behind. Research points to People of Colour being more likely to experience digital poverty, such as inadequate computing facilities, and poor Wi-Fi or internet access.[96]

"FOR ANYONE, RELENTLESS ONLINE BIDDING CAN HARM MENTAL HEALTH. ONE INTERVIEWEE JUGGLED EARLY STARTS FOR WORK WITH AN ONLINE BIDDING PORTAL THAT OPENS AT MIDNIGHT, WHICH GRADUALLY DETERIORATED HER MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH ROUTINE LOSS OF SLEEP."

"MOST SOCIAL LANDLORDS NOW UNDERTAKE STRINGENT AFFORDABILITY ASSESSMENTS AS PART OF THEIR ROUTINE PRE-TENANCY CHECKS AND WILL REFUSE TO LET TO PEOPLE WHO FAIL THEM."

5

Pre-tenancy checks

Even when people have overcome the barriers to getting onto the waiting list and being prioritised for, and offered, a suitable home, the individual social landlord may still refuse to let to them.

Most social landlords now undertake stringent affordability assessments as part of their routine pre-tenancy checks and will refuse to let to people who fail them.[97] Some require a month's rent in advance at sign-up.[98] The need for affordability assessments arose from a combination of the welfare reforms introduced in 2012 and reduced government grants for social housing, which made social housing providers more reliant on income from rents.

Black people and People of Colour are more likely to be living in poverty, and therefore be in receipt of benefits. This means that cuts and sanctions to housing benefit hit harder, increasing chances of failing affordability checks and restricting access to a social home.[99, 100]

SUMMARY

- **National eligibility criteria:** Restrictive policies limit social housing access for some migrants, which can lead to excessive questioning and scrutiny for People of Colour, even if born in England.

- **Local qualification criteria:** Local residency requirements can disproportionately disadvantage recent migrants and those in temporary accommodation, while rent arrears policies may further exclude People of Colour who face higher poverty rates and greater affordability challenges due to structural inequalities.

- **Prioritisation on the waiting list:** Some participants report long waits and feeling pushed to the back of queue. The lack of social homes means even applicants who should have reasonable preference may have no realistic chance of being offered a home.

- **Offers of accommodation:** Direct offers can result in Black households being offered unsuitable homes. Choice-based lettings can be more empowering and transparent, but both systems risk People of Colour being placed in more deprived areas, with choice limited by the scarcity of suitable social homes.

- **Pre-tenancy checks:** Strict affordability assessments and advance rent requirements can restrict people's access to a social home. Cuts to housing benefits and higher poverty rates among Black households increase their risk of failing these checks.

'We need to get to the root of racism and to the root of what is causing us to be actively discriminated against.'

Joy, Peer Researcher

FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION SHAPING B/BMH PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOMES
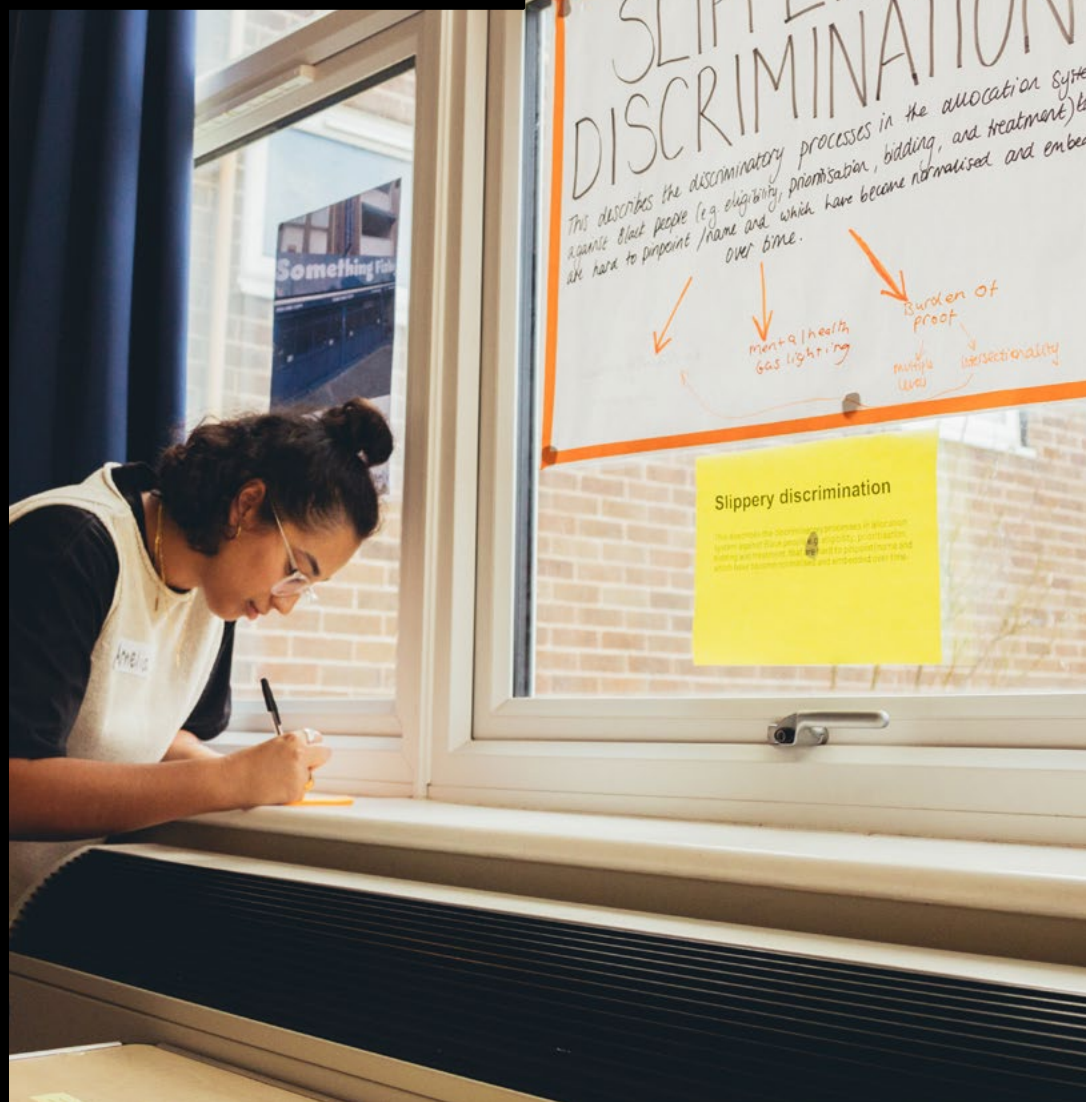
CHAPTER 5

Both overt and covert forms of discrimination are systemic in the social housing system in England.

Access to social homes for Black and Black Mixed heritage (B/BMH) people is adversely impacted.

'There are some kinds of discrimination [in] policy and practices going on within the local authority which has deprived me and a lot of other black individuals' access to a social home.' INTERVIEWEE

This chapter identifies

THREE FORMS OF SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION OPERATING IN THE SOCIAL HOUSING SECTOR

1

ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Anti-Black racism was coined by Akua Benjamin (2003) and is rooted in anti-Blackness, which describes a belief system and ideology that devalues Blackness and shapes the way Black people are viewed and treated.

2

SLIPPERY DISCRIMINATION

Lukes et al. (2019) describe subtler, more covert racism in housing which is now prevalent. It can be hard to pinpoint, prove and challenge, particularly as it has become systemically embedded and normalised over time.

3

INTERSECTING FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) term 'intersectionality' illuminates how different systems of oppression interact, such as racism, sexism, and ableism, to impact an individual based on various aspects of their identity.

The following sections highlight how these three forms of discrimination impacted B/BMH applicants' journeys to social homes.

1

Anti-Black racism

Anti-Black racism describes how the marginalisation of Black people, or those perceived to be Black, is embedded into various social, economic and political systems and institutions.[101]

It is a product of racial hierarchies developed over centuries of slavery and colonisation, reinforcing Eurocentric knowledge systems that uphold, as one co-analysis workshop participant put it, 'anything Black is less than White'. It denies Black people's humanity, dignity and full citizenship.[102]

ANTI-BLACK RACISM WAS EXPERIENCED BY PARTICIPANTS AT MULTIPLE LEVELS:

1. Institutional level
There is a systemic failure to acknowledge and address the needs of B/BMH applicants. They often described feeling unheard, neglected and, in some cases, an indifference from social housing providers.

2. Interpersonal level
The day-to-day interactions with housing officers and frontline staff where B/BMH applicants experienced discrimination and mistreatment. Anti-Blackness was also perpetuated by some Black housing officers who were reported as, knowingly or unknowingly, conforming and reinforcing discriminatory treatment of B/BMH applicants.

3. Internal level
B/BMH applicants described how being denied access to a social home and encountering systemic barriers affected their self-perception and feelings of worthiness.

Anti-Black racism is evidenced in the differing levels of mistreatment B/BMH applicants experienced based on their perceived proximity to Whiteness. Texturism (i.e. hair type) and colourism (i.e. skin tone) are components of anti-Blackness, where straighter hair and lighter skin tones are treated preferentially. This promotes Eurocentric beauty standards and White supremacy. Several interviewees experienced or knew applicants who described

being penalised by housing officers for not having 'long' and 'blonde' hair or being of a darker hue. This reflects how Whiteness is enforced as a standard of desirability and worthiness shaping access to housing.

1.1. STEREOTYPING AND HOMOGENISATION
B/BMH applicants experienced or were acutely aware of harmful stereotyping and homogenisation.

'Ignorant people thinking that we're linked to crime, we're linked to violence, we're linked to drugs.' INTERVIEWEE

'I spoke to various people [at the council], and I heard that some of them just made assumptions of me without even meeting me or knowing my background.' INTERVIEWEE

B/BMH applicants were repeatedly perceived by social housing provider staff as 'angry' or 'aggressive', perpetuating the racist trope.

'Black men are referred to as aggressive and are set unreasonable goals that do not benefit them in the long run.' INTERVIEWEE

'The angry Black woman stereotype where it's like if you do advocate for yourself, you're now being told that you shouldn't fight back.' INTERVIEWEE

These homogenising stereotypes are tied to deeply ingrained anti-Black biases which evidently shaped discriminatory attitudes and allocations. As a local councillor reflects:

'There was a culture within the housing establishment that was dominated by prejudice and stereotypes about certain groups… if you allocate this person to this type of house then this is what's going to happen. Not on the basis of any research or evidence.' INTERVIEWEE

THIS IS OUR HOUSE

BY TRACY

Exploring themes of displacement,
slippery discrimination and self-doubt.

'This is our house, our family home for 52 years. When I say it was ours, really it belonged to my Jamaican father and my half-Irish mom who moved there in the early 1970s with me and my three brothers.

I had informed the council that I was living there to look after my dad who had an onset of dementia, and as we were in lockdown, there were no face-to-face interviews. Fast forward to 2021, and my son living four hours away was in an accident and I naturally went to be with him. When I got back, the council had changed the locks on my parents' house.

There were no letters, no warnings as far as I was concerned. Fortunately, I sort of knew my rights and managed to get hold of a housing officer. He said he deals with people like me all the time and that immigrants come here and think they can have/take everything. He also said over his dead body would I get to keep our family home.

I had never met that man face-to-face and only spoke to him over the phone, but he had so many pre-conceived notions and stereotypes about me because of my Black Mixed heritage.

The house and the picture of myself in black and white reflect how I remember that time. It's such a sad memory. I've used red too as it's used at stop signs, signifying risk or danger. The red used over my mouth shows the way I was unable to stick up for myself and feelings of vulnerability.

Through the workshops and the interviews, the same things are being said up and down the country. Silence isn't always golden, and if no one says anything, how will it change? But be careful because you don't want to be that angry Black woman! To be part of a group that is helping to tackle these issues, and with the encouragement and kindness of the Shelter team and the other researchers, I can pass on knowledge and encouragement.'

2

Slippery discrimination

Racism within the social housing system in the 21st century often appears as 'slippery discrimination'. Slippery discrimination describes the subtler, more covert form of racism in housing that is now more prevalent than overt racism, particularly following the implementation of Race Relations legislation.[103] The term resonated strongly with Peer Researchers.

'It really hit, that word [slippery]. It just resonated with me. I've never heard it put that way before, but I completely understood it... I couldn't put my finger on the way I felt about [my experiences]. But yeah, that word seemed to sum it up.' PEER RESEARCHER RESPONDS TO THE CONCEPT OF 'SLIPPERY DISCRIMINATION' BEING DISCUSSED BY THE GROUP

Interactions with social housing provider staff, other residents or the allocations system at large often left B/BMH applicants feeling they are being treated unfairly and questioning whether this is on account of their 'race'. Participants also used terminology like 'wishy-washy' or 'murky' discrimination to articulate this experience.

'I suppose that's what makes racism quite insidious, that it's a system that we can't always pinpoint.' PEER RESEARCHER REFLECTS ON THE CHANGING NATURE OF RACISM

'I don't think it's removed the racism. It's just taught people how to be cuter with it.' AN INTERVIEWEE REFLECTS ON THEIR EXPERIENCES WORKING AT A LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING DEPARTMENT

RIGHT:
PEER RESEARCHER PHOTOVOICE BY TRACY: THE EMOTIONAL TURMOIL OF SELF-DOUBT.

Tracy uses scales to illustrate the emotional turmoil of self-doubt and emotional impact of the microaggressions she faced 'Am I doing right thing? Should I have to drop? Should I speak more? Should I said something? Can't always?'

2.1. THE BURDEN OF PROOF

Those on the receiving end of slippery discrimination describe an innate awareness of when they are being treated in a racist manner – they know or feel it to be true.

'The way you're treated, the way you're responded to. Like if you ask questions, the way you'll be answered, the looks, the whispers, the movement, everything. You just sense it when there's a negative energy around.' INTERVIEWEE

The Equality Act 2010 is designed to protect against such experiences. But, in practice, the victim carries the burden of bringing a county court claim to enforce their right to not be discriminated against. B/BMH people may be put off from doing so because the slippery nature of contemporary racism makes it difficult to prove in a legal system which requires hard evidence. There is little place in such a system for 'knowing' or 'feeling' something to be true.

'You can't call something racism because you only ever see how you are treated. So it's hard... to say if that's how everyone's treated. But when you've got this skin and you've lived for a while, you kind of recognise it.' INTERVIEWEE

Lack of access to Legal Aid is an additional barrier, as well as the Legal Aid Agency's 'culture of refusal' which holds that discrimination cases do not generally meet the 'significant wider public interest' test.

The current legal system therefore disempowers those who experience slippery discrimination in their social housing journey and allows discriminators to continue to act with impunity.

Self doubt
Sensitive
Over thinking

NO ACCESS

BY SIMON

Simon describes his own experience of slippery discrimination, using satirical photos to show unnecessary restrictions and unfair treatment.

'As an African descendant, I have personally experienced the effects of slippery discrimination whilst attempting to access social housing in this country.

Slippery discrimination is a form of racist discrimination that is disputable due to its obscure nature. You often just get the sense that 'something fishy' is going on. The discriminator and the victim can both be unaware of their descent into the perverse world of racial bias. Due to the lack of awareness, it is difficult to demonstrate irrefutable proof of racial prejudice, which makes slippery discrimination frustratingly hard to identify.

Individuals of African mixed or unmixed ancestry are the victims of slippery discrimination within the social housing process. The effects of slippery discrimination act as barriers, barring them from securing social housing.

My experiences inspired Me to photograph various literal 'barriers' which I composed into a photovoice to reflect the feelings of African mixed or unmixed progeny who experience slippery discrimination during the social housing process.

Slippery discrimination is important for Me to highlight because my experience of it resulted in an illegal denial of access to social housing. In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, My legal status was repudiated, which I believe is due to the hue of My skin and the distorted view taken of it.'

3

Intersecting forms of discrimination

Housing needs are shaped by an individual's identity, such as disabled people requiring accessible accommodation. Anti-Black racism overlapped with other forms of discrimination to compound barriers to accessing a social home for B/BMH applicants. We found this was particularly true for migrants, lone mothers, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities and working-class people.

'Race is still central in discrimination but when other factors also come into play then [you] are damned and excluded.'
CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Local authorities often failed to adequately tailor their service offer or social housing provision to meet these needs.

'Different identities mean [you are] more likely to face people with discriminatory views.' CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

B/BMH applicants reported the following forms of discrimination when trying to access a social home.

3.1. XENOPHOBIA AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENT

B/BMH people with migration statuses, or those assumed to be migrants, felt 'othered' or treated as an 'outsider' by social housing providers.

'[You're] always assumed and treated as someone who belongs somewhere else.'
INTERVIEWEE

Over time, migrant identities have been racialised as non-White, and People of Colour who are British citizens or British-born are sometimes falsely perceived as migrants by social housing providers.

'It's like if you aren't a White British person, your immigration status always feels shaky.'
CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Anti-immigrant rhetoric and scapegoating is fuelled by the media, politicians and the general public. These harmful ideologies led to B/BMH applicants reporting discrimination by social housing providers.

"ANTI-BLACK RACISM OVERLAPPED WITH OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION TO COMPOUND BARRIERS TO ACCESSING A SOCIAL HOME FOR B/BMH APPLICANTS."

3.2. GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Please note the following section contains references to domestic abuse.

Black women experience misogynoir, a unique form of discrimination due to the intersection of racism and sexism.

'It's hard for women but it's triple hard for a Black woman. She's [a Black female social housing applicant] got to work the utmost hardest because not only is she discriminated [against] for being a [Black] person but she's a woman. So she's not even listened to full stop. It's before she even gets out the womb, she's already got them things against her. You're Black, you're a woman instantly, that's against you. And then as you grow up in society you're taught, it's a man's world. You will always come second to a man.' PEER RESEARCHER REFLECTS ON BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

Black women described assumptions that they were inherently strong and resilient which led services providers to underestimate their challenges and needs for support.

'There's always that view that Black women, we don't suffer in the same way as other ethnicities, so people view us like that so they're less likely to help us.' INTERVIEWEE

'People assume Black people have a thick skin – and they do, because of oppression. But when you see a strong Black woman, there is also a little Black girl crying out inside.' CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Women who have survived domestic abuse frequently felt let down by social housing providers. Domestic abuse disproportionately impacts women,[104] and individuals with a Mixed White and Black Caribbean background experience the highest rates compared to other ethnic groups.[105] Evidence shows Black women are more likely to report domestic violence to the police yet are less likely to be referred to specialist support,[106] and report feeling failed by mainstream services more broadly.[107]

Most commonly, survivors reported that domestic abuse was used as an 'excuse' to rehouse them outside of their area, often away from support systems.

"EVIDENCE SHOWS BLACK WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO THE POLICE YET ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE REFERRED TO SPECIALIST SUPPORT, AND REPORT FEELING FAILED BY MAINSTREAM SERVICES MORE BROADLY."

3.3. STIGMATISING LONE MOTHERS

B/BMH lone mothers that their rights awareness, self-advocacy and communication skills were underestimated by social housing providers. When knowledge of housing rights was displayed, one interviewee reported that 'you're treated worse, not better' by the local authority.

'When people find out you're young, you're a single mum, you're Black. There's a certain… stereotype, so [the local authority] assume that you don't know your rights [or] how to properly advocate for yourself. And I found during that process whenever I would communicate with them, I'd always send in an email or letter that's dated and signed by myself. And I noticed they'd be surprised that I'll be communicating in such a formal manner.' INTERVIEWEE

3.4. DISCRIMINATION BASED ON BEING LGBTQIA+

Homophobia mainly surfaced in relation to how people were treated by other residents in temporary accommodation (TA) while waiting for a social home or when considering neighbourhoods to live in.

'As a Person of Colour and also being gay, sometimes I don't necessarily feel safe where I live.' INTERVIEWEE

'I'd heard that being on an estate can be quite dangerous… back then, you being Black and gay, you're just asking for trouble.' INTERVIEWEE IN HIS 50S EXPLAINS WHY HE REFUSED AN ALLOCATION ON A PARTICULAR ESTATE IN LONDON

Some participants reported challenges in getting appropriate support, even from services tailored specifically to help LGBTQIA+ people with their housing.
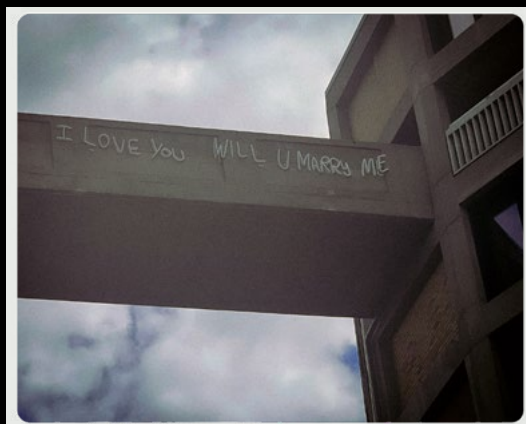
'I thought they would have been a bit more help within that charity as they were meant to be catered for people that are LGBT and coloured people as well.' INTERVIEWEE

THEY ARE BEING DISPLACED

BY VICTORIA

Exploring themes on gentrification,
anti-immigration sentiment and homophobia.

ABOVE:

*Victoria captures landmark graffiti at
Sheffield's Park Hill Estate which has
been turned into a neon installation,
symbolising the estate's transformation.*

*Originally built in the 1950's, Park Hill
declined and has been redeveloped.
The redevelopment has faced criticism
for offering few affordable homes
and displacing former working-class
residents. The graffiti, once a personal
love declaration, has become a
marketing tool for commercial gain,
reflecting the gentrification
of the estate.*

ABOVE:

*Victoria captures an image of her friend's
packed bags to highlight the increased risks
when racism, homophobia and anti-immigrant
sentiment intersect.*

**'My photo describes a refugee who has just gotten
her status and is about to start her journey getting
a social home. For now, she is in a hostel
surrounded by homophobia, which is threatening
to her mental health. But she is focusing on the
end goal which is to get a suitable council home.
Being a gay woman, they are worried about
approaching the council and the treatment they
are going to receive because of their sexuality
and also the fact that they are Black.'**

3.5. ABLEISM

Social housing providers are legally required to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, but participants repeatedly reported this did not happen. This included time limits to complete online forms penalising people with dyslexia, housing officers failing to give people more time to understand when needed and not providing forms in accessible formats (e.g. different colour schemes or Easy Read versions). One participant with ADHD highlighted 'it is so hard keeping on top of everything', which was made harder when different departments gave conflicting advice.

Some people highlighted a lack of understanding by local authority staff that disabilities are not always visible and can show up in many different forms.

'[People with learning difficulties] get left out a lot more... because learning difficulties is not something that's widely recognised. And a lot of people just look at it as [the] person's just lazy or not communicating with [them]. They're ignoring [that] the learning difficulty... prevents them from being able to function like a neurotypical person. And in terms of housing, then people get evicted a lot more because they're the ones that don't open the letters because they can't read the letter.' CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

One participant felt Black disabled people, like him, received poorer treatment by their local authority than their White peers.

'I saw [my local council] try to see how they can give some more attention to [people with a disability]. But even in that, I still discovered that people that are Black heritage, that are disabled... were not given the same attention to White people that were disabled. Are you kidding me? So there was still some unjust... unfairness in the process.' INTERVIEWEE

3.6. CLASSISM AND GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification is inextricably linked to the intersections of class and 'race' politics. Typically, regeneration projects disproportionately impact working-class, Black and other Communities of Colour who have been actively displaced by Whiter, more affluent communities.[108] Several people in this research, and many others,[109] called out the gentrification process for enacting 'social cleansing'.

'Over the years, I have seen how gentrification has transformed my community. Many Black families including my own relatives have been priced out of the area [by] wealthier and predominantly... White newcomers'. INTERVIEWEE

Gentrification has left B/BMH social housing applicants and tenants feeling deprioritised by their local authority. It has negatively impacted people's sense of belonging in areas, transforming once familiar spaces and altering the make-up of these communities.

'Why is it every time you have a poster about how wonderful it is to live in an area, the person's always White and looks hipster, because you're creating an idea of what an ideal place this is to look at with [what] the ideal people to live here look like and it's not us.' INTERVIEWEE

'The places where I used to feel [a] sense of belonging are being replaced by luxury apartments and high-end stores. And this is very distracting [sic] to witness.' INTERVIEWEE

One participant discusses how areas where children used to play are now off-limits, and pathways that once provided easy access to shops are blocked.

'They've been there for 50 years now and suddenly you're being told that the area that kids have always played on, they can't and that this is being blocked off to stop children going through there. The estate isn't for them anymore.' INTERVIEWEE

'They've segregated [and] pigeonholed our families.' INTERVIEWEE

Gentrification drives competition for the remaining social homes, which compounds the challenges for B/BMH people trying to access a home.
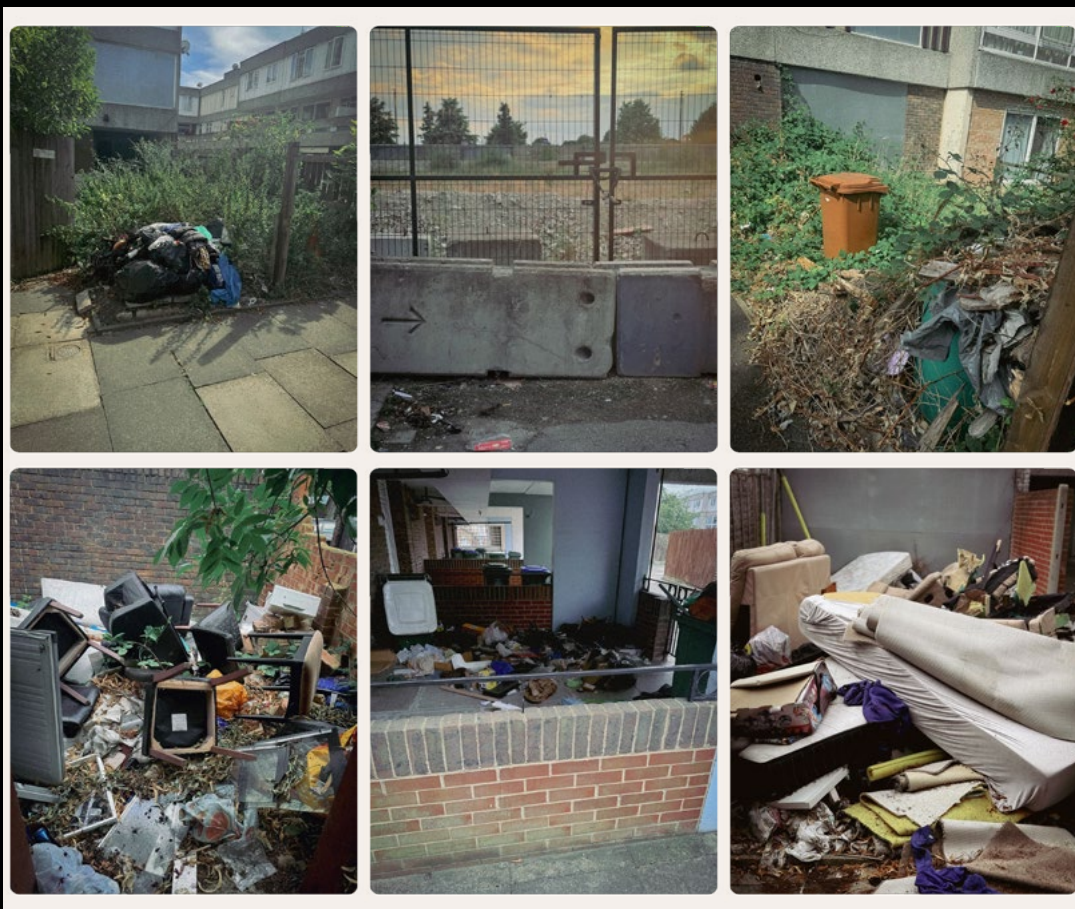
IN SOLIDARITY

BY ANDREA

Exploring themes of racialised displacement and gentrification.

RIGHT:

Live campaign to stop the demolition of social homes on an estate where tenants are disproportionately Black people and/or migrants, who feel they are being displaced as the landlord seeks to replace their homes with 'affordable' housing.

'Since 2015 the residents on the Lesnes estate in Thamesmead have been campaigning to save their homes from being demolished as part of a so-called 'regeneration' project by Peabody, the housing association managing the estate.

Racism and gentrification have played a part in this demolition. Almost half of the population in Thamesmead East identify as Black.[110] Many moved here from West Africa in the early 2000s because back then the price of the homes was more affordable.

The majority of the residents are social tenants living in poorly maintained homes with damp, mould and heating issues. Residents had been supportive of the original plan to retrofit the houses under the promise they could stay in their homes. But Peabody then decided this was too expensive.

The residents feel that the new Elizabeth tube line opening in 2022 has played an essential role in why Peabody want to demolish 596 homes[111] and replace them with over 1,950 homes[112] – just 3% will be social housing.[113]

Ageism is also another issue, with a lot of the residents being of pension age, and a smaller number of families and young people who are property guardians studying at the local Arts college. This is going to make leaving the estate even more difficult as so many people have made their life here and had no intention of leaving.

The residents feel like their concerns have been ignored by Peabody and opportunities to engage and involve the community have been missed. The campaign to save people's homes continues.'

THE IMPACT OF DISCRIMINATION ON SOCIAL HOUSING APPLICANTS

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL

Please note the following section contains references to mental illness and substance abuse.

B/BMH applicants described the lasting emotional and mental toll of experiencing anti-Black racism and other forms of discrimination when trying to access a suitable social home. It left many applicants feeling dehumanised.

'It's horrid for humans to feel this way – confiding in people of power... even if they're unable to [do] something, you should treat people like human beings.'
PEER RESEARCHER REFLECTS ON HER ONGOING JOURNEY TO A SOCIAL HOME

This mistreatment can have serious mental health implications, including anxiety, depression and paranoia. The stress led some to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance misuse as a form of self-medication. For others, this distress had become normalised.

'The stress, the anxiety that I went through during that period, the feelings of invisibility and helplessness was really kind of pressing on me perceiving this discrimination during [the] application process.' INTERVIEWEE

'He's [interviewee's friend] saying he has depression and things like that, but he doesn't look at it as a weakness. He looks at it as just something that comes along with going through the [social] housing process.' INTERVIEWEE
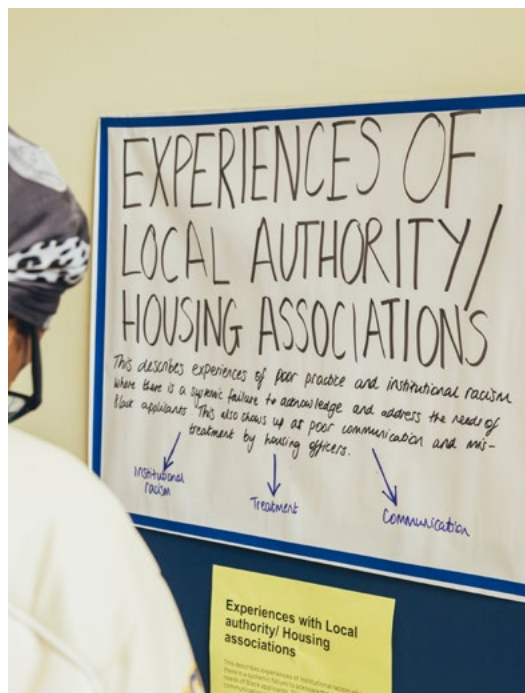
Participants described being let down by the system at large.

'[The social housing journey] makes one question their worth, purpose and existence. People become jaded and disillusioned. It develops a distrust of local authority.'
CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Children in B/BMH families also experienced the stress of the social housing allocations system. Children endured insecure housing and disruptive moves between temporary accommodations while waiting for a permanent home. Distress was heightened for children with learning difficulties or disabilities.

"THIS MISTREATMENT CAN HAVE SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS, INCLUDING ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND PARANOIA."

DOWN IN THE DUMPS

BY SIMON

Exploring the emotional impact
of racial discrimination.
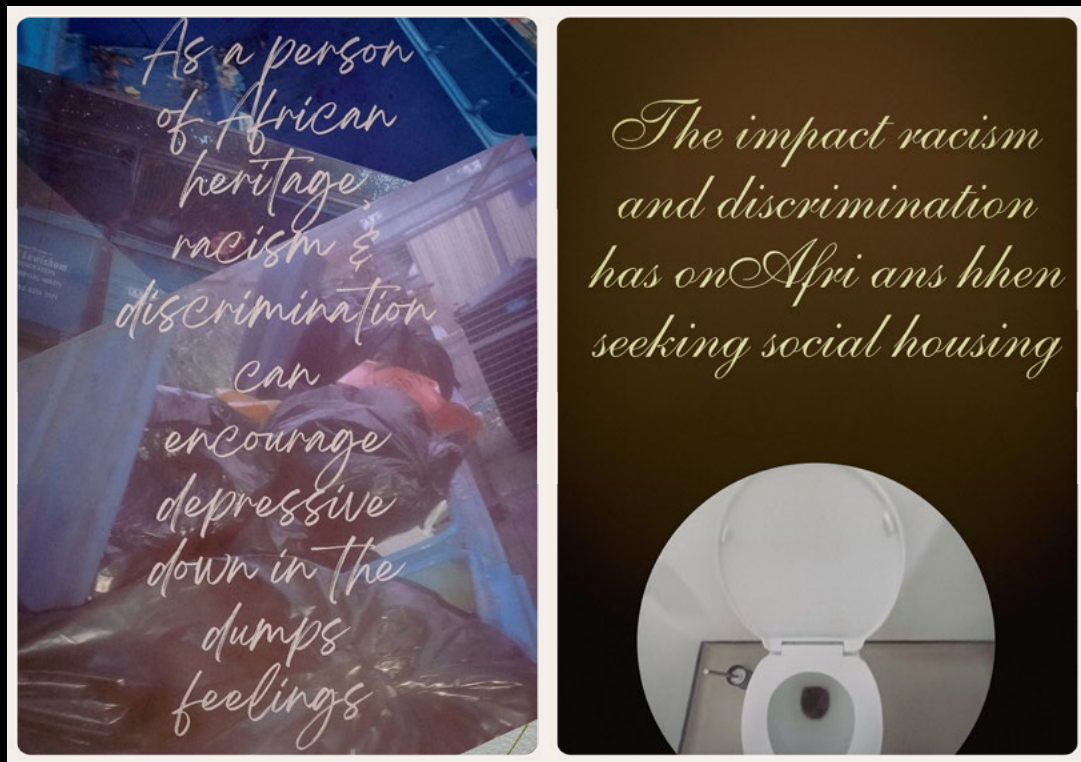
ABOVE:

*Simon captures images of toilets
and bins and uses satire to show the
impact of racism and discrimination
on B/BMH.*

**'Discrimination and racism
impacts those of African heritage.
It makes them feel like faeces
or down in the dumps. Suffering
racism and discrimination can,
if one's not careful put you in a
depressive mood.'**

CONFUSION AND SELF-DOUBT
By demanding irrefutable proof of racism and discrimination, people were left feeling dismissed by housing officers. Participants described experiencing confusion and self-doubt, as they questioned their own perceptions of a racist interaction.

'Maybe that particular agent... is just having a really bad day, like something could be happening in their life or whatever... [So] how do we know the difference? Where do you say, "oh he's probably having a bad day" or... "maybe he's just a bad person?"' PEER RESEARCHER IN A WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

B/BMH women in particular questioned whether the discriminatory treatment in the allocations process was due to their 'race', gender or any other intersecting identities.

'Especially the slippery discrimination... [and] the intersectionality of it, when you start to question "what is it about me that's making you not want to do your job?" Is it because I'm a woman? Is it because I'm a single mum? Black? African? I can't put a pin on why you're treating me like this.' PEER RESEARCHER IN THE CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP
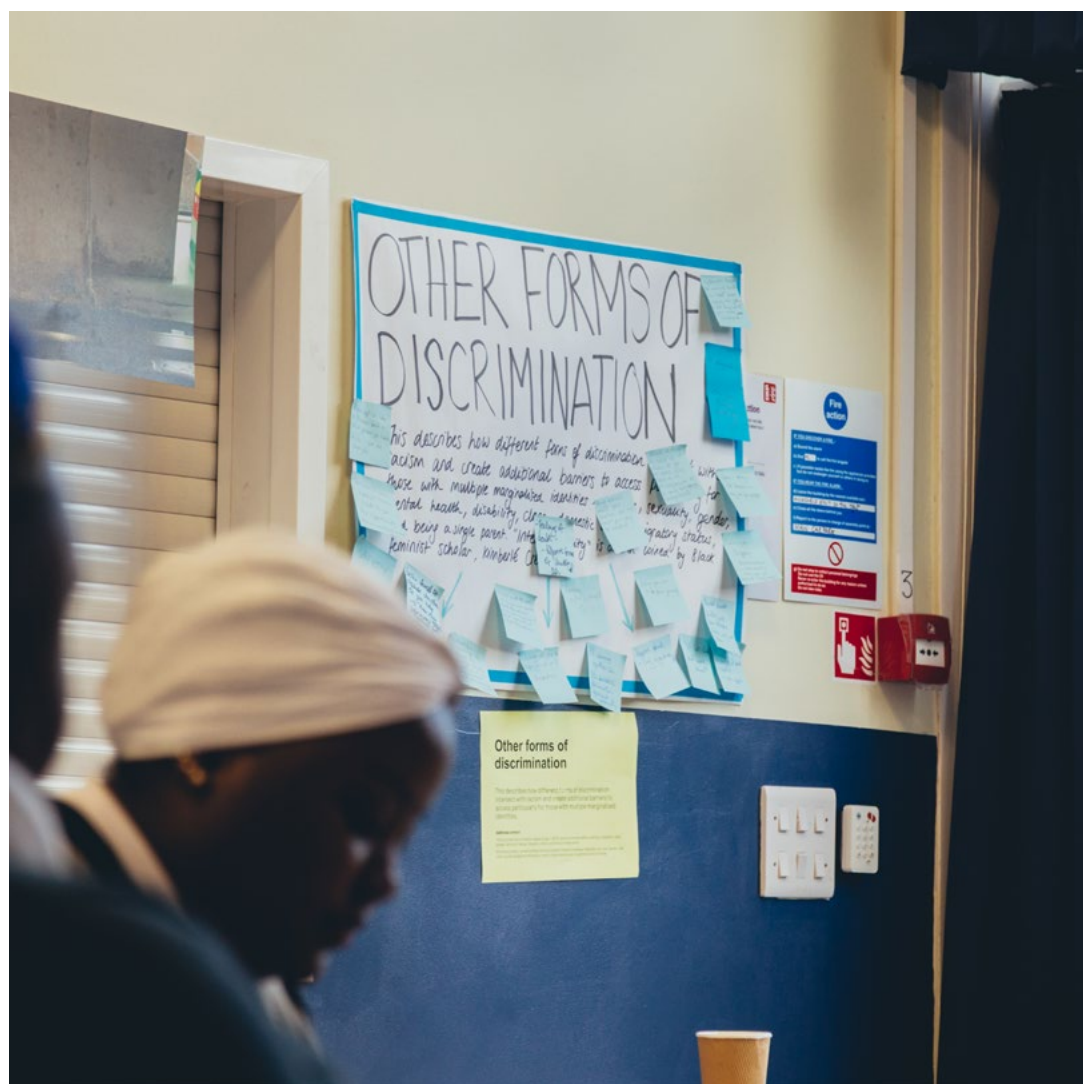
JUDGEMENT AND STIGMA

At times B/BMH applicants felt judged and stigmatised by social housing providers because they were, or were perceived to be, working class and unemployed. Some felt they needed to prove they were employed to obtain better support. This links to stigmatising notions of 'deserving poor and undeserving poor' which intersect with wider stigma of social housing tenants.[114]

'The council just thinks we're all low class, we're all "bottom of the barrel" type people. I think there's definitely that type of discrimination.' INTERVIEWEE

'I feel like the council just think that social housing tenants or "wannabe" tenants… don't work, they're just like… on benefits and they just want these nice houses for nothing. And that… is so far from the truth. I'm sure everyone in this block pretty much works. At least one person in their household works.' INTERVIEWEE

This fear of being stigmatised prevented some B/BMH applicants from being open about their experiences and circumstances. They feared, or had experienced, that what is disclosed is then 'used against you'. This sometimes limited the information shared by Black individuals and therefore their ability to receive the full support they required.

[When asked about whether they had considered omitting details] 'I do have those thoughts, if I was to not put that I was a Person of Colour and I'm also gay, would that benefit my situation.' INTERVIEWEE

'I feel like these are some of the things that kind of hold us back from getting the help that we need so to speak, the fear of being judged, the fear of the stigma, the fear of, if I say too much, they're going to think this or they're going to do this or there will be repercussions.' PEER RESEARCHER

This fear around disclosure was heightened among applicants reluctant to reveal their migration status due to concerns of it blocking access to a social home or of being treated differently.

'From most of my experience with [migrant] communities that I work with [the] issue [migration status] is seen as very personal or too sensitive just to share openly with people that probably just don't know… it may have an impact on people's experiences with housing in general and also with racist attitude[s] within the housing system.' PEER RESEARCHER SHARES THEIR EXPERIENCES IN CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP

'It doesn't surprise me that people especially… if they're mistrustful of authorities, especially if they've been treated badly by the Home Office… The last thing they're thinking is, "Oh yeah, if I'm nice and honest, I'm sure these people will treat me fairly".' INTERVIEWEE

"THIS FEAR OF BEING STIGMATISED PREVENTED SOME B/BMH APPLICANTS FROM BEING OPEN ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AND CIRCUMSTANCES. THEY FEARED, OR HAD EXPERIENCED, THAT WHAT IS DISCLOSED IS THEN 'USED AGAINST YOU'."

SUMMARY

- **Anti-Black racism within the social housing system** in England manifested at institutional, interpersonal and internal levels. Many B/BMH applicants reported being dehumanised and neglected by social housing providers, as well as frontline staff perpetuating harmful stereotypes of Black people.

- **Slippery discrimination** was difficult to prove leaving B/BMH applicants feeling unfairly treated. The burden of proof lies with the victim, who may be deterred from pursuing due to the challenges of proving in court.

- **Anti–Black racism combines with other discriminations like xenophobia and gender discrimination** (misogynoir), compounding barriers to social homes for B/BMH applicants. Gentrification particularly impacted working-class Black communities leading to displacement.

- The experiences of discrimination had **serious mental health implications** leading to anxiety and depression. Mistreatment led to feelings of self-doubt, judgment and stigmatisation.

"MANY B/BMH APPLICANTS REPORTED BEING DEHUMANISED AND NEGLECTED BY SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS, AS WELL AS FRONTLINE STAFF PERPETUATING HARMFUL STEREOTYPES OF BLACK PEOPLE."

POORER TREATMENT OF B/BMH APPLICANTS BY HOUSING OFFICERS

CHAPTER 6

B/BMH applicants reported poorer treatment by housing officers, including preferential treatment of White applicants, prolonged waiting times and poor communication from inadequately trained housing officers.

This left many feeling overlooked and struggling to access a social home.

PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF WHITE APPLICANTS

Housing officers were frequently described as 'favouring a particular ethnicity'. More specifically, displaying preferential treatment of White applicants above those who are B/BMH when allocating the scarce resource of social housing.

'They [the local authority] pick and choose who they want to help.'
PEER RESEARCHER

'I think that's [where] preferential treatment comes in. So I think they try to pay more attention to those that are White, you know, secure them first and get them [Black applicants] the leftovers.' INTERVIEWEE

A local councillor who lives in a social home himself, witnessed preferential treatment of applicants first-hand. His account reiterates how the intersections of 'race', ethnicity, migratory status and class influence an individual's treatment.

'Anytime you give someone power over someone else… you're gonna get bias, and you're gonna get people going "I just don't like them. I like these two young University students… I like talking to them, I'm going to be nicer to them and push them further up the line. [Whereas] this old guy, his funny accent, his beard… He's annoying me. Let me just fob him off. And if he gets aggressive then I'll tell him he's being a problem and we'll block him". And you know that definitely happens… I've seen that a number of times to be honest.'

'Everyone needs a place to call their own. Home, where you're safe, surrounded by supportive friends and/or family.'

Uche, Peer Researcher

Several times participants expressed concerns about preferential treatment given to White migrants.

'[Black migrants] are having to deal with a different level of discrimination where it's like you're not getting the same as someone that's Ukrainian that comes in when they're refugees.' PEER RESEARCHER AT WORKSHOP

'There is an element of racism and who was seen as worthy… it just felt like when White people were in need, they get the help. Yet when Black people are in need or Brown people in need [you must] sort [it] out yourself, put them in a boat and then treat them like they're prisoners […] You've created a discriminatory practice because in your intentions, there was always an implicit bias that's behind it.' INTERVIEWEE

"SEVERAL TIMES B/BMH APPLICANTS RECOUNTED USING A DIFFERENT, ENGLISH-SOUNDING NAME ON THEIR APPLICATION TO AVOID RACIAL BIAS AND IMPROVE THEIR CHANCES OF A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION."

Several times B/BMH applicants recounted using a different, English-sounding name on their application to avoid racial bias and improve their chances of a successful application. This has been reported elsewhere, such as by Somali families in east London who used White-passing names to counter the alleged 'social cleansing' by their local authority via the social housing waiting list.[115]

'During the application process at some point, I had to stop using my native name because I felt like it also contributed to [discriminatory treatment]. When they hear you mention your native name, they're like "okay, this is not an English name, this [is] Nigerian probably." So I stopped using much of my native name and I noticed that… I get more response and more attention when I changed my name.' INTERVIEWEE

'I do think if you see my name on paper, you'll think, oh, that's probably a non-English speaking, you know, African.' BRITISH-BORN APPLICANT REFLECTS ON HOW HER NAME INFLUENCED HOW SHE WAS TREATED BY HER SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDER

Digital application systems also reduced chances of racial bias, enabling B/BMH applicants to, as an interviewee put it, 'hide our colour'. Another interviewee saw similar benefits to applying over the phone.

'A lot of people are surprised when they see that I'm not White after speaking to me because I have a very generic accent. I don't feel like it identifies as anything except born in the Midlands and that's about it. So I've been fortunate in that way because like I said, the process is so impersonal. They probably had no idea of what 'race' I was except for, like, [me] ticking a form but even that they're not going to be looking at it.' INTERVIEWEE

UNITED IN DIVERSITY

BY SIMON

Exploring themes on equitable
treatment and diversity.

ABOVE:

*Simon captures different shades and
natural diversity amongst humans. He
uses symbolism to emphasis the need
for unity in diversity.*

'All are unique and united in diversity.
To those who got the authority [i.e.
the social housing providers] I would
relate it to their preference of one
type over another. That... partiality...
there's no need for the partiality. Like
we all, we're all in this together... The
partiality is not helping.'

MY COLOUR SPEAKS BEFORE ME

PROLONGED WAITING TIMES

Several B/BMH participants reported experiencing racial bias during in-person visits to their local authority, noting that they faced longer waiting times compared to their White peers.

'You try as much as possible to ensure that you just bypass the discrimination by trying to be punctual in everything… So even when I went early… it was like ten White British [people were] being called in before [me]. There was a kind of halt on the interaction. So I have to wait again till noon. I didn't take breakfast because I try as much as possible to be there on time… You are definitely not treated as a priority and overlooked even though you did all this.' INTERVIEWEE

'Well, there was someone we walked in together. [He was] White, so they let him in. In five minutes, [he] was done. But they kept us there like for two hours waiting.' INTERVIEWEE

These delays were seen as reflecting racial hierarchies in the social housing allocation system.

'Until you've reached the peak of your crisis, you don't matter.' PEER RESEARCHER

POOR COMMUNICATION BY HOUSING OFFICERS

Rudeness and incivility from housing and other public services impacts service access as People of Colour become wary of engaging for fear of mistreatment. [116, 117]

B/BMH applicants repeatedly criticised housing officers' communication and reported a lack of empathy and sensitivity from social housing providers. This highlights a failure in duty of care towards B/BMH applicants, many of whom were in precarious housing situations or homeless during the application process.

Poor communication was frequently attributed to racism. For example, a Peer Researcher felt she was being bullied and targeted due to being Black as her housing officer repeatedly ignored her calls and emails. Multiple interviewees shared similar accounts.

'That woman was racist… There was a difference between the way she spoke to me and spoke to her colleagues that would pass by. She was nonchalant [and] her answers were like the shortest possible answer and would cause me to have to ask more follow-up questions because she wasn't freely giving the information. It definitely felt like I was dragging blood from a stone just to get basic information on what I should be doing.' INTERVIEWEE

'I don't think they're [Black people] treated fairly. A lot of the times when I've gone down to the council, when I was seeking housing, I was spoken to like I was a nuisance and… I wasn't going down there shouting or, you know, trying to start a war with anyone. But just that thing of like, I'm a bother and like, I'm lucky to be here.' INTERVIEWEE

B/BMH migrants reported a condescending or 'disrespectful' tone from housing officers. This was heightened when there were language barriers, which negatively impact service uptake for first-generation migrants, disproportionately affecting elderly People of Colour. [118, 119]

'I'm part of the "new Blacks", the African recent migrants. And I think there was an added dimension here [for] those who struggle to speak in English [or] have a different, difficult accent.' PEER RESEARCHER

'There's a big transparency issue that you only know things through word of mouth a lot of the time which I can appreciate would be much more difficult for someone, say where they don't speak English very well, or they keep within a very tight community, or they just don't know many people.' BRITISH-BORN INTERVIEWEE CONSIDERS HEIGHTENED CHALLENGES FOR MIGRANTS

YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO BE READY

BY JOY

Exploring themes on stalled time.

Joy captures suitcase and clock to symbolise the emotional and physical realities of living in housing limbo when waiting to access a permanent social home.

LEFT:

'You can't really put your suitcases away permanently because you never know when you have to move. You always have to be on go. You always have to be ready and I think it also teaches you to kind of have to make do with little.'

RIGHT:

'The clock symbolises the time and patience required to navigate the social housing system. It also represents the past, present, and future: we know racism has occurred in the past and the present, and we hope for change in the future.'

Recent migrants who are not proficient in English also lack familiarity with an application process that is widely criticised for being complex and bureaucratic.

> **'The application process… wasn't very smooth because I had to go through some officials that I wasn't familiar with, and that was a new experience for me because back [in Mali] we don't exactly have something like social housing provided by the government.'**
> INTERVIEWEE REFLECTS ON HOW UNFAMILIAR THE PROCESS IS GIVEN SOCIAL HOUSING IS NOT PROVIDED IN HER COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Several applicants perceived these convoluted or impenetrable processes as a form of gatekeeping to 'discourage people to hold out to be provided social housing'. Some suspected deceitful practice, such as local authorities saying that calls are recorded yet being unable to recover recordings when requested by applicants. A local councillor corroborated this suspected gatekeeping:

> **'They [local authorities] don't want that heat, so they make it hard for them [applicants]. They make it hard to kind of access and learn. You've got to do this and log on and double authentication and they make it a little bit tricky… A better way would be to have more transparency and make the system easier. [To] let people have the knowledge and then people can work in the way they want to work, rather than just feeling like they're being ignored or they're a problem.'**

Individuals adopted various strategies to improve communication with their housing officer. Some found in-person contact increased empathy, helping one participant overcome fears of not being listened to due to her ethnicity. Others spoke of 'code-switching' to appear closer to notions of Whiteness that might be considered more 'palatable' and avoid mistreatment. One interviewee observed that his code-switching meant he was treated 'like a White person now', implying he received more respect from his housing officer.

> **'I'm still a Black person, so I can't completely "fix" that, if I just rock up in my tracksuit, there's a way that they start interacting with me that changes. I have to speak your language for you to treat me like a human.'**
> INTERVIEWEE

Again, this was corroborated by a local councillor interviewee who observed it 'work[s] against you' if applicants have had less experience in a professional environment, writing emails, or if they speak in a 'raw' or 'uncut' way. He felt both 'race' and class are at play:

> **'I know how they talk to posh White people… I know if you phone up and you're middle class… the way they treat you then is the way they treat me as a councillor. They treat you that everything is perfect… [but]… when you… have a bit of an accent or when you have got into some kind of debt or… when the neighbour's complained about something you're doing, there's a mode that kicks in where I think the council officers think you're a problem now. I don't know if it's "you're a Black problem", but it's certainly "you're a problem".'**

These examples reveal the pressure on B/BMH applicants to modify their appearance, speech or behaviour to conform to White norms and the power structures that uphold them.

INADEQUATE TRAINING, A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF ANTI-RACISM AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

Some participants praised the high level of training evident in interactions with some housing officers, noting their professionalism and responsiveness. This built trust and a more comfortable experience when navigating the social housing system.

'I really appreciate the fact that they were being trained in a very good way and good manners.' INTERVIEWEE

However, others highlighted a lack of adequate training among staff in areas such as compassion and customer service, which hindered their overall experience. The most shocking reports of poor practice involved housing officers suspected of accepting bribes to boost an applicant's chance of an allocation. However, none of the participants had direct experience of this.

An absence of trauma-informed practice was evident when dealing with vulnerable individuals.

'I'm saying these are traumatised people being dealt with sometimes by people [who] have got no knowledge of it really and just see it as a job and they're just pushing some numbers.' INTERVIEWEE

A lack of understanding about anti-racism and cultural awareness was also apparent. Housing officers often failed to recognise and respond to the specific needs of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, such as proximity to places of worship or social networks.

"SOME SUSPECTED DECEITFUL PRACTICE, SUCH AS LOCAL AUTHORITIES SAYING THAT CALLS ARE RECORDED YET BEING UNABLE TO RECOVER RECORDINGS WHEN REQUESTED BY APPLICANTS."

HOUSING OFFICER IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

Several participants mentioned a distinct lack of B/BMH council staff:

'I need more diversity 'cause I only see White faces when I go into these places.' INTERVIEWEE

For many, speaking to a B/BMH housing officer was a source of comfort and trust, helping them feel supported and understood.

'When you've got some similarities to someone, you feel more open and you feel like they might be more inclined to help you. Whereas there's somebody else that doesn't necessarily come from similar backgrounds, they'll kind of like, overlook it. So you feel like you've got someone on your side in a way of like that support, that community.' PEER RESEARCHER IN A WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

A local councillor reflected on how he could use his position of power to advocate for the rights of People of Colour applicants and promote good practice:

'If someone is Black and may be older or Asian or they're struggling with the language, I think, yeah, I can see how they're going to play you here, then I'll offer to come along with them… and just sit in the room with you… I can't do anything. I'm not a lawyer, but… you'd be amazed how differently they get treated… and you know, I'm Black. So it's not that, but it's like "here's a councillor in the room who could report back that I didn't treat this woman correctly".'

However, he also reflected on the challenges of advocating for one's community while being part of an institution that marginalises those very communities.

'I think part of the cost of being at that table is often not being as close as you could be to your own community. You've got there by not speaking up for Black people because if you do that then you're seen as a problem.'

This shows how even B/BMH professionals who work in such institutions can find themselves subtly pressured to conform to or accept harmful norms. This was reflected by some B/BMH applicants who discussed feeling unsupported and unheard by Black housing officers.

The impact of representation is further complicated by structural limitations within institutions that hinder meaningful change. The lack of B/BMH individuals involved in policymaking can lead to poorly implemented policies that fail to consider the needs of Black communities and perpetuate harmful dynamics. The local councillor interviewee continues:

> 'You end up just doing things badly. You're either doing them badly deliberately or by accident because you've not spoken to anyone Black or the one Black guy in the room is too junior to even put his hand up and say, "what is this nonsense, you're going to embarrass me" so… yeah, that's the outcome: bad policy and bad practice.'

Compounding this issue is the influence of senior management that seemed out of touch with the realities of marginalised communities.

In the words of one interviewee, this perpetuates 'a safe space for racists' and a culture that resists change. Even B/BMH professionals who enter such institutions can find themselves subtly pressured to conform to or accept these harmful norms.

SUMMARY

- **Housing officers were reported to give White applicants preferential treatment over B/BMH applicants.** Some B/BMH applicants resorted to using English-sounding names on applications to avoid racial bias.

- **B/BMH applicants reported longer waiting times for in person appointments and experienced rudeness, incivility, a lack of empathy and poor communication from housing officers.** This made it harder for B/BMH to know and act on their rights and to progress in their journey to social home.

- **There is a reported lack of training among housing staff**, especially in compassion, customer service, anti-racism and cultural awareness.

- **Having a B/BMH housing officer was a source of comfort and trust for many, but even B/BMH officers can face challenges** in advocating for their community due to structural limitations and pressure to conform.

BEING ALLOCATED A SOCIAL HOME: QUALITY AND SUITABILITY
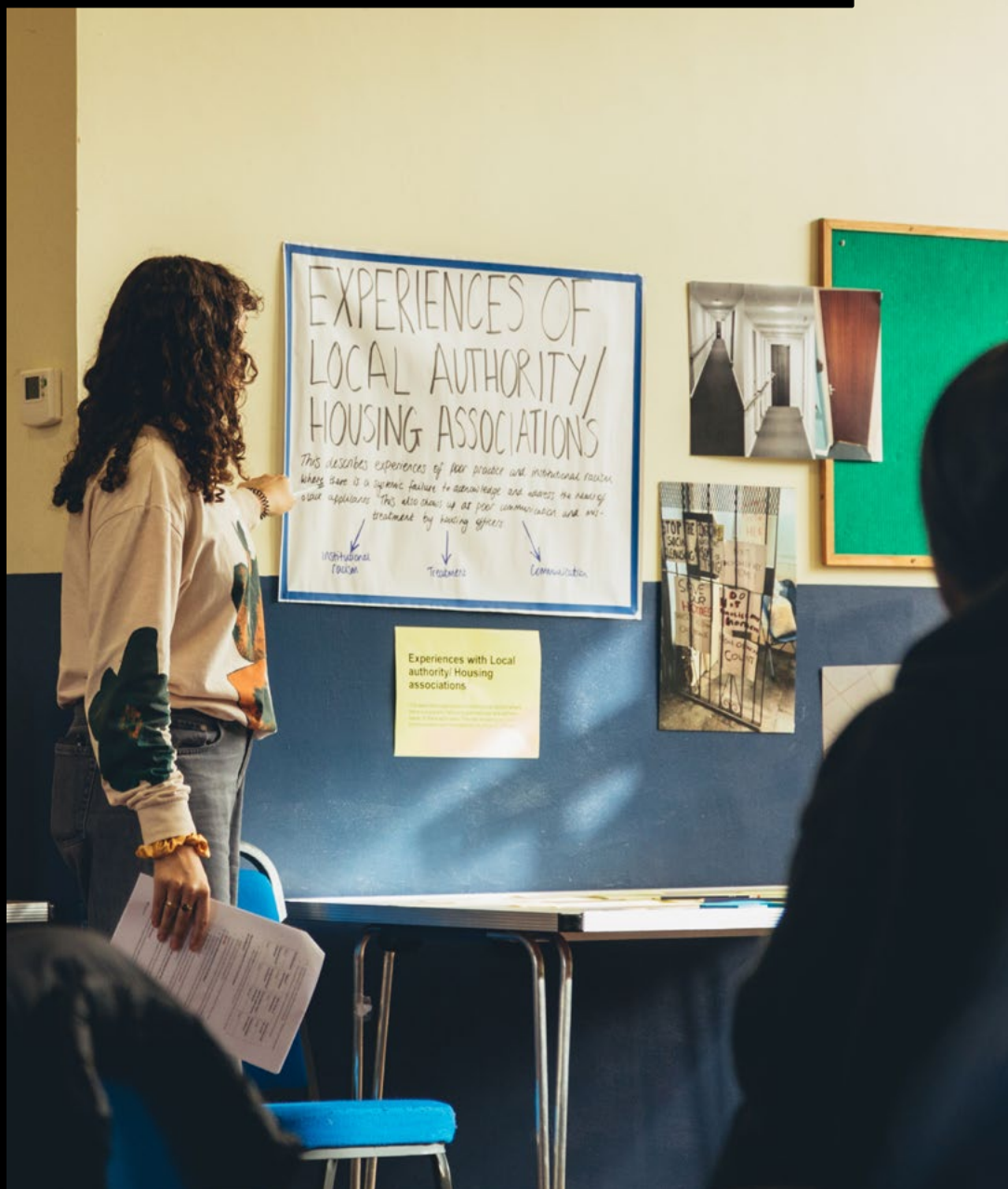
CHAPTER 7

When Black and Black Mixed Heritage (B/BMH) people are allocated social housing, it was widely reported to be of poor quality, in undesirable areas or simply unsuitable.

'I know others [White people] who applied after me, but were allocated houses much sooner, which only added to my suspiciousness. And after more than a year of waiting, I was finally offered a property that was interesting. But the location and the condition of the home were far from ideal. The flat was in a rundown area on the outskirts of town, isolated from my support network. And in a neighbourhood that had been severely impacted by gentrification.' INTERVIEWEE

ENSURING SAFETY IN ALLOCATIONS

Safety from harassment is of great importance to People of Colour when considering the suitability of a home, yet this need is consistently overlooked by housing officers.[120] Peer Researchers agreed that there is 'systematic racism in failing to understand… issues of safety' for B/BMH communities.

> **'You know, when you've been homeless this long, you tend to care less about [other] things, but if I'm being factual here, you know, security is number one for me.'** INTERVIEWEE WHO IS HOMELESS DESCRIBES THEIR PRIORITIES IN SEEKING SUITABLE SOCIAL HOUSING

As 'the first Black family' placed on a specific social housing estate in the 1970s, one participant described the racism and hostility from neighbours his family endured. This demonstrates the power held by local authorities to shape community dynamics through social housing allocations.

Today, the continued neglect of this need for safety puts households in danger. Numerous participants highlighted that they felt unsafe in their social home due to harassment and anti-Black racism from their landlord or new neighbours. Examples of racial stereotyping and harassment included:

- Social housing staff repeatedly emphasising that tenants could not smoke cannabis when moving into a property
- Microaggressions from White residents routinely misnaming an interviewee's pet with a racially stereotypical variation of its actual name
- An interviewee who lives in a majority-White housing association property whose neighbours ask on a weekly basis if she has bought chicken when carrying shopping bags
- Housing association staff (and police) not taking ongoing harassment from a neighbour seriously, leaving the interviewee anxious and confined in her home
- An interviewee was offered a council property with a door that had been kicked in by the recently evicted tenant, and they did not feel safe accepting. Their social worker conveyed this to the local authority, who replied 'Well, wasn't she desperate? Can't be that desperate'.

A greater presence of other Black residents in the local community increased people's feelings of safety:

> **'Being someone of African descent, what I will say has happened is because the council tend to use my neighbourhood to dump a lot of the African and Black people in this area, the area's become safer in a sense that there's more and larger population of Black people, so the racism and the attacks have gone down significantly in the last 20 years.'** INTERVIEWEE

However, placing People of Colour in 'safe' areas, with lower rates of racial harassment, risks creating areas that are 'no go' areas for Communities of Colour, 'where such individuals are not tolerated'.[121] This can entrench segregation, with racist attitudes influencing both the allocation decisions of social housing providers and applicants' preferences.

'You report these things to the council and they will tell you "that's your problem". It's not their problem.'

Victoria, Peer Researcher

POOR QUALITY AND CONDITIONS

Some participants reported being allocated social homes in poor condition or in need of repair, but not being taken seriously when reporting this.

This is corroborated by Shelter's 2023 survey of social housing tenants which found that Black and Minority Ethnic social tenants were more likely than White social tenants to have experienced poor conditions in their home (71% compared to 63%) and to feel that their landlord was not responsive when they made a complaint (28% compared to 21%).

'There's a lot of disrepair issues of like mould and damp and overcrowding. My son's now got asthma, and you report all of these things and the council just pretty much doesn't care.'
INTERVIEWEE

One Black social housing tenant described how she was consistently ignored when making repeated requests for her social housing provider to fix a faulty communal heating system. She asked her White neighbour to call instead which promptly resulted in 'someone turn[ing] up within 24 hours' to address the issue. The contrasting level of urgency displayed by her local authority left her feeling she was 'fobbed off' and treated 'like a second-class citizen'.

Overcrowding in allocated social homes was also a common experience – particularly over a longer period of time.

'It's always been cramped… we've never ever had enough space for all of us… I was literally sharing a bunkbed into my [thirties]… It delays your life. It means you can't have a partner. It means you can't have a family.'
AN INTERVIEWEE IN HER THIRTIES DESCRIBES STILL LIVING IN HER MOTHER'S OVERCROWDED SOCIAL HOME, BECAUSE SHE CAN'T GET ON THE WAITING LIST FOR HER OWN PROPERTY

"BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC SOCIAL TENANTS WERE MORE LIKELY THAN WHITE SOCIAL TENANTS TO HAVE EXPERIENCED POOR CONDITIONS IN THEIR HOME."

IT'S A 'RACE' THING

BY ANONYMOUS

Exploring themes on racial stereotyping, microaggressions and emotional toll of racism.

LEFT:

One Peer Researcher (who would like to remain anonymous) uses black and white to signify feelings of discomfort and isolation from white residents. Colour is then used as she arrives at her flat representing her feelings of safety in her private space.
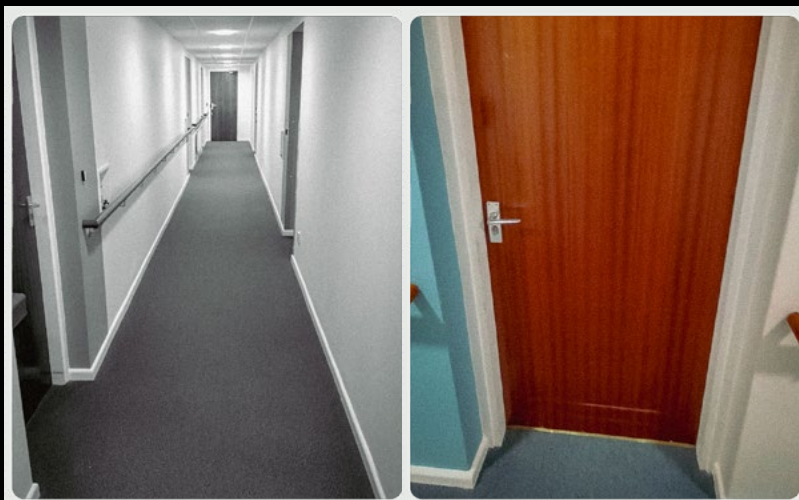
RIGHT:

The Peer Researcher captures the way another Black resident growing vegetables was accused of taking over the communal garden which she believes was due to his 'race'. The resident reflects about his experience below:

'[I am] lucky enough to have social housing but [I] still face prejudice. With the people I live with I still feel judged and treated differently... every day... I still feel even though I have a house, the way you are... you're judged, [and it's] hard.'

HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

BY AHMED

Exploring themes of displacement,
neglect and systemic failure.

ABOVE:

*Ahmed captures Grenfell and
reflects on what success looks
like in the journey to a social
home after living in temporary
accommodation for
three years.*

'I think it just raises the question for me:
is it worth it? Was it worth the journey? How long
is the journey? Is the cup half full or half empty?
I'm not sure... [Does] our success in this journey
mean a Grenfell or similar to Grenfell? Or maybe
a permanent social housing but similar [quality]
to where we are now? Because that's not really
a good solution... [Is] success in social housing
truly a success or another bigger failure, is it
above a hole, another tragedy.'

THE 'GRATEFUL MIGRANT'

A conscious or subconscious belief that migrants should be grateful for what they are given came up throughout the research.[122] This particularly affects B/BMH migrants due to negative stereotypes of their origin countries (in particular, Black-majority countries within Africa) as being underdeveloped.[123]

'When they feel like we are complaining [about the facilities] a lot or we are requesting for too much [repairs], they will be like "if it's not fine with you, you can just go back to wherever you're coming from".' INTERVIEWEE WHO HAD MIGRATED FROM NIGERIA

'When they realise that you're Black and when they realise that you're a refugee, they treat you unequally, they don't care as long as you've gotten a house… They keep on saying: "there are people on the waiting list that need houses and you've got one and you're complaining"… You get people telling you "You should be grateful for what you have because you've got a roof over your head"… But you know you deserve more.' INTERVIEWEE

The 'grateful' stereotype can become internalised, and migrants may feel compelled to express indebted gratitude for access to a social home, even if it is unsuitable.

'So many people… perhaps [due to] where they are coming from, there might have been a war or something, and so they are kind of grateful for what they [can] get… they are like, "Oh, I should be grateful because I have something to work with because where I'm coming from the government don't care about me".' PEER RESEARCHER

British-born Black people also reported a pressure to be 'grateful', often due to assumed foreignness by housing officers.

'I've noticed with the Black community… that gratefulness that at least you've got something. So they don't want to, like, stir the waters and, you know, bring up trouble.' PEER RESEARCHER

This sometimes prevents such groups from voicing valid and even safety concerns, for fear of how raising issues could impact migration status or support received.

'I've got kids to look after, I've got bills to pay, I don't need any more troubles or any more thing[s] on my plate that's going to cause an uproar.' INTERVIEWEE WHO IS A MIGRANT EXPLAINS HER RELUCTANCE TO COMPLAIN ABOUT MISTREATMENT TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Ultimately, the pressure to be 'grateful' marginalises the needs of applicants who are migrants.

"BRITISH-BORN BLACK PEOPLE ALSO REPORTED A PRESSURE TO BE 'GRATEFUL', OFTEN DUE TO ASSUMED FOREIGNNESS BY HOUSING OFFICERS."

THEY TELL YOU TO GET ON WITH IT

BY VICTORIA

Exploring themes on disrepair, negligence
and experiences of migrants.

'These photos are from two council house
properties in Sheffield – the homes of two
of my friends. Both are Black women with
migration status. Both are mothers.

One has been suffering with mould since she
moved in and nothing has been done about it.
She is worried that her two-year-old daughter
will get ill from sticking her fingers in the mould
and putting them into her mouth.

The other's backyard has been overgrown by
weeds. The garden is the landlord's responsibility
– and she has complained several times. She's
a single mum who is not working so she has no
access to her own lawnmower and cannot afford
to pay someone else to do it for her. She worries
about the safety of her four kids playing in
this environment.

These photos speak volumes about the
experience of immigrants and highlight the
negligence they face even after they have been
given a social home. At the same time though
the two women remain grateful for having a roof
over their heads. This brings to mind the 'grateful
migrant' phenomenon.

The impact of racism and discrimination in this
story cannot be measured very easily: they both
feel like they aren't being treated right compared
to other (White) people yet they can't place their
finger on it. Slippery discrimination comes into
play here.

These photos relate to my own experience when
I wasn't feeling heard. I entered my social home
after a period of eight months homeless. I had
no other place to go and so was at the mercy
of the council and the officials allocated to me.

When I moved in, the bathtub was completely
broken but despite persistent complaining,
I was told to fix it myself. It feels that so many
Black and Black Mixed heritage people are not
held and are left to deal with issues themselves.'

LINGERING TRAUMA AND STRUGGLING TO FEEL 'AT HOME'

For the B/BMH people allocated unsuitable or unsafe social homes, the journey continues. Many carry with them the trauma of unstable housing from their time in temporary accommodation (TA) or the private rented sector, and struggle to settle in and see their new home as permanent.

'[It's] a bit like trauma… and it stays with you even after you've moved to your new [home]. It's like PTSD, but for bags: when you get into your new place, you won't be comfortable enough to unpack because you're still scared in your mind that you're gonna have to move again.' THIS PEER RESEARCHER SHARED SIMILAR TRAUMA EXPERIENCES TO SOME INTERVIEWEES

Even for those who are allocated appropriate social homes, ingrained trauma and anxiety about social housing tragedies elsewhere can make it hard to settle in and feel 'at home.'

"MANY CARRY WITH THEM THE TRAUMA OF UNSTABLE HOUSING FROM THEIR TIME IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION OR THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR, AND STRUGGLE TO SETTLE IN…"

SUMMARY

- **B/BMH individuals often received social housing of poor quality, in undesirable areas, or that was unsuitable.** Disrepair issues such as mould, damp and faulty heating systems were often ignored.

- **Housing officers frequently overlooked the need for safety from harassment when allocating homes to Black people.**

- **Overcrowding was a common issue** in social homes allocated to B/BMH individuals, with examples of this lasting many years.

- **There is a perception that migrants should be grateful for the housing they receive**, which can prevent B/BMH individuals from voicing concerns about their housing for fear of repercussions.

- **Some B/BMH individuals experience trauma from previous unstable housing situations**, making it difficult to settle into their new social homes.

RESILIENCE

CHAPTER 8

Many B/BMH participants felt they had to be 'a fighter', pushing harder than White applicants to be heard in a system that is designed for them to fail. Participants described themselves as 'tenacious', 'stubborn', 'determined' or 'persistent'.

'The loudest person gets the house. That's how I feel now these days. But if you're not making a noise and you just comply and say "okay" and you wait... you'll be bidding for 500 years.' INTERVIEWEE

'I'm currently supporting a campaign with a very high population of West African residents, and they're currently fighting to save their homes.'

Andrea, Peer Researcher

This resilience has deep historical roots through centuries of fighting oppression.

> 'Resilience is something the Black man has built over the years. Black people keep suffering and smiling through it all.'
> – CO-ANALYSIS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Having a system that necessitates a 'fighter' mentality to access a home – a basic moral right – is deeply unjust.

"SELF-CARE PRACTICES HELPED MANY APPLICANTS TO COPE WITH THE STRESS OF NAVIGATING THE SOCIAL HOUSING SYSTEM."

SELF-CARE AND RESOURCEFULNESS

Self-care practices helped many applicants to cope with the stress of navigating the social housing system. Participants spoke of the benefits of hobbies and creative outlets, such as dance, and NHS therapy (which unfortunately is insufficiently available). Through various means, participants sought to create moments of peace for themselves.

> 'You know, just little things that tend to help... [like going] to your gym. My local [GP] surgery used to have gardening on Tuesdays... When you're deep in your darkest moment, you're... like "gardening is not making sense to me right now". But in that gardening, I met some people that were going through the same stuff as me.' PEER RESEARCHER

THE NEED TO SURVIVE

BY JOY

Exploring themes of resilience,
stillness and nature.

ABOVE:

'**This park sits quietly in the middle of a concrete jungle, a space that's been cared for and respected, and one I found by accident. It's become a place where I can pause, connect with nature, and breathe.**

Though it's neat and maintained, what I love most is that people treat it with respect. No litter, no noise, just stillness. It reminds me how important it is to have our own spaces, where we can reconnect with ourselves and feel grounded.

As someone navigating life with a Black heritage, that space feels even more sacred. Our experiences are layered; full of beauty, resilience, and complexity. Often, we've had to create our own peace, joy, and community from scratch. This picture is a reflection of that, of finding sanctuary, of staying rooted in who I am, and of building something soft and safe in a world that hasn't always made space for it.'

ABOVE:

'**What I tried to capture here is the importance of allowing ourselves to find stillness amid the chaos, to anchor ourselves, even when things around us feel uncertain.**

In the image, you can see the water still carrying ripples, a sign that movement and disturbance are part of life. Yet surrounding it is nature, growth, stillness, and the sun shining gently over it all. Growth is always happening, even when we can't see it. Some of the trees have shed their leaves, but when spring returns, so do they, just like us.

Eventually, the sun illuminates what needs to be seen: what must change, where opportunities lie, and how we can rise above what weighs us down. It reminds us to hold space for our pain, to allow light in, and to share that light with others, supporting one another through every season.'

STRENGTH AND DETERMINATION

BY JAMILA

Exploring themes of resilience, determination
and strength when navigating allocations system.

ABOVE:

*Jamila captures stones on a path
to speak to resilience needed to
overcome challenges faced in
accessing a social home.*

**'This photo shows strength,
stability and endurance. Stones
can be associated with having
a solid foundation.'**
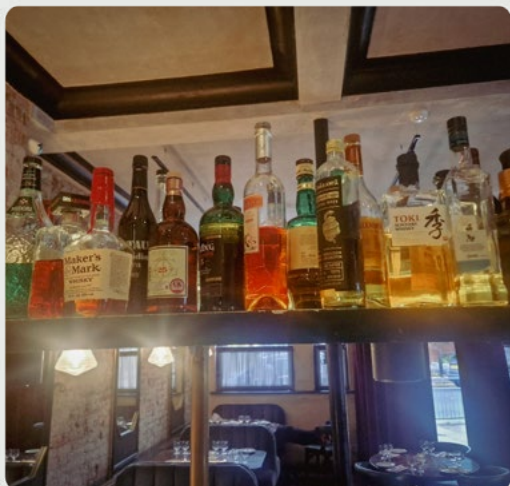
LEFT:

Glass bottles are a metaphor for the fragility and strength evoked in her journey to a social home.

'We all go through our challenges and we're all gonna be vulnerable and we're all gonna have our explosion time and that's absolutely fine because what you have to do is go with what you're feeling and you just have to pick yourself up. The same way when a bottle breaks and you just have to clean it up and move on. Even though it's hard to, but that's the only way.'

LEFT:

Jamila speaks about the strength that she summoned to protect their children's wellbeing.

'Even though there's been times that I have felt vulnerable and weak, I've had to be strong, especially for my daughter. Because I felt like if I led with emotions then I wouldn't be where I am today. So I just had to have that hard front on… and that's what symbolises the table… I feel like you just have to work so much harder than others, which can be very exhausting.'
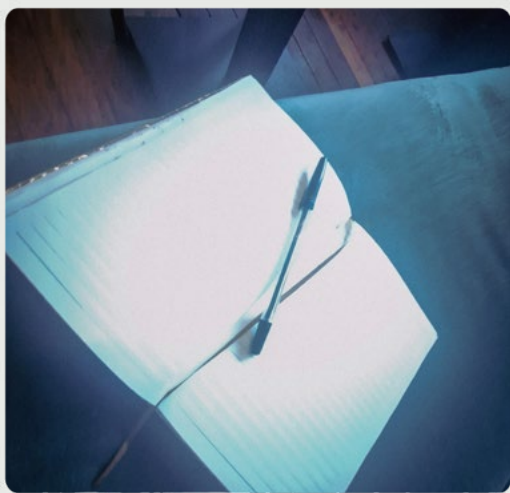
LEFT:

Jamila captures her diary and how she used it as a tool to document the overwhelm of navigating the allocation system.

'I felt this picture was important to take because you have to document and keep records of what's happening, who you spoke with, information you've sent, when things happen. Being organised and on top of things is something that would help with the challenges. Journaling the experience gives you that space to speak your mind and do it privately.'

DON'T GIVE UP

BY TRACY

Exploring themes of resilience, displacement and hope.
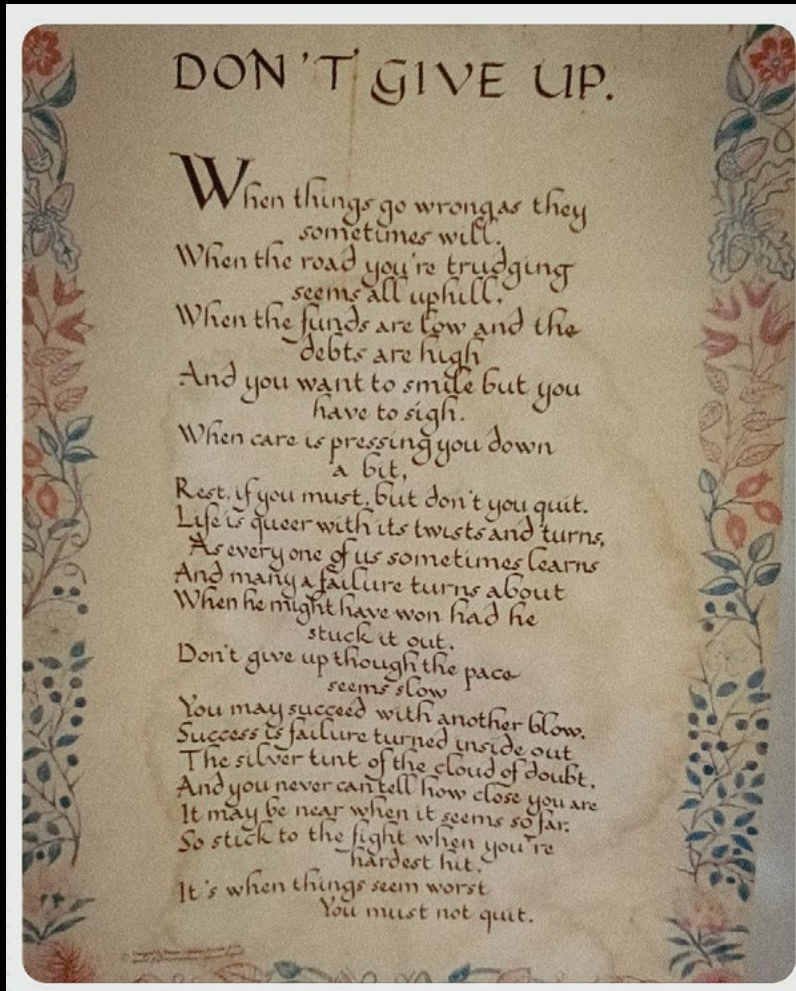
ABOVE:

Tracy captures a poem she sought solace in when she lost her belongings due to homelessness. Tracy embraced the reminder to not give up, despite the racism she encountered in her journey to her social home.

KEEP YER CHIN UP

BY UCHE

Exploring themes of community strength,
culture and joy.

'The top left photo depicts a stall holding a variety of handmade African beads and fans, at an event put on by local residents in East London. It is organised by a group of friends that came together and decided to create a platform to showcase talent, skills or expertise in the community.

The colours of the beads and the Ghanaian Kente cloth on the fans hold cultural significance for people living within these communities, most of whom hail from predominantly Black/Black Mixed backgrounds.

The event is a chance for a much-needed social gathering and a chance to relax and not think about housing issues, immigration challenges, health issues, employment issues, children at

risk of exploitation/grooming, knife crime, robberies, family issues and the rising cost of living. These are the issues that face the predominantly Black community here.

The photo talks about how people from these communities, much like myself, are forced to think outside the box when the system fails you. When people cannot get access to support or services that are tailored to their specific needs is when alternatives come into play.

Our resilience stems from the need to survive despite the odds; the realisation that success cannot be achieved alone but as a group of people with similar goals, values, culture or ideals coming together for a common goal.'

COMMUNITY STRENGTH AND SUPPORT

The need for community is universal, but people build support networks in different places, including family, friends, roommates or through their places of worship, which provide spiritual, practical and financial support. This latter also has its secular equivalent in the 'pardna' money-pooling scheme first brought to the UK by Windrush-era Caribbean migrants.

Regardless of where support is found, talking to others to ease the burden was a common theme.

'Who exactly would you report [discrimination] to? Because I felt like everybody was just in on it. So… I just tend to say whatever I feel to my friends. They are more like the people I report it to and they share their own experience and will be like, "don't worry, we'll get through this". So that makes sense leaning on your friends.'
INTERVIEWEE

Strong community links facilitated information sharing and advice, empowering people to advocate for themselves in the social housing system. Participants uncovered useful information on social media, websites (e.g. Mumsnet), or in-person, such as by 'speaking to mums on the playground'. Others approached services like Shelter, Citizens Advice or their local MP.

'Definitely people are your biggest resource, don't rely on the word of the organisation such as the council or the housing association to be the gospel. Compare and cross-reference information that they're giving you because that will help you to access better.'
INTERVIEWEE

Some expressed concern that community-building is under threat due to reduced investment in community spaces. One interviewee that housing associations only 'build homes to make money', which leaves 'everyone for themselves'. Likewise, the disappearance of youth clubs reduces safe outlets for children experiencing precarious housing. Several participants expressed a desire for better integration of facilities and community-building in new projects.

Where community continues to thrive, so does collective action, where people share skills and ideas with the aim of collective resistance, fundraising or fighting for a more equitable social housing system.

SUMMARY

- **B/BMH people used self-care practices** including hobbies and creative outlets, such as dance, and NHS therapy to cope with the stress of the social housing system.

- **Community events** provided a platform to showcase talent and skills and offer a chance to relax and not think about issues.

- **Resilience stems from 'the need to survive'** and the realisation that success can be achieved as a group 'with similar goals, values, culture or ideals'.

- **Support networks were built through family**, friends, roommates or places of worship, providing spiritual, practical and financial support.

- **Community-building is under threat** due to reduced investment in community spaces, and there is a desire for better integration of facilities and community-building in new projects.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

NOTE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A flaw of traditional research and policymaking is that problems are often seen in isolation and systemic issues can be ignored. If data is hard to gather, it's as if the problem doesn't exist. But when people with lived experience get directly involved in the development of solutions, they are often able to see how issues are interconnected and to speak powerfully about the problems they face and how tangible barriers can be removed.

There are many barriers that prevent B/BMH people from accessing a social home that extend beyond local and national allocation policy. For example, people may not know that they qualify for social housing; they may find that the application process is inaccessible because it is all online or not translated in their language; they may find the process difficult to navigate; they may face discrimination; or there may simply be no social homes available.

We therefore took a Peer Research approach in this project: researchers drew on their personal experiences to develop policies to remove barriers to Black communities' access to social housing. While the project focused on social housing allocation policy, this approach meant researchers brought in their experiences of wider, systemic discrimination and the broader impact of a lack of social housing.

Shelter's policy team took a back seat and focused on supporting Peer Researchers to analyse problems and identify common threads and solutions themselves. The team restricted its role to facilitating and (in collaboration with Researcher Ahmed) summarising recommendations.

Shelter facilitated **two deliberative policy workshops** with the cohort and members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). The SAG included charities, academics, equality organisations and the Greater London Authority.

"RESEARCHERS DREW ON THEIR EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP POLICIES TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO BLACK COMMUNITIES' ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING."

The **first workshop** focused on defining core policy principles – the changes they wanted to see – by imagining a housing system without specific barriers. Participants were organised into six groups, each focusing on a key problem area mentioned in the previous section of this report (Intergenerational experiences; Government, policy and wider housing emergency; Experiences with local authorities/housing associations; Coping strategies and resilience; Slippery discrimination; Experiences of migrants).

The cross-cutting themes of anti-blackness and intersectionality were discussed throughout. To structure the discussion in the second 'solutions' workshop, the policy team reviewed the principles identified in the first workshop and organised them into six 'buckets' structured by the type of change needed and the stakeholders with the power to enact those changes.

The **second** workshop focused on **solutions organised by these buckets:**

01. National housing system

02. Build social housing and placemaking

03. The role of the local authority (LA)

04. Practices of service providers (councils and housing associations)

05. Trust and respect

06. Empowerment and representation

After assessing the challenges and barriers in each 'bucket', participants identified and prioritised top policy solutions. The policy team then fine-tuned proposed solutions by grouping them into themes and worked with Ahmed to finalise a list of recommendations. This was then presented back to Peer Researchers to amend and approve. *N.B. While many of the solutions focused on specific issues faced by B/BMH people, many of them could benefit Communities of Colour more generally.*

Policy recommendations were mainly identified by Peer Researchers and the stakeholder advisory group, over the course of two half day workshops. The workshops were facilitated by Shelter's Policy Team and the recommendations below emerged from these discussions. **Further analysis will be required to better understand and define the specific mechanisms to implement the recommendations.**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

01. National and local government needs to prioritise delivering social rent homes and set clear national and local targets to end homelessness with social homes allocated on a needs-based approach.

02. Local authorities must incorporate equity and diversity into local, strategic and neighbourhood plans to tackle racism and inequalities in land, planning and development.

03. The government should establish a national commission on racial discrimination in the housing system, including social housing allocations and access to a social home.

04. The government should introduce and pass a new Housing Act which establishes access to an affordable, decent and safe home as a legal human right.

05. All housing staff (junior to senior) involved in creating and implementing allocation policy and processing applications should have mandatory training on cultural competency that is trauma and racial trauma informed.

06. Local authorities should commit more capacity and resources to anti-racism, diversity and inclusion.

07. Better, more frequent and reciprocal communication between Social Housing providers and applicants – and greater transparency on decisions.

08. The Regulator of Social Housing should ensure there are clear expectations on equality, equity and diversity in standards.

09. All local authority housing staff, including allocation, planning and housing strategy teams, (plus all social housing providers), should be required to publicly report and publish complaints on racial discrimination. This can be an anonymised dashboard, or a similar platform, on their website to easily show the number of complaints received and resolved, that are associated with racial discrimination.

10. End discriminatory practices/outcomes in development and regeneration plans.

Workshop 1:
SUMMARY OF THE POLICY PRINCIPLES

PROBLEM AREA	PRINCIPLES/VISION
INTERGENERATIONAL EXPERIENCES	• A system that is **trauma-informed**, especially racial trauma-informed, and sensitive to triggers, to applicant's lived experiences with racism and anti-Blackness and sensitive to communities that have suffered racism. • A system that **reflects intersectionality** and **allocates communities to areas where they feel safe** and that meet their needs, including location and access to support systems that can help future generations.
GOVERNMENT, POLICY AND WIDER HOUSING EMERGENCY	• A system that puts **equity, including 'race' equity, at its heart**. • A system **that redefines housing policy** to ensure everyone has a decent and affordable home. • A system where communities come together to create solutions to the problems that affect them and to create **a more welcoming, accommodating and considerate housing system**. • A system where Black and marginalised groups who are affected by the housing emergency are **represented in decision-making structures that affect them**.
EXPERIENCES WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS	• **More social rent homes need to be built**, and public land needs to be used for public benefit for those homes, not just private housing. • Give **Black people a 'shared claim to the land'** (i.e. ensuring land is used to address the housing emergency and not just for profit) and minimise displacement. • **Waiting times for a social home are shortened**. • **Good communication and respect** – the process of allocating social housing should be clear, simple, and accessible to everyone, carried out in a way that makes people feel respected rather than stigmatised. • **Mandatory power sharing and meaningful involvement (in decision-making)** which is embedded within communities.

Workshop 1: summary of the policy principles (continued):

PROBLEM AREA	PRINCIPLES/VISION
COPING STRATEGIES AND RESILIENCE	Researchers observed that B/BMH people facing discrimination and being underserved create community support networks to assist with social housing applications, translation, and wellbeing. While they lauded the resilience communities have built, researchers argued that communities shouldn't be forced to fill the service and investment gap left by the government. • A world where **communities are not forced to take on the role of national or local government**, providers or social landlords. • A world where **local authorities and other social housing providers learn from the successes of communities**. • A world where **resources for interpretation and translation services are available**, including simplified and accessible explanations of legal and technical jargon in English and other languages. • A world where the **local authority thoroughly understands the historical barriers of B/BMH communities**. • A world where **more social rent** homes are built so that the local authority's role is a trusted support provider rather than a gatekeeper.

Workshop 1: summary of the policy principles (continued):

PROBLEM AREA	PRINCIPLES/VISION
SLIPPERY DISCRIMINATION This working group identified many of the points outlined above, but also included additional principles/vision:	• A housing *system* **that takes responsibility for equitable outcomes**, rather than the burden of proof sitting with the recipient. • **People should have clarity and trust** in the process of social housing allocation and interactions. • **People understand discrimination and know how to** identify it and understand avenues to accountability, including discrimination laws/rights to advocate for yourself and others. • **Services reflect the community they serve** so people can get help from those that understand the nuances and needs of Black communities. • **Staff understand** the communities they serve and the policies they are meant to be implementing. • **Policies that consider specific needs of single/young Black men who are experiencing homelessness and/or facing other challenges** (e.g. intersection with mental health).
EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANTS This working group also identified many of the points outlined above, but also included additional principles/visions:	• **Social homes should be allocated on people's need rather than immigration status or residence**. • **Local authorities must take into account the intersectionality of people's experiences and needs**. • **Local authorities must be norm-setters in making people feel safe and welcome**. B/BHM persons shouldn't have limited choice because they feel unsafe in certain areas due to anti-immigration sentiment.

The policy team identified a series of common threads (e.g. power sharing, B/BMH representation, choice, autonomy, eliminating anti-Blackness, good communication, physical and mental safety in a respective local authority's area and respect) **and mapped these into the six policy buckets for the second deliberative session.**

Workshop 2:
DELIBERATIVE POLICY: FROM PRINCIPLES TO SOLUTIONS

In the second policy deliberative session, groups assessed the challenges and barriers in each 'bucket' and identified and prioritised top policy solutions.

The policy team then fine-tuned proposed solutions and grouped them into themes and worked with Ahmed to finalise. This was then presented back to Peer Researchers to amend and approve.

Discussions included particular focus on the level of impact these solutions would have specifically on B/BMH people rather than Communities of Colour more broadly, given B/BMH people are disproportionately affected by the housing emergency.

Peer Researchers noted that improvements to our housing system – particularly those that improve the ability of people to access a social home – would help end housing discrimination more generally.

RECOMMENDED POLICY SOLUTIONS

The sessions led to the following ten policy interventions.

1

National and local government needs to prioritise delivering social rent homes and set clear national and local targets to end homelessness with social homes allocated on a needs-based approach.

The national government needs to **invest in good-quality social rent homes** through a robust successor of the Affordable Homes Programme at the June 2025 Spending Review. The government should also **adopt a national social housing target**. Building social homes could help provide a safe and decent home, including for the 24,000 Black and Black Mixed Households in temporary accommodation.[124] Many of these families are stuck in inappropriate temporary accommodation and are waiting to be allocated a social home.

Social housing allocation must be done on a needs-based approach without other bias or disqualification of a person's immigration status, residency or local connection. If national and local government is to tackle the social housing waitlist and end homelessness, it must prioritise the specific needs of households.

Shelter, Crisis and the National Housing Federation say that 90,000 social rented homes are needed a year for ten years. Local authorities should also include a **social housing target in local plans** to end homelessness and clear social housing waitlists. Perpetual discrimination is likely to continue or even get worse as the supply of social homes is limited.

2

Local authorities must incorporate equity and diversity into local, strategic and neighbourhood plans to tackle racism and inequalities in land, planning and development.

Local plans identify sites to promote their area's vision for development and are used for housing, the environment, employment, economy and transportation. The purpose of strategic plans is to set out the future for local areas. However, there are no plans or development strategies to promote equality and equity in the identification of sites for new social homes and lower-income households. Peer Researchers raised concerns about not being allocated a social home in a safe and well-resourced area, with proper facilities and infrastructure, and strongly held that it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that need is met.

3

The government should establish a national commission on racial discrimination in the housing system, including social housing allocations and access to a social home.

This **would not investigate *whether* racism exists** in the housing system but instead must be **solution driven**. This would investigate the current and historical issues experienced by Black and other Communities of Colour and would recognise and raise awareness of systemic racism in housing. Commissioners must include people with lived experience, Black and Black Mixed persons and other Communities of Colour and community-based organisations, alongside usual attendees (e.g. local authorities, other social landlords, charities, and academics). The commission would create a national framework to promote racial equality and eradicate anti-Blackness and systemic and institutionalised racism in the housing system.

4

The government should introduce and pass a new Housing Act which establishes access to an affordable, decent and safe home as a legal human right.

Peer Researchers want to see a **humane, people-centred and needs-based housing system**. They reported that social housing applicants (and tenants) felt ignored or forgotten by providers. Researchers concluded that people could have guaranteed access to a social home, regardless of racial identity, if the government ensured that access to a genuinely affordable, decent and safe home was a human right, enshrined in a new Housing Act.

5

All housing staff (junior to senior) involved in creating and implementing allocation policy and processing applications should have mandatory training on cultural competency that is trauma and racial trauma informed.

This would apply to both housing associations and local authorities. Staff must also take training on anti-Blackness, intersectionality, gender bias and unconscious bias to understand applicants' and tenants' needs and lived experience. Councils and housing associations would need to prioritise this in their budgets, supported by central government funding. To maintain standards and ensure up-to-date practices, training should be done during onboarding and at defined review points. To ensure uptake, local authorities and housing associations will need to institute a system of incentives and sanctions.

6

Local authorities should commit more capacity and resources to anti-racism, diversity and inclusion.

Improving the social housing allocation system and experiences of Black and Black Mixed Heritage people when trying to access a social home, will require more resource and capacity on a local authority level. One way is to establish a permanent role(s) within an existing or new equity and inclusion team within councils and housing associations. While some of these roles already exist in some local authorities and housing associations, these are usually internal human resources teams, rather than public facing. It is vital that social housing providers ensure that Black and other Communities of Colour are represented in decision-making, including recruiting more diverse employees who are representative of the communities they serve.

7

Better, more frequent and reciprocal communication between social housing providers and applicants – and greater transparency on decisions.

Researchers noted that email or telephone communication can make engagement more transactional and less personable and needs-oriented. They thought social housing providers should **consider having annual meet and greet sessions** where communities and applicants can meet housing and management teams in the local authority and housing associations. They should also **remove language barriers** by having translators available, including for British Sign Language (BSL), and access to closed captioning.

Researchers highlighted experiencing unprofessional, inappropriate and disrespectful communication and treatment and that reports and complaints of these incidents are not taken seriously. Therefore, they noted that **calls should be recorded**, and tenants and applicants should be able to access or request access to use for recourse if needed. Just as providers rightfully say they will not tolerate abuse of staff, applicants and tenants should have recourse to ensure their complaints are taken seriously.

Lastly, local authorities and other social housing providers must **move away from solely relying on electronic communications** and making it the only means for applicants and tenants to respond, especially to time-sensitive matters. Applicants may not have sufficient access to technology required to complete tasks and other information-sharing requests.

8

The Regulator of Social Housing should ensure there are clear expectations on equality, equity and diversity in standards.

The Regulator of Social Housing should set expectations on equity, equality, tackling anti-Blackness and the consequences of racism. This could be achieved, for example through the proposed **Competence and Conduct Standard**, which should embed anti-racism and other proactive anti-discrimination and cultural history within professional qualifications in social housing. This would require relevant training for all social providers including relevant senior managers and staff.

There should also be a requirement and expectations for providers to proactively inform people about their rights and paths to recourse if they want to file a complaint specifically about racial discrimination or mistreatment in the allocation system or in their journey for applying or accessing a social home. Social housing providers should have clear and measurable targets to assess progress and effectiveness.

9

All local authority housing staff, including allocation, planning and housing strategy teams, (plus all social housing providers), should be required to publicly report and publish complaints on racial discrimination. This can be an anonymised dashboard, or a similar platform, on their website to easily show the number of complaints received and resolved, that are associated with racial discrimination.

Peer Researchers spoke about the lack of transparency and trust in the allocations process, as well as planning and development. Often, they felt complaints were not taken seriously by housing associations or local authorities and were sceptical if concerns they raised about the process were ever addressed.

While the Regulator of Social Housing's standard on Transparency, Influence and Accountability already requires all registered providers to generate and report tenant satisfaction measures, the providers are not specifically required to report on complaints of discrimination, including 'race' discrimination.

Therefore, having an **anonymised dashboard** or other easily accessible reporting mechanism of this nature, that is open to the public, could help build some trust with B/BMH applicants and tenants, and the general public. This could be a simple staged system to publish how many complaints linked to racism claims were brought forward in a given year or quarter, how many have been resolved, and how many remain unresolved or open.

10

End discriminatory practices/outcomes in development and regeneration plans.

Gentrification and regeneration can displace low income Black and other Communities of Colour – especially in London. National and local government should **minimise displacement** and ensure Black and other Communities of Colour are part of informed decision-making when new developments are built, or an area is designated for regeneration. Low-income B/BMH people can get stuck in a displacement cycle where they must again go through the allocations and application system for a social home in the new area, until that place is regenerated too.

The national government should adopt **a minimum requirement for developments of 11 homes or more to include social rent**. This can also include where demolition and regeneration take place so that there is **no net loss of social homes through regeneration**.

Planning officers and staff in large developers (particularly those involved in regeneration schemes) should undergo **training that covers anti-Blackness**, intersectionality, anti-racism and the socio-economic impacts of homelessness. Planning proposals for major development or regeneration schemes should **set out how the developer will minimise displacement**.

One Peer Researcher also highlighted poor communication in local development and regeneration schemes. They shared their experience with an ongoing regeneration project that is set to progress after what many in the community thought were misleading statements about plans, particularly around displacement. This is why **a robust outreach plan is needed** which includes planned communications, on and offline, and in-person information and feedback sessions at dates and times of day that fit different living schedules. As well as balloting and decision-making, processes must be co-produced with people with lived experience and Communities of Colour, including B/BMH people.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION:
HOPES FOR EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING

CHAPTER 10

In the midst of a housing emergency that disproportionately impacts People of Colour, this research evidences the racism and discrimination that B/BMH individuals face when navigating England's social housing system.

'I want people to understand that social housing is for everybody. And I want provisions to be equal when there's an allocation... I want people to be treated with respect.' INTERVIEWEE

Racism is not a single occurrence, but a structural reality embedded in social housing policies and practices. Affected communities have long called for change. Historic, systemic barriers restricted access for earlier generations and post-war migrants, leaving a legacy that is still felt in unequal housing outcomes for People of Colour.

Current allocations policy embeds numerous systemic 'hurdles' that disadvantage B/BMH applicants. These hurdles are shaped and reinforced by different forms of discrimination that actively impede equitable progress to a social home. Namely, anti-Black racism, slippery and intersecting forms of discrimination.

By centring B/BMH applicants' lived experiences of trying to access a social home, and applying an anti-racist lens, this research highlights the persistence of anti-Black racism at both interpersonal and institutional levels.

B/BMH applicants repeatedly reported being treated more poorly than White applicants, with heightened delays, poor communication and support that is neither trauma-informed nor culturally aware. This points to social housing providers' systemic disregard for Black applicants' right to safe homes free from racial harassment.

For B/BMH applicants allocated unsuitable or unsafe social homes, the journey to be suitably housed continues, and often depends upon their ability to advocate for themselves within an unjust system. Among those still waiting, attaining the long-term security of a safe, affordable social home was a central hope.

'I hope the future is bright. I still am on the journey. I hope I don't have any more stressful hurdles, but I think I will do… I just hope that I'm being treated fairly moving forward in the housing process.' PEER RESEARCHER

Participants ultimately called for a social housing system free from racism and discrimination.

'My hope for the future [is that] there will be a lot of transparency and also that there will be a total shutdown of discrimination and racism.' INTERVIEWEE

Throughout this project, B/BMH people embodied resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity, building and relying on community networks as vital support. It is however time for the system to step up. For too long, marginalised communities, especially those impacted by racism, have been forced to bear the weight of systemic failures.

'We constantly have to struggle. We constantly have to fight and find alternative, creative ways in which to just be able to live… I just want to be able to be at peace in my home.' INTERVIEWEE

Structural change is urgently needed to dismantle racism and discrimination in B/BMH people's access to social homes. The policy solutions mainly identified by Peer Researchers in this report are critical so every person can access the home they need.

Special thanks to our Peer Researchers

Ahmed, Andrea, Dani, Jamila, Joy, Simon,
Tracy, Uche, Vanessa and Victoria.

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• who need to move urgently because of a life-threatening illness or sudden disability
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APPENDIX

Demographic tables for all participants, including Peer Researchers. All participants were Black and Black Mixed heritage and lived in England. All had experience of trying to access a social home, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. Demographics were collected through surveys, screener calls, and one-to-one support. While the report presents information submitted, some data is missing or incomplete.

ETHNICITY

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
Black African	28
Black Caribbean	12
Black Other	3
Mixed / Black Other	1
Prefer Not to Say	1

LOCATION APPLIED FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
Birmingham	8
London	25
Newcastle	2
Sheffield	5
Rest of England	3
Prefer Not Say	1

MIGRATION STATUS

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
Any migration experience	17
Asylum seeker	6
Born in England	20
EU national	2
Refugee	2
Student	2
UK national	31
Prefer Not to Say	1

CURRENT SOCIAL HOUSING SITUATION

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
Current homelessness	15
Private renter	12
Social renter	18
Prefer Not Say	1

AGE

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
18-24	5
25-34	19
35-44	11
45-54	2
55 to 64	8
65+	0
Prefer Not to Say	1

LGBTQ+

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
Bisexual	2
Gay	4
Heterosexual	25
Lesbian	3
Pansexual	1
Queer	1
Prefer not to say	9

FAMILY COMPOSITION

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
Households with dependent children	16
No dependent children	27
Prefer Not to Say	1

GENDER

SUBGROUPS	PARTICIPANTS
Female	26
Male	17
Non-binary	1
Prefer Not to Say	1

GUIDED BY PEER RESEARCHERS:

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ANDREA *P.82*
DANI *P.18*
JAMILA *P.28*
JOY *P.40* SIMON *P.14*
TRACY *P.45* UCHE *P.62*
VANESSA *P.03*
VICTORIA *P.73*