

# Britainthinks

— Insight & Strategy —

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## Social housing in England after Grenfell

**Final report**

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## 1. Executive summary

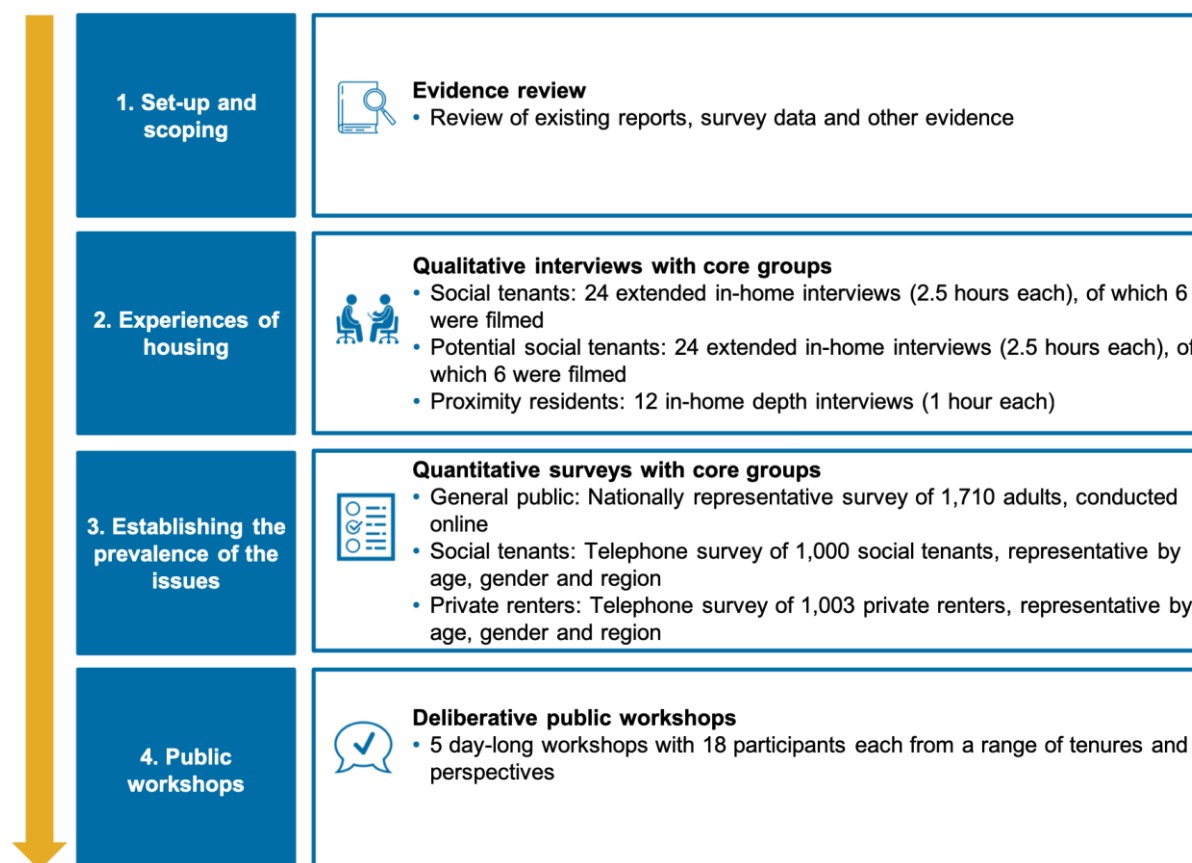
### 1.1. Background to the research

- The social housing sector in England has seen great change in recent decades. First and foremost, the supply of social housing has drastically declined as a proportion of England's housing makeup. Where it housed 32% of the population in 1981, only 17% live in social housing today. Despite this, demand remains high.
- There have been substantive legislative reforms of the social housing sector in recent years. Among the most significant are reforms to the way that social housing can be allocated and the introduction of shorter, fixed-term tenancies in the Localism Act 2011.
- A conversation about the current state of social housing in England is not complete without reference to the tragedy of Grenfell tower. The shocking events at Grenfell serve as a powerful symbol of the need for a conversation about how we as a society think about and value social housing.
- As England's leading voice for people who are homeless or in poor housing, Shelter has appointed a social housing commission, the aim of which is to develop a series of recommendations for the future of social housing. These will be submitted to the Government and opposition.
- To ensure that the commission had a detailed understanding of the experiences and priorities of social housing tenants, Shelter commissioned BritainThinks to conduct a programme of research. This research aimed to:
  - Develop a picture of the realities of living in social housing that tenants themselves would recognise;
  - Understand perceptions of social housing and its role in wider society; and
  - Work with tenants to develop a set of priorities and recommendations for the future of social housing in the UK.
- In order to answer these objectives, we conducted research with:
  - Social tenants: Those who live in either council housing or housing association properties;
  - A group we are referring to as 'Potential social tenants': These are households who do not currently rent from a social landlord. But, they have a low income, and if supply was higher, may have been social tenants. This group mainly live in the private rented sector.
  - Proximity residents: People who live near social housing (but own or privately rent their homes).

## 1.2. Research approach

- The research approach for this piece of work was designed to obtain:
  - Rich qualitative detail on the lives and experiences of social tenants and potential social tenants;
  - Robust quantitative data establishing the prevalence of views and experiences, and differences between groups; and
  - Participant-led recommendations on policy around social housing.
- The following diagram summarises our full approach to achieving these objectives.

Figure 1.2.1



## 1.3. Experiences of housing

- Positive experiences of social housing are widespread and show that most social tenants feel their housing needs are being met by their tenancy. Often, their tenancy

goes beyond meeting need and has a wider positive impact on social tenants' lives and on the opportunities available to them.

- Almost 9 out of 10 (86%) social tenants say that they are happy with their housing.
- High numbers (77%) of social tenants also say that they feel they are fortunate to live in social housing.
- The key features of social housing that are behind these positive attitudes are:
  1. Affordable rents. Our research showed that aside from fulfilling the basic need of helping social tenants survive on a low income, having spare income and the ability to save money can have major positive impacts on tenants' family, social and working lives.
  2. Secure tenancies. We found during the research that not having to frequently move home allowed social tenants to get on with other parts of their lives. It also meant tenants were more likely to have built good relations with their neighbours and to spend money on improving their home.
- In addition to those key features of their housing, the majority of social tenants say they are happy with the condition of their home. Our research found many tenants felt their homes were in good repair, and tenants were often very 'houseproud'.
- The majority of tenants are also happy with their neighbourhood. The research showed this often linked back to secure tenancies and the ability to 'put down roots'.
- Most tenants are also happy with their day to day relationships with their landlord.
- Despite these broadly positive views, there does exist a sizeable minority of social tenants whose housing is not meeting their needs.
  - Four out of ten (40%) social housing tenants struggle to afford their rent, which our research found is often due to rising rent and costs of living outstripping their income.
  - Additionally, throughout the research we found examples of social tenants who have more negative experiences with the space and quality of their housing, with some living in extremely cramped or poorly maintained housing.
  - Finally, there are concerns among some social tenants that their local neighbourhood suffers from high levels of anti-social behaviour or problem neighbours
- The positive experiences of social tenants stand in contrast to the housing situation of a group who are on a low income, but are not renting from a social landlord. We are referring to them as 'potential social tenants' (see above). They are much more likely to be unhappy with their housing situation:
  - This group is significantly less happy with their housing than social tenants (64% say they are happy with their housing compared to 84% of social tenants).



- They are also much more likely to feel insecure in their housing, more likely to say they struggle to pay their rent more likely to say that their housing situation has a negative impact on their life
- In addition, our research found that the condition of potential social tenants' housing can be extremely poor, with issues including dangerous and/or faulty electrics, and mould growing on interior walls.
- Finally, many potential social tenants also had concerns about their local area, feeling that it has high levels of anti-social behaviour
- Importantly, potential social tenants find it extremely difficult to move from housing with poor conditions or challenge their landlords.
  - Unaffordable rents can mean that potential social tenants cannot afford to save for a deposit on a new rental property. In addition, many feel that there is widespread discrimination by landlords of those in receipt of benefits, further limiting the pool of quality homes available.
  - They also feel unable to challenge their landlords on poor conditions for fear of being evicted or rents being raised to cover the cost of repairs.
- Social tenants have a much stronger attachment to their community than potential tenants do, which appears to be encouraged by longer term tenancies in this sector.
- Both social tenants and potential tenants – as well as those privately renting – commonly raise concerns about anti-social behaviour near their housing, suggesting this is not unique or concentrated in social housing.
- Both households renting from a private landlord and those renting from a social landlord said that they felt they had limited say in the decisions made about their housing.

## 1.4. Reputation of social housing

### *Stigma*

- There is a widespread perception among social tenants who took part in our survey, and that we spoke to, that social housing is stigmatised by society.
  - Specifically, social tenants tend to feel that a series of negative assumptions are made about them. The most prominent of these are that social tenants are out of work and reliant on benefits or that areas with social housing are characterised by crime, anti-social behaviour, neglect and disrepair.
  - The media is seen as a significant driver of this stigma.
- Importantly, while social tenants say that there is a stigma towards social housing on a macro level, we found that few say that they have been personally affected by it.
- While potential social tenants ostensibly reject stigmatising views of social housing and social housing tenants, negative perceptions about where social housing is located –

such as in areas with problems with antisocial behaviour – and who lives in it can lead many to feel that it is not for them.

- This is despite the fact that potential social tenants tend to recognise social housing as being affordable and stable – both of which are often missing from their own experience of their housing situation.

#### *How social housing is allocated*

- Both potential social tenants and social tenants tend to agree that the way social housing is allocated is difficult to understand, is not transparent, and fails to take account of the whole context of each applicant in favour of a simplistic tick box method.
  - While there is broad support for social housing being allocated to those who are most in need, there is a strong suspicion that the current system is open to abuse leading to the wrong people being prioritised.

#### *How social housing has changed*

- Although social housing is viewed as the most affordable option by social tenants, there is a perception that it is becoming increasingly unaffordable. This, many feel, is driven by increasing rents, low wages and cuts to benefits (including the so-called 'Bedroom Tax').
- There is little awareness among social tenants of the introduction of fixed-term tenancies (ie where some social housing tenants are no longer offered lifetime tenancies, but instead for a fixed time with their needs reassessed at a later date).
  - When prompted, the issue is divisive, provoking strong opinions on both sides.
  - For many, fixed term tenancies undermine the unique security offered by social housing and put social tenants in a more precarious position.
  - However, others welcome the idea and see it as a way to make the social housing system fairer by freeing up housing for those who need it most.

#### *Predictions for the future of social housing*

- There is widespread pessimism about the future of social housing, with both social tenants and potential social tenants saying that the gap between supply and demand for social housing is likely to get worse.
- A lack of political will is often blamed for the gloom about the future of social housing.
  - Social housing is not seen as a high priority for political leaders – only 16% of social tenants and 11% of potential social tenants think that politicians care about the future of social housing.



## 1.5. What the future of social housing should be

- We wanted to find out from social and potential tenants what their priorities are for the future of social housing. We explored this in the depth interviews and in a series of full-day workshops which included a mix of social and potential tenants.
- When thinking about the future of social housing, participants in our workshops developed eight key principles that the sector should aim to achieve, these are split between:
  - Primary principles (those that are fundamental to a *functional* social housing system): widely accessible, affordable, secure and stable, and good quality; and
  - Secondary principles (seen as being important to a *high-quality* social housing system): human-centred, fairly and transparently allocated, safe neighbourhoods, and good communities.
- While the majority of social tenants felt that the current sector mostly succeeds in providing good quality, affordable and stable housing, they voiced concerns that it is not living up to their expectations in the other areas identified.
- When looking to the future, both social tenants and potential social tenants identified building more houses as the top priority.
  - This is driven by a strongly held belief that there is insufficient supply to meet the demand. And a belief held by tenants that building more will help to address other issues with social housing.
- Other priorities mentioned by the social tenants and potential social tenants during this research process were to:
  - Reform the allocation system to make it fairer;
  - Take action on crime and anti-social behaviour
  - Improve the quality and speed of repairs by landlords.
- In the workshops we presented a series of policy recommendations aimed at improving the state of social housing, and responding to these concerns. Of the policies presented, there was particularly strong support for a strengthened regulator of social housing.
  - This recommendation was seen as offering a workable and effective solution to key issues of slow repairs and poor maintenance, and the pervasive sense of powerlessness that are identified by both social tenants and potential social tenants as being pressing problems in both the social and private renting sector.
  - Participants said that they would like this regulator to conduct inspections of social housing and for the results to be reflected in a published rating
  - Furthermore, participants broadly agreed that the most effective way to ensure that the inspections and ratings led to tangible changes was to build into the system a programme of penalties and rewards for landlords.

- There was also strong support for this regulator, or something similar, to be extended to the private rented sector.

## 1.6. Key conclusions and recommendations

1. **Whilst some social tenants face unquestionable challenges, on balance the issues facing ‘potential social tenants’ (households on low incomes, largely living in the private rented sector at the moment) are both more widespread and more severe.** This group should be considered alongside social tenants.
2. **There is a pressing need for more social housing.** This would end distressingly long waiting times, and also facilitate greater flexibility for those already in social housing, for example by allowing them to move to more suitable properties.
3. **But fundamental change is also needed within the private rented sector.** Tenants need to have more security of tenure and ways need to be found to empower them in relation to their landlords.
4. **There is a need to rethink social housing in the future.** In order to empower social tenants in their relationships with their landlords, there is widespread support for developing a stronger regulator of social housing. Furthermore, whilst not as high a priority for those already living in social housing, there are some clear steps that could be taken to address the stigma that deters those who might benefit from social housing from wanting to live in it. For example, avoiding the development of concentrated areas of social housing, and ensuring that social housing is not distinguishable from other types of housing by the virtue of its design.
5. **Campaigning on social housing should challenge the current media narrative.** Social housing is central to the housing make-up of the UK, and should be treated as such. In addition, social tenants’ positive experiences should be brought to the fore, highlighting the desirability of social housing.

## 2. Introduction

The fire at Grenfell Tower on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 was both a tragedy and a powerful symbol of the urgent need for a conversation about the role of, and issues facing, social housing today.

As England's leading voice for people who are homeless or in poor housing, Shelter has appointed a social housing commission in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire to establish this much-needed conversation. The aim of this commission is to develop a series of recommendations for the future of social housing which will be submitted to the Government and opposition.

To ensure that the commission has a detailed understanding of the experiences and priorities of social housing tenants, Shelter commissioned BritainThinks to conduct an ambitious programme of research that aims to capture and elevate the views of social tenants and their communities around the country.

The primary aim of this research was to put those who live or may live in social housing at the heart of the conversation about social housing today and what it should look like in the future.

Specifically, the research aimed to respond to three broad objectives:

Figure 2.1

1	<b>Develop a picture of the realities of living in social housing that tenants themselves would recognise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gain insight into social tenants' experiences of living in social housing, including understanding their daily lives and routines and what impact social housing has on them</li><li>• Understand the extent to which social tenants, potential tenants and those living in the wider community feel that their housing and the area that it is situated in meets their needs (for example, safe, affordable, and comfortable housing)</li><li>• Understand social tenants' experiences of trying to change or improve aspects of their homes</li><li>• Gain insight into social tenants' relationships with their housing providers (either social landlords or local councils) and their experiences of interactions with them</li><li>• Gain insight into social tenants' plans for the future, and what impact social housing has on them</li></ul>
2	<b>Understand perceptions of social housing, social tenants, and their role in their communities and wider society</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gain insight into the relationships that social tenants have with their neighbours and community, and the extent to which they feel accepted by them</li><li>• Understand what potential social tenants feel the main benefits and disadvantages of living in social housing are</li><li>• Understand how people living in communities alongside social tenants perceive their neighbours, and how they identify the role that social tenants play in their community</li></ul>
3	<b>Develop a set of priorities and recommendations for the future of social housing in the UK</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand what social tenants would wish to change about their housing, and how they feel it could be achieved</li><li>• Understand which issues with social housing tenants and communities identify as priorities for policy makers and the reasoning behind this</li></ul>

This research is about social housing, not just the people who live in social housing. At the outset, Shelter identified that there were three key groups who have a particularly important

stake in the social housing system, and whose voices were essential to include as part of the research. They are:

### **1. *Social tenants themselves***

Households renting either council or local authority-owned social housing.

### **2. *Potential social tenants***

At the broadest level, this group comprises those who do not live in social housing but whose preferences or circumstances indicate that they might do so, if the supply was there. The precise definition was refined over the course of the research in light of learnings from the evidence review to provide a workable definition for each element of the research.

For the purposes of the qualitative findings, 'potential social tenants' was operationalised as:

- Private renters on low incomes;
- Households on social housing waiting lists in private rented accommodation or who were concealed households<sup>1</sup>; and / or
- Homeless households in temporary accommodation.

For the purposes of the quantitative findings, the definition was operationalised as the lowest income quintile of private rental households, determined by annual household income.

### **3. *Those living in close proximity to social housing***

The final core group focused on in the research is those who live in close proximity to social housing but who do not live in it themselves, a group referred to here as 'proximity residents'. This group is defined in two ways:

- Non-social renting households living in social housing estates in former Right to Buy properties (whether or not these were bought by the current resident); and / or
- Non-social renting households living in mixed tenure developments or areas which include social housing.

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<sup>1</sup> A concealed family is one living in a multi-family household in addition to the primary family, such as a young couple living with parents. Each family is assigned a Family Reference Person (FRP). *Office for National Statistics*.

## 3. Background to the research

### 3.1. Summary of findings

#### **Social housing is a tenure experiencing change.**

- The social housing sector in England has drastically shrunk in size in recent decades (from housing 32% of households in 1979 to 17% today) and now houses a smaller proportion of the population than the private rented sector. The key driver of this transformation has been the Right to Buy policy.
- There has been a move away from single tenure, segregated social housing estates in recent years and social housing is increasingly integrated with other tenures.
- There have been some substantive legislative reforms of the social sector in recent years. Among the most significant are the reform of the way social housing is allocated (allowing local authorities more leeway to determine their own allocation schemes) and the introduction of shorter, fixed-term tenancies in the Localism Act 2011.

#### **Social tenants are a diverse group.**

- The volume of social housing as a share of the total varies by region and is highest in London and the North East. A large majority of social housing across the country is located in urban areas.
- People who are social tenants are more likely to be in a single-parent family<sup>2</sup>, BAME<sup>3</sup>, people with a disability<sup>4</sup>, on a low income<sup>5</sup>, and to not be digitally-literate<sup>6</sup>.
- The London social housing population is also distinct from social tenants in other regions, with more young people and a considerably higher proportion of BAME residents than the overall social housing population – 46% of social tenants in London are BAME compared to the average in England of 16%. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), p. 10, Annex Table 1.5.

<sup>3</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), Annex Table 1.3.

<sup>4</sup> EHS, Social rented sector report (2015-16), pp. 4, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Power, A. and Provan, B., *Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing: Can Social Housing rebuild its reputation?*, LSE (2018), p. 19; EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), Annex Table 1.3.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyds Bank, *Consumer Digital Index* (2017), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> 2011 census, DC4201EW - Tenure by ethnic group by age - Household Reference Person

- The age profile of social renting households is similar to that of the overall population, whereas tenants in the private rental sector are disproportionately younger.<sup>8</sup>

### **Social housing remains in high demand**

- While attitudes towards social housing do differ between different tenure groups, perceptions of its advantages and disadvantages appear to be relatively consistent across the population. In particular, the evidence suggests that security of tenure and affordability are perceived as its major benefits, while neighbourhood and (to a lesser extent) space are perceived as significant drawbacks.
- There is a large group of private renters, particularly those on low incomes and those with dependent children, who express a hypothetical preference for social housing, given a free choice. Nonetheless, only a small proportion of this group appears to have put their names down on a waiting list.
- Despite this, there is a drastic mismatch between social housing supply and demand. According to the latest data, 1.16 million applicants are currently on a social housing waiting list.<sup>9</sup>

### **The existing literature on social housing is thorough but by no means comprehensive.**

- Much of the best data and analysis on the topic is five or more years old and pre-dates important legislative changes to the system (in particular, the introduction of fixed-term tenancies and the reform of allocation criteria in the Localism Act 2011).

## **3.2. Introduction**

This section of the report aims to provide context for the research. It begins with an introduction to social housing itself and the way the sector has changed in recent years. We then move on to the three core groups focused on in the research, those who have a particularly important stake in the social housing system and its future. We explore each group's demographic profile in turn and summarise how they differ. Next, there is a summary of the first stage of the research: a literature review of the existing evidence on social housing and what it meant for the rest of the project.

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<sup>8</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), Annex Table 1.3.

<sup>9</sup> Table 600: numbers of households on local authorities' housing waiting lists, by district, England, from 1997 – 2017, MHCLG.



Finally, this section concludes with a summary of the approach we took to the research itself: what we did, how we did it, and why.

### 3.3. Introduction to social housing

#### *Defining social housing*

Social housing systems vary in different parts of the world and have changed over time. For the purposes of this report we use the following definition of social housing in England today<sup>10</sup>:

*Social housing is let at low rents on a secure basis to those who are most in need or struggling with their housing costs. It is owned and managed by councils, or registered providers.*

In practice, this means that social housing has a number of key characteristics:

1. **Affordability.** The purpose of social housing is to provide accommodation that is affordable to people on low incomes. Limits to rent increases set by law regulate this.
2. **Allocated according to criteria.** Unlike in the private rented sector, where tenancies are offered by the landlord and letting agent to whomever they choose, social housing is distributed according to an allocation scheme. Although councils can determine how the housing in their area is allocated, there is a requirement that certain groups in need are given priority, also known as 'reasonable preference' for social housing.
3. **Owned and managed by councils and registered providers.** Registered providers are almost exclusively non-commercial organisations, particularly housing associations. Housing associations are independent, not-for-profit organisations that can use any profit they make to maintain existing homes and help finance new ones. It is legal for commercial organisations to build and manage social housing and become 'registered providers', but this is not yet common practice.
4. **Regulated.** Registered providers are financially regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing. New development can be funded by the government through the Homes and Communities Agency, which is responsible for the allocation of government funding for the construction of new social homes.

#### *The size and composition of the social sector*

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<sup>10</sup> Shelter England, 'What is social housing?', [https://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/\\_why\\_we\\_campaign/Improving\\_social\\_housing/what\\_is\\_social\\_housing](https://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/_why_we_campaign/Improving_social_housing/what_is_social_housing).

One striking feature of the English social housing system is its decline in size over the past few decades. Since a peak in 1981, when 32% of all households in England socially rented, the proportion of social housing has fallen steadily<sup>11</sup>. The social sector now accounts for 17% (3.9m) of all households in England, slightly smaller than the private rented sector (PRS) at 20%.<sup>12</sup>

Underlying this change is the role of Right to Buy, the flagship Thatcher government scheme which enabled social tenants to buy their homes at a discounted rate. Between the introduction of the Right to Buy scheme in 1980 and 2013-14, 1.8 million social rented properties were sold into owner occupation. When combined with low rates of building new homes, this has been a particularly significant factor in the decline of council housing in the overall housing stock.<sup>13</sup>

Right to Buy sales were initially extremely robust, reaching a peak of more than 200,000 in 1981 as pent-up demand was released, before falling away in the mid-1980s. The rate of sales varied substantially, in particular, by:

- **Region.** Sales were higher in the South and lagged behind in the North;
- **Area classification.** Rural areas, new towns and smaller towns saw higher rates of sales, while large cities (London, the urban North West) experienced lower rates; and
- **Existing housing stock.** Right to Buy sales were higher in areas which already had a higher proportion of owner occupation, and lower in areas where there was a greater proportion of council housing stock.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to its shrinking size, the composition of the social sector has also changed in recent years. Housing association rentals now form a higher proportion of the total than local authority rentals. In 2008-9, half (2.0 million) of social renting households rented from housing associations and half (1.9 million) from local authorities. By 2016-17, the gap had widened considerably: 60% of social tenants (2.4 million) rented from housing associations and 40% (1.6 million) rented from local authorities.<sup>15</sup>

Historically, social housing was characterised by long tenancies, and since the eighties, lifetime tenancies. Following the introduction of fixed-term social housing tenancies (FTTs) in the Localism Act 2011, an increasing proportion of the overall social housing share has been let on a fixed-term basis. In the most recent data, 13% of the total proportion of new social

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<sup>11</sup> *Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing: Can social housing rebuild its reputation?*, 2018, Professor Anne Power and Dr Bert Provan, p 7.

<sup>12</sup> EHS (2016-17), pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, *The Impact of the Existing Right to Buy and the Implications for the Proposed Extension of Right to Buy to Housing Associations* (2015), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

lettings were let on a fixed-term basis, and the remaining 87% were lifetime tenancies.<sup>16</sup> The Housing and Planning Act 2016 introduced provision for mandatory ten-year FTTs for all new local authority social rentals, showing some political appetite for extending this.<sup>17</sup>

### *Integration with other tenures*

Social housing is conventionally associated with segregated, single-tenure housing estates and this was the model which dominated much social housing construction in the mid-twentieth century. However, in recent decades there has been a systematic move away from this approach. This shift has been informed both by lower direct government funding for house-building and concerns about income segregation and ghettoisation.

Today, the leading approach for provision of social housing is to impose quotas for 'affordable' housing on developers. These quotas can be met either through housing provided at social rents, or through other criteria that meet an affordability benchmark (e.g. shared ownership).<sup>18</sup> In light of this, the social sector is geographically intertwined with other tenure types, a trend that is likely to increase.

### *Supply and demand for social housing*

There is a significant gap between supply and demand for social housing. As the social sector has shrunk in size over recent decades, the mismatch has grown. In 2016-17, the most recent year that data is available, there were 1.16 million households on local authority social housing waiting lists.<sup>19</sup> In that same year, just 290,000 new social lets were made available (through new social housing being built or a tenancy coming to an end): a gap of 870,000 homes.<sup>20</sup>

As shown in the chart below, the 1.16 million figure represents a 38% decrease in waiting list numbers since their 2012 peak. However, this decline is unlikely to reflect falling demand for social housing. Instead, it largely reflects reforms in the Localism Act 2011, which allowed local authorities to determine their own criteria for social housing eligibility. Since the Act came into effect, 95% of local authorities (as of 2017) reported having changed their waiting list

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Statistical Release: Social Housing Lettings: April 2016 to March 2017* (2018), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Fitzpatrick & Watts, 'Competing visions: security of tenure and the welfarisation of English social housing', *Housing Studies*, 32:8 (2017), p. 1022.

<sup>18</sup> The Chartered Institute of Housing & JRF, *More than Tenure Mix: Developer and purchaser attitudes to new housing estates* (2006), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Local authority housing statistics: year ending March 2017* (2017), p. 1.

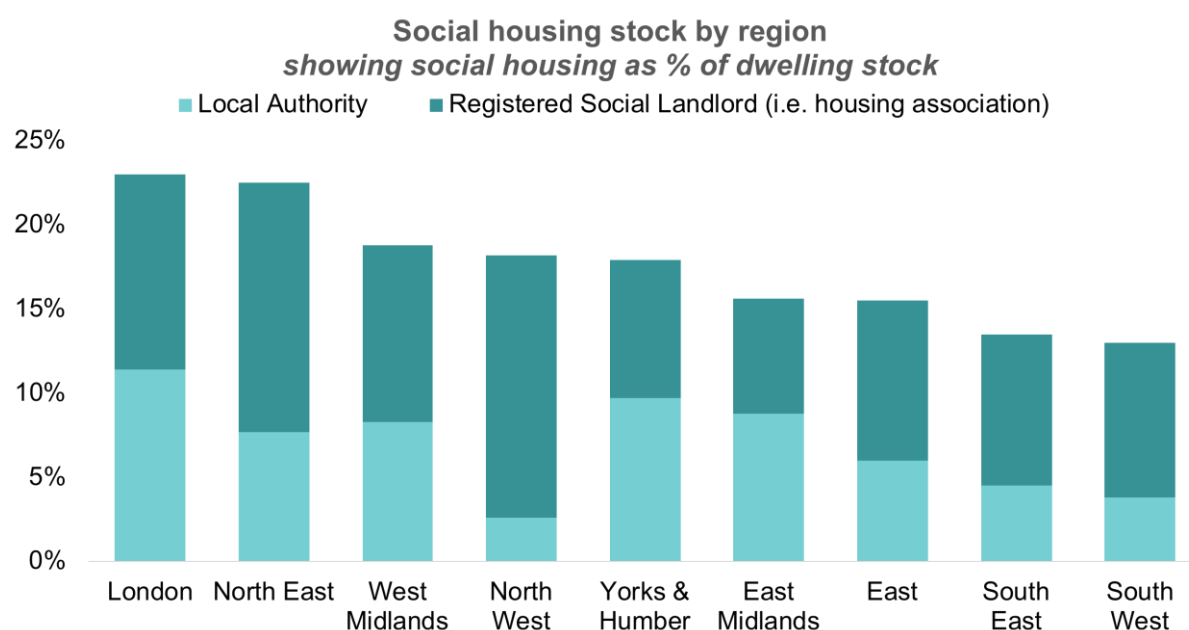
<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Statistical Release: Social Housing Lettings, April 2016 to March 2017* (2018), Table 1b, p. 6.

criteria, sometimes with dramatic effects.<sup>21</sup> To give one example, the number of households on Gateshead local authority's waiting list fell from 11,854 in 2012 to 4,835 in 2017.<sup>22</sup>

### *Where social housing is located*

The proportion of the total housing stock comprising social housing varies quite substantially between different regions. The proportion is highest in London and the North East (where almost a quarter of all households were social housing as of 2016), and lowest in the South West and South East (where just over one in ten were), as shown in the following chart.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 3.3.2 Chart showing social housing stock by region



**Source:** Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, live data tables on dwelling stock, 2016.

A large majority of social housing nationwide is located in urban areas. As of 2015, social housing comprised 19% of the overall urban housing stock in urban areas and 12% in rural areas.<sup>24</sup> The latest population estimates are that 83% of the population of England lives in an

<sup>21</sup> *Local authority housing statistics: year ending March 2017* (2017), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies*, Table 600.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Live tables on dwelling stock*, Table 100. N.B. Figures for total dwelling stock are estimates.

<sup>24</sup> Action with Communities in Rural England, *Affordable Housing: A Fair Deal for Rural Communities* (2015), p. 3.

urban area and 17% lives in a rural area.<sup>25</sup> Taken together, these statistics suggest that there are around eight times as many social homes in urban areas as there are in rural areas. However, the proportion of social housing that is located in rural areas does appear to be on the rise as an increasing share of new-build social housing is in rural areas. In 2016-17, 46% of new social housing was completed in areas of predominant or significant rurality – an increase of 15 percentage points since 2009-10.<sup>26</sup>

### **3.4. Summary of existing evidence about social housing and the groups in the study**

This section summarises the existing evidence about social tenants, as well as about the other two groups included in the research<sup>27</sup>. In particular, it focuses on the profiles of the three core groups, and how do these differ between locations. What is already known about experiences of, attitudes towards and priorities for social housing of these groups.

The evidence on social housing in England is thorough, comprising primarily quantitative data: statistics, charts and rent tables. However, it is by no means comprehensive. Through this presentation of existing evidence we are able to shed light on the gaps in pre-existing knowledge.

The information that we gathered was subsequently used to inform the plan for the rest of the research: the definitions of potential social tenants and proximity tenants, the demographic profiles of the groups we spoke to, the lines of questioning we pursued and the locations we visited. This section concludes with a summary of the implications of the evidence review and details about how the research was shaped by them.

#### **1. What is known about the profile of social tenants in England?**

##### *Introduction*

A social tenant might be defined as anybody who lives in social housing. From a practical perspective we know most about the person who completes surveys on behalf of the household. The English Housing Survey (EHS), the most authoritative source on the

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<sup>25</sup> Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, *Rural population and migration statistics* (February 2018), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, *Rural housing availability and affordability* (2017), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> The sources discussed in this section are varied. They include published sources from public authorities, existing polling and attitudinal research (such as the British Social Attitudes Survey and the English Housing Survey) and a range of secondary sources exploring different dimensions of social housing. Where possible, we refer to evidence covering England-only from the last five years. However, there are several areas where that evidence is patchy or non-existent and in those cases we have drawn on older sources

demographics of housing in England, and the sources derived from it use the 'Household Reference Person' (HRP) as their main unit of study.<sup>28</sup> This does mean that much of the analysis that derives from the EHS can miss out some information about everyone living in social housing. Nonetheless, it is the system used across all tenures and allows easy comparisons between different groups.

### *Social tenant demographics and employment structure*

Social tenants have a similar age profile as the population as a whole, with 27% of HRPs in the social sector aged 65+ (compared to 28% overall) and 39% aged 16-44 (compared to 35% overall)<sup>29</sup>. However, there are striking differences between the age profiles of social tenants and private tenants. In the private sector, the age profile is disproportionately younger: 68% of private tenant HRPs are 16-44<sup>30</sup>. Unsurprisingly the profile of owner occupiers is older than the general population, with 55% HRPs aged 55 and over (compared to 45% of the population overall).<sup>31</sup>

In almost every other respect, social tenants are a demographic outlier group. On all of the following measures, there are substantial demographic differences between social tenants and the wider population.

- 1. Income and deprivation.** Social tenant households are disproportionately concentrated in the lower income brackets. By weekly income, 45% are in the bottom income quintile, and 73% are in the bottom two quintiles.<sup>32</sup> Child poverty and deprivation are also both more common in social housing relative to other housing types. Children in households below median incomes are more than twice as likely to live in social rented housing as in private renting and more than nine times as likely to live in social renting than in owner occupation.<sup>33</sup>
- 2. Disability.** The social rented sector houses a considerably higher proportion of people with a disability than other tenures. 49% of social rented households included at least one family member with a long-term health condition or disability. This compares to 29% of owner-occupied households and 23% of private rented households.<sup>34</sup>
- 3. Ethnicity.** A higher proportion (18%) of social tenants are from Black & Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds than across the population as a whole (12%). However, this gap

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<sup>28</sup> In the 2016-17 English Housing Survey, an HRP is defined as: 'The person in whose name the dwelling is owned or rented or who is otherwise responsible for the accommodation. In the case of joint owners and tenants, the person with the highest income is taken as the HRP. Where incomes are equal, the older is taken as the HRP.'

<sup>29</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), Annex Table 1.3.

<sup>30</sup> Same source as above.

<sup>31</sup> Same source as above.

<sup>32</sup> Power, A. and Provan, B., *Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing: Can Social Housing rebuild its reputation?*, LSE (2018), p. 19; EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), Annex Table 1.3.

<sup>33</sup> *Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing*, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> EHS, Social rented sector report (2015-16), pp. 4, 12.



appears to be a rental-occupation gap rather than something specific to social housing. The exact same proportion (18%) of social tenants and private renters are BAME.<sup>35</sup>

4. **Household composition.** The social rented sector has the highest proportion of single parent households of any tenure, 39%, compared to 29% overall.<sup>36</sup>
5. **Employment.** The proportion of social tenants in work is lower than all other tenure groups other than those who own their homes outright (owing to this group's older age profile). 43% of social tenants are in work overall, with 30% in full-time work and 13% in part-time work. 27% are retired and 21% are classed as 'inactive', a category that includes those who have a long-term illness or disability or who are looking after the family home full-time. The proportion of social tenants in work is considerably lower than in the private rented sector (74%) or people who own their home with a mortgage (91%). It is, however, higher than those who own their homes outright. This derives from the older age profile of outright owners.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Other aspects: Rent, affordability and digital literacy*

There are striking differences between the social sector and the private rented sector on rent and affordability measures. A majority (59%) of social tenant households receive Housing Benefit to help pay their rent in the latest data, compared to less than a quarter (22%) of privately renting households. One notable change in recent years is that while the overall proportion of social tenants receiving this benefit was unchanged since 2008-9, the proportion of those *in work* receiving it rose from 19% to 30%.<sup>38</sup>

Rent arrears in the social sector are more prevalent than in the PRS. In 2016-17, a full quarter (25%) of social tenant households were either behind on paying their rent or had been in the last 12 months. This compares to 9% of private renting households. Both proportions were unchanged since 2011-12.<sup>39</sup>

One further distinction between the social sector and other tenures had important implications for the research: social tenants are more likely than any other tenure to be digitally excluded. In 2017, 67% of Housing Association renters and 63% Local Authority Renters were classed as having 'Basic Digital Skills'. This compares to 92% among those who owned with a mortgage, 88% of those in the private rented sector and 69% of outright owners (in line with this group's older age profile).<sup>40</sup>

#### *Differences by location*

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<sup>35</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), Annex Table 1.3.

<sup>36</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), p. 10, Annex Table 1.5.

<sup>37</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), p. 11, Annex Table 1.3.

<sup>38</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Lloyds Bank, *Consumer Digital Index* (2017), p. 45.

London's social housing population stands out as an outlier in a number of respects.

1. **Age.** The city has the youngest age profile of any region in the country, with half of social housing HRP's aged 44 or younger, and (linked to this) the highest proportion of households with children of any region.
2. **Ethnicity.** A far higher proportion of the London social housing population is BAME than in other regions. In 2008, over 40% of households in the London social rented sector were headed by a BAME individual, around three times the proportion of any other region. New households were more likely still to be BAME, indicating that the proportions would be considerably higher now.<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, the demographic similarities between other English regions stand out more than their differences, with similar profiles in terms of age and household composition. The most notable difference is in terms of employment status, where social housing lines up with overall levels of regional employment. In line with this pattern, social tenants in the North East, North West and West Midlands all have lower employment rates than other regions. As of 2011, The North East and North West also have the highest rate of social tenants who are economically inactive due to sickness or disability.<sup>42</sup>

As outlined in section 2 above, looking at social housing, or at social tenants alone would not give a rounded picture of the situation facing social housing in England. This is because there is a wider group in England who are currently not in social housing, but in times past may well have been. This includes households on Local Authority waiting lists (including statutory homeless households), and others whose income, household size and housing preferences mean they could benefit from living in social housing. These 'potential tenants' are also key stakeholders in shaping what social housing should provide. In addition, the communities that social tenants live in are made up of households from many different tenures. These groups can also contribute to building a picture of what social housing is like. We go on to describe these groups, and what is known about them.

### Potential social tenants

At the broadest level, this group comprises those who do not live in social housing but whose circumstances indicate that they might do so if more social housing was available. To understand more about this group, we explored the literature on several distinct (though overlapping) groups of people:

- Individuals on social housing waiting lists, not currently in social housing; Or individuals who express a preference (in surveys) for living in social housing but do not at the moment; and

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>42</sup> 2001 Census, LC4601EW - Tenure by economic activity by age - Household Reference Persons.

- Private renters on low incomes.

The findings on each of those groups are summarised below.

*People on social housing waiting lists, not already in social housing*

The most recent data indicates that there are 1.16 million households on local authority social housing waiting lists.<sup>43</sup> However, many of these are social tenants waiting to transfer to a new social home. The data we have does not allow us to differentiate between these social tenants, and the groups we are interested in. However, it gives some useful insight into the workings of waiting lists, and the households waiting for a new social home.

Many applicants spend extended periods of time on waiting lists. As of 2015-16, 65% of them had been on a list for more than a year, and 27% had been on a list for more than five years.<sup>44</sup>

Data from the English Housing Survey demonstrates that households on waiting lists are demographically distinct in a number of ways.<sup>45</sup>

1. **Age.** Applicants are predominantly young people: those aged 16-24 are more than twice as likely to be on a waiting list than those aged 45+.
2. **Household structure.** Waiting list applicants are much more likely to have children. 5.9% of households with dependent children had somebody on a waiting list in 2015-16, three times the rate of households without dependent children.
3. **Tenure status.** Renters of all types are more likely to be on a waiting list than owner occupiers, but the gap between private tenants and social tenants is relatively small. 7.7% of all social rented households contained someone on a waiting list in 2015-16, compared to 8.2% of private renters and 0.6% of owner occupiers.<sup>46</sup>

Although local authorities have been allowed wider discretion to determine the criteria for their social housing allocation systems since the Localism Act 2011, the Act does require that 'reasonable preference' is given to certain vulnerable groups. Of the 1.16 million households on waiting lists, almost half – 479,000 – fell into the reasonable preference category in 2016-17. The groups contained within this are shown in the chart below.

Figure 3.4.1 Chart showing the status of those on waiting lists for social housing

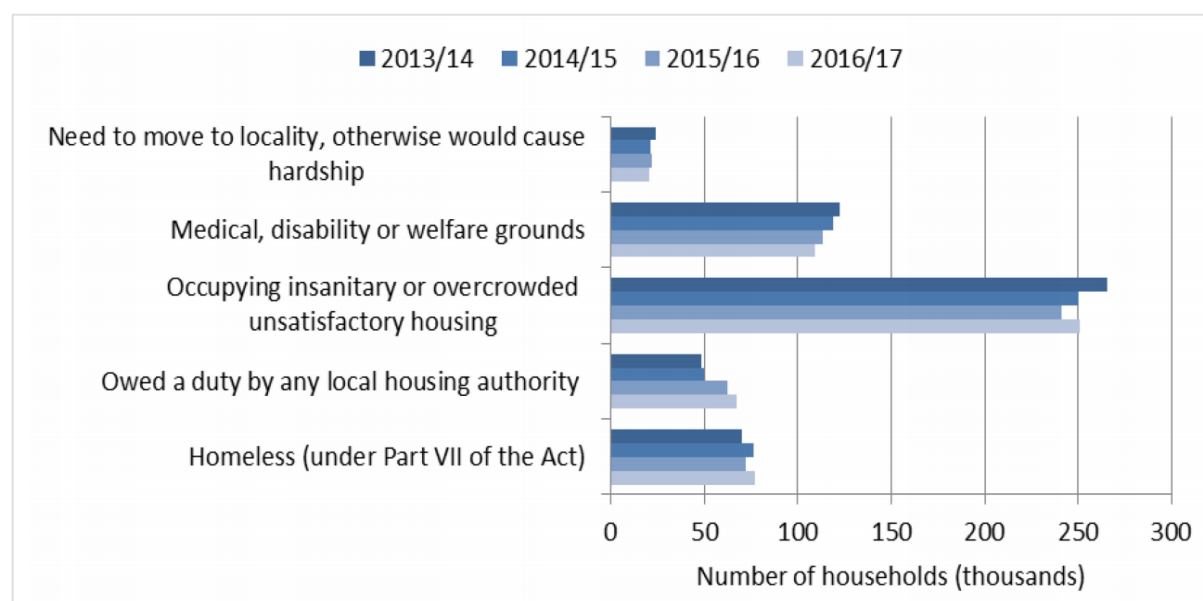
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<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Local authority housing statistics: year ending March 2017* (2017), p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> EHS, *Social rented sector report* (2015-16), Annex table 2.11.

<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that, because this data is drawn from the English Housing Survey and therefore relies on using the HRP as a proxy for the household, the data is not fully representative of the whole population of those on social housing waiting lists.

<sup>46</sup> EHS, *Social rented sector report* (2015-16), Annex table 2.9.



The biggest single group of in this category is households living in unsanitary or overcrowded conditions, and the second is households who need housing on medical, disability or welfare grounds. The reasonable preference category also includes households who are considered to be statutorily homeless.<sup>47</sup> The size of this group has increased markedly since 2009-10, particularly in London.<sup>48</sup>

#### *People with a preference for social housing*

Although the total number of households on social housing waiting lists is high, as a proportion of the population they are a small minority: 3% of households in 2015-16 contained someone on a waiting list.<sup>49</sup> And this group contains many households who are already social tenants, making the group we are interested in, smaller still. However, there appears to be a larger group who would like to live in social housing if they could, but who are not currently on a waiting list. In the 2004-5 Survey of English Housing (the precursor to the English Housing Survey), only around a third of those who agreed that they would 'like to live in social housing if [they] could get it' had their names on a list.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, the question about social housing preference was subsequently taken out of the EHS, meaning more recent data on this issue was not available when this research began.

As of the 2004-5 data, this wider group was much more prevalent in the private rented sector (where 34% of tenants expressed a preference for social housing) than in owner occupation.

<sup>47</sup> *Local authority housing statistics*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>48</sup> Chartered Institute of Housing, *UK Housing Review* (2017), p. 94.

<sup>49</sup> EHS, Social rented sector report (2015-16), Annex Table 2.9.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR), *Understanding demographic, spatial and economic impacts on future affordable housing demand. Paper Four - Moving Into Social Housing* (2008), p. 3.

The proportion of people with a social housing preference also increases as you go down the income scale, to almost half of private renters in the lowest income category.

Strikingly, a preference for social housing was particularly prevalent among two groups of private renters.

**Private renters who had previously been social tenants.** Among this group, the preference for social housing rose to six in ten.

**Families with dependent children.** This group was much more likely to express a social housing preference than those with no dependent children.<sup>51</sup>

The Survey of English Housing data shed some light on the reasons for not joining a waiting list. By far the most commonly identified reason for this was an aspiration to buy in the future. The second most important category was 'not interested', which may include a portion of households who disapprove of social housing or see it as 'not for them'. A perception that they were unlikely to be eligible came in third.<sup>52</sup>

Due to a lack of data, and a suggestion that available data does not capture aspirations or need truly, it appears that a broader definition may be more useful to capture this group.

#### *Private renters on low incomes*

The group of 'potential tenants' could also be defined as tenants who are not currently social tenants but are on low incomes. Housing affordability has declined for people on low incomes in recent decades. Between 1994-5 and 2015-16, the proportion of people in the poorest fifth of the working-age population who spend more than a third of their income on housing costs rose from 39% to 47%. The problem is particularly acute in London and the South East, in many parts of which monthly rent-to-earnings ratios run at over 40%.<sup>53</sup> Many of these people would be likely to benefit from homes with greater affordability and security of tenure.

There are many ways this group could be defined. It could include households paying a high proportion of their income on housing. Or it could include households whose housing costs are so high that their residual income is not high enough for an acceptable standard of living. Alternatively, it could be households on a low income, or who state that they are struggling as a result of housing costs.

Looking at analysis of households with a low residual income gives us some insight into the households in this situation. Shelter analysis has found that 1.3 million working age

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> CCHPR, *Moving Into Social Housing* (2008), p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), *Using the Social Housing Green Paper to boost the supply of low-cost rented homes* (2018).

households have an income after housing costs that is lower than the 'after-housing costs Minimum Income Standard' for their family size. This is a tenth of the working-age population. Regardless of the definition used, this group is disproportionately overrepresented in London, is younger (25% are 25-34) and 33% of this group contains a household member with a disability.<sup>54</sup>

Considering the apparent high demand for social housing, the proportions of households on low incomes who actually apply for it are relatively low.<sup>55</sup> As of 2015-16, just 5% of all households in the lowest income quintile contained somebody on a waiting list. In the 2004-5 Survey of English Housing data, 85% of renting households with incomes under £25,000 had not applied for social housing.

### **Proximity residents**

Another group with a stake in the future of social housing is those who live in close proximity to social housing and social tenants, a group referred to here as 'proximity residents'. By definition this is an amorphous and varied group. To learn more about them, we explored the literature on two categories of people:

- Households living in former social rented properties on estates which were taken out of the social sector through Right to Buy; and/or
- Households living in owner-occupied or private rented properties in mixed tenure developments containing social housing.

Each of these two groupings contains a range of tenure types and reflects a wide range of different demographics. In line with this, they have not traditionally been analysed as a single group and the evidence base on each of them is patchy. Detail on each of them is outlined below.

#### *People in former Right to Buy properties*

Since the introduction of the Right to Buy scheme in 1980, 1.8 million social rented properties were sold into owner occupation. In this time, certain types of household have been more likely to exercise Right to Buy than others. Skilled working-class and lower-middle-class families with children appear to have taken it up at higher rates, while younger tenants, the very old, single parents and the unemployed have been less likely to exercise it. The aggregate effect of this pattern has contributed to the social housing sector increasingly becoming a smaller, more 'residual' option catering in larger part to households on very low incomes.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Shelter, *Analysis on low income private renters*.

<sup>55</sup> EHS, Social rented sector report (2015-16), Annex Table 2.9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.



There is widespread agreement that a large amount of former Right to Buy property has been recycled into the private rented sector, but precise data on this appears to be missing from the literature. A high estimate is that 40% of the entire stock of homes sold through the scheme are now used for private renting.<sup>57</sup> This suggests that 60% of this group are owner occupiers, and 40% are private renters.

### *People in mixed tenure developments containing social housing*

One of the recent changes referenced in section 3.3. above is the shift towards mixed tenure estates as the dominant approach for new social housing.

The literature on these mixed tenure estates, and who lives in them, appears to be sparse. We know that the proportion of social housing in new developments varies widely between different parts of the country and different developers. Affordable housing quotas tend to vary between 20% and 50% of the overall share but, as these can be met in a number of ways besides social housing, the social rented proportion of the total is often much lower.<sup>58</sup> In a 2006 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) study of seven case study new developments, the proportion of properties available for social rent varied between none (in several of the estates) and a full third<sup>59</sup>.

Within mixed tenure developments, there is also a wide variety of spatial configurations between different types of tenure. The three main categories can be defined as:

- 'Integrated' or 'pepper-potting' (where tenures are located side-by-side and are indistinguishable; various types and sizes);
- 'Segmented' where social rented and market properties are divided by blocks or properties characterised by short cul-de-sacs; short terraces; and
- 'Segregated' where different tenures are geographically separated (e.g. gated communities or apartments with tenures separated by doors or entrances<sup>60</sup>).

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> CIH & JRF, *More than Tenure Mix: Developer and purchaser attitudes to new housing estates*, 2006

<sup>60</sup> See for example Hilary Osborne, 'Poor doors: the segregation of London's inner-city flat dwellers', *Guardian* (25<sup>th</sup> July 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jul/25/poor-doors-segregation-london-flats>.

## 2. Existing evidence on experiences of and attitudes to social housing

### *Introduction*

We started by looking at existing evidence of how social housing measures up to other tenures in terms of overall satisfaction. Following this, in order to sort wider evidence about peoples experience of housing we have drawn on a recent piece of research by Ipsos MORI for Shelter, that captured a public view of what a decent home should provide. The *Living Home Standard*, identified that people identified five key dimensions of what people needed from a home: *affordability*, *decent conditions*, *space*, *stability* and *neighbourhood*. To these five we have added one further theme that is prominent in the literature: the desirability of different housing tenures, and any perceived *stigma* of social housing and the people who live in it. Each of these dimensions is explored in depth below.

### *Overall satisfaction*

Data from the English Housing Survey allows us to compare social tenants' satisfaction with other tenure groups. There are two distinct ways in which satisfaction is measured: satisfaction with *home* and satisfaction with *tenure status*. On the first measure, social tenants fare worse than other groups (though, as with other tenures, a large majority are still satisfied). As of 2015-16, the most recent year for which detailed data is available, 81% social renters are satisfied with their accommodation overall. They are, however, slightly more likely than private renters to be dissatisfied with their accommodation (13% compared to 10%) and there is a stark satisfaction gap with owner-occupiers (only 3% of whom are dissatisfied).<sup>61</sup>

The picture is different when it comes to satisfaction with *tenure status*, where reported satisfaction among social renters is higher than among private renters. More than 82% of social renters are satisfied with their tenure status and only 10% are dissatisfied. By contrast, 69% of private renters are satisfied and 21% are dissatisfied with their tenure status.<sup>62</sup>

### *Affordability*

There are lots of ways in which affordability can be measured but, using conventional housing affordability definitions based on the proportion of income spent on housing costs, social housing fares considerably better than privately renting. In 2014-15, 48% of the poorest fifth of social tenants spent more than a third of their income on rent, but for the equivalent group of private renters this proportion rises to a full three-quarters (73%).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> EHS, Social rented sector report (2015-16), p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> JRF & New Policy Institute, *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion* (2016), p. 40.

The literature on perceptions of affordability, and how this compares between tenures, is a little less clear cut. In the 2011 British Social Attitudes Survey, affordability was deemed to be the biggest disadvantage of living in the PRS (by 32% overall) but was not seen as nearly as important in the social sector. It is notable that social tenants (43%) viewed cost as the major drawback of privately renting at considerably higher rates than private tenants themselves (34%).<sup>64</sup>

The Living Home Standard also touches on affordability but paints a different picture. To meet the benchmark for living in an affordable home, an individual must:

1. Feel they can meet their rent or mortgage payments without having to regularly cut back on essential spending;
2. Not worry that rent or mortgage payments could rise to an unmanageable level; and
3. Feel they can meet their rent or mortgage payments without regularly preventing them doing social activities **or** put enough money aside to cover unexpected costs.

Using this definition, the same proportions of private renters (48%), social renters from a local authority (48%) and social renters from a housing association (47%) fail the Standard.<sup>65</sup> In part, this may be a function of the higher average incomes in the private sector, meaning that tenants feel more able to cope with a larger proportion of their income going towards rent.

### *Decent conditions*

The leading way of assessing whether a home is in decent condition is the Government's Decent Home Standard (which assesses homes by state of repair, facilities and energy efficiency standards). Over the last decade, the number of non-decent homes in all tenures has been rapidly falling, as outlined in the chart below.<sup>66</sup>

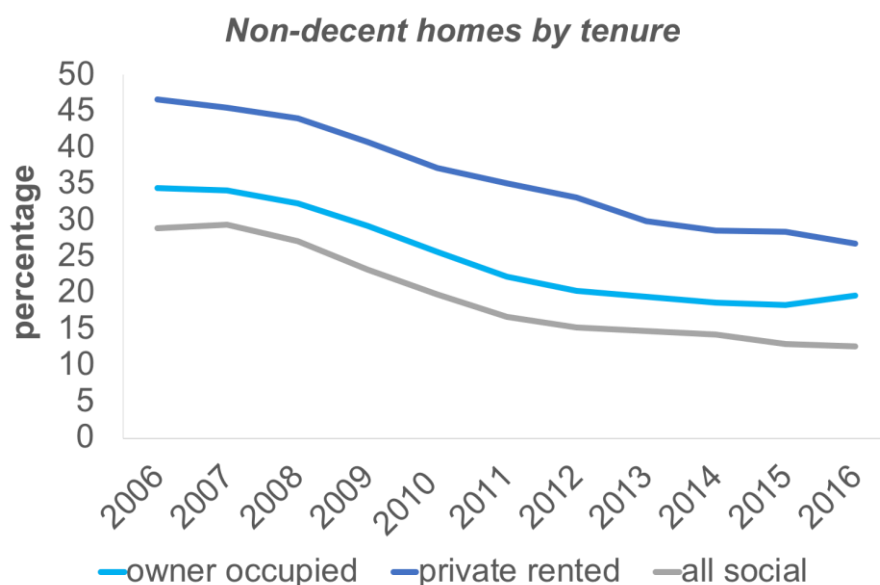
Figure 3.4.3 Chart showing proportion of homes that fail the Decent Home Standard by tenure

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<sup>64</sup> NatCen, British Social Attitudes 28 (2011), *Housing*, p. 132.

<sup>65</sup> JRF & New Policy Institute, *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion* (2016), p. 40.

<sup>66</sup> EHS, Headline Report (2016-17), p. 29.



Source: *English Housing Survey, Headline Report (2016-17)*

Using this method, the social rented sector tends to fare better than other tenures. This is in large part because energy efficiency standards in the sector (which has a higher proportion of modern buildings) are higher. According to the most recent data, the social rented sector had the lowest (13%) proportion of non-decent homes, while the rate in the private rental sector was twice as high (27%). Among owner occupied homes, 20% failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard.<sup>67</sup>

As with affordability, the findings from the Living Home Standard present a slightly different picture. A home is deemed to meet the Standard for conditions if the occupant feels it meets a series of minimum quality benchmarks (including being free from damp, having hot and cold running water and meeting the disability-related needs of everybody in the household). Using this method, social housing and privately rented housing fail the LHS at almost identical rates. Nationally, 29% of social renters report living in a home which fails the LHS, compared to 28% of private renters. This compares to 11% of owner occupiers without a mortgage and 13% of owner occupiers with a mortgage.<sup>68</sup>

### Space

This is an area where the existing evidence suggests social housing markedly falls down compared to other tenures. Using the Government's official 'bedroom standard' benchmark for overcrowding, in 2015-16, 7% of social rented homes were overcrowded. This compares with 1% for owner occupied homes and 5% for private rented homes. Local authority tenants

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

were slightly more likely to live in overcrowded accommodation than housing association tenants (8% compared with 6%).

The problem of overcrowding in the social rented sector is heavily concentrated among families with dependent children. Overcrowding was more prevalent among households with dependent children; 17% of them lived in overcrowded accommodation compared to 2% of households without children.<sup>69</sup>

Data from Living Home Standard supports the distinction between social housing and other tenures. Overall, 11% of the public overall live in homes which fail the benchmark, this rises to more than one fifth for social rented homes – 22% for local authority social rentals and 23% for housing associations. The lack of space is seen as a particular problem in London, where a full quarter of homes fail the LHS on this dimension.<sup>70</sup>

### *Stability*

In this context, stability is a measure of the extent to which people feel secure enough in their accommodation to make it feel like a 'home'. It relates to the length of time they can live in the home and the length of notice required if they were ever forced to leave. In this respect, stability is seen as one of the main advantages of living in social housing over private rented housing.

In the 2011 British Social Attitudes Survey, secure tenancy arrangements were identified by 18% of the public as the main advantage of living in social rented accommodation over private rented (second overall after Right to Buy, 29%, and joint with low/affordable rents). Notably, social renters themselves were particularly likely to value tenure security (24%). Conversely, 12% of the public selected 'restrictions around the length of time you can stay living in the property' as the main disadvantage of private over social rented accommodation (second after problems with landlord and joint with 'little choice over what happens to the property'). Social housing tenants were considerably more likely (16%) to choose tenure length as the main disadvantage of private renting than their private sector counterparts (9%).<sup>71</sup>

The Living Home Standard provides additional evidence for the gap between the tenures. A full quarter (25%) of those living in private rental accommodation live in homes which fail the stability dimension of the LHS, compared to 16% of local authority tenants and 12% of housing association tenants. Owner occupiers are most likely to live in homes which meet the standard. Only 4% of owner occupiers without a mortgage and 5% of those with a mortgage fail the LHS on this dimension.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> EHS, Social Rented Sector Report (2015-16), Annex table 1.20, pp. 4, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Shelter & Ipsos Mori, *Living Home Standard: Space*, <http://www.shelter.org.uk/livinghomestandard/space>.

<sup>71</sup> British Social Attitudes 28, *Housing*, pp. 135-6.

<sup>72</sup> Shelter & Ipsos Mori, *Living Home Standard: Stability*, <http://www.shelter.org.uk/livinghomestandard/stability>.

Much of this evidence precedes the introduction of fixed-term tenancies (FTTs) in the Localism Act 2011. This type of tenancy is usually set at a five-year term, but can go as low as two years in exceptional circumstances. Tenancies of this length represent an important shift in the direction of social housing, which had historically been characterised by very long-term tenancies.

The reform is still a recent one and affects a relatively small proportion of the overall social tenant population (although, as referenced in section 3.3 above, their numbers are growing). It may therefore not be surprising that the literature on this issue is patchy. The most comprehensive evidence is a large-scale qualitative research programme with hundreds of FTT social tenants across England, published in 2017. It proposed that social tenants on FTTs can be divided into three main attitudinal groups:

- **The Unaware.** A relatively small number of those on FTTs were not aware of their tenancy status, or were under the misapprehension that they had a tenancy for life.
- **The Unconcerned.** A larger group of those on FTTs were aware of their status, but not too bothered by it. This group tended to be younger, and included a portion who had previously been living in the PRS, for whom a five-year tenancy felt like a relatively secure option. It also included a number of households who had previously experienced homelessness and felt grateful for accommodation on any terms offered.
- **The Anxious.** Most prevalent were a group who were anxious about their tenancy status, seeing it as a source of insecurity. Older people, those who had previously been in secure tenancies, people with health or disability issues, and families with children tended to be the most concerned.

The overall picture appears to be that, while stability is viewed as a key advantage for social housing in comparison to the PRS, tenants on FTTs are more concerned by the stability of their housing circumstances than those on traditional lifetime tenancies.<sup>73</sup>

### *Neighbourhood*

The literature suggests that neighbourhood and local area is one of the main perceived disadvantages of social housing. As outlined in the table below, social renters are the least likely of any tenure to be satisfied with their local area, though satisfaction has risen steadily over time.<sup>74</sup>

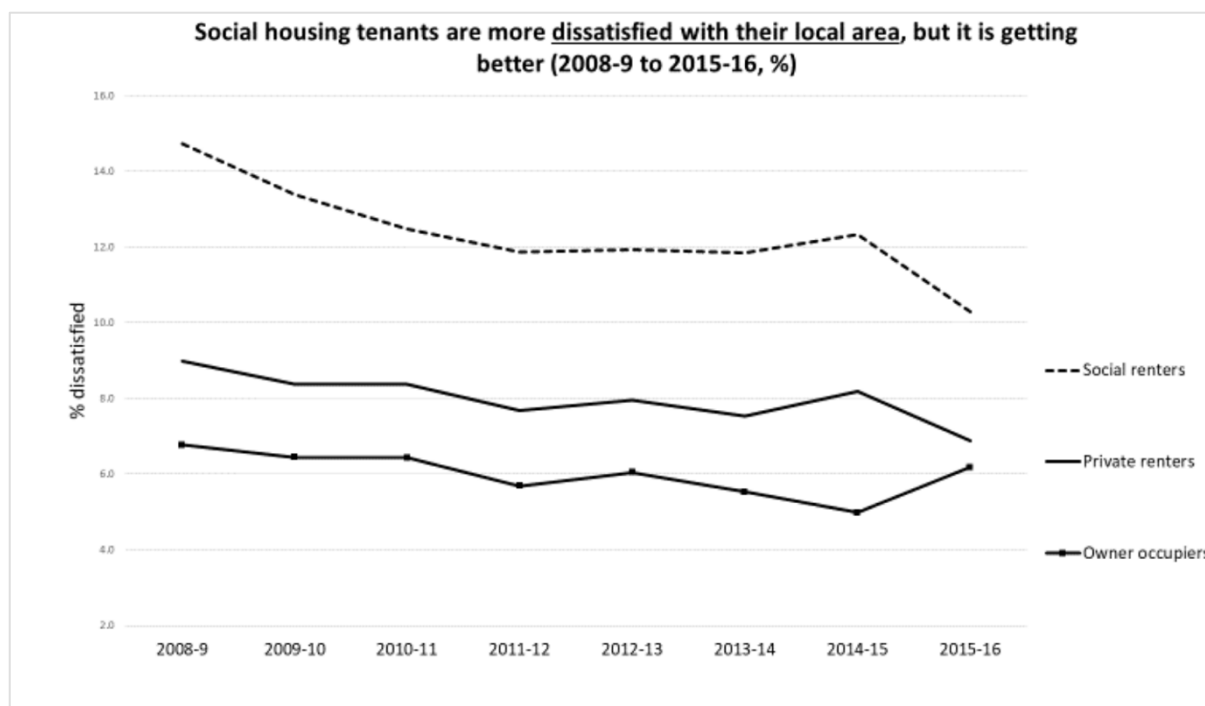
Figure 3.4.4 Chart showing dissatisfaction with local area by household tenure

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<sup>73</sup> Fitzpatrick & Watts, 'Competing visions: security of tenure and the welfarisation of English social housing', *Housing Studies*, 32:8 (2017), pp. 1022-32.

<sup>74</sup> Power, A. and Provan, B., *Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing: Can Social Housing rebuild its reputation?*, LSE (2018), p. 19





Source: *Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing* (2018)

This is backed up by the findings from the Living Home Standard. A home is considered to be satisfactory on the neighbourhood dimension if its occupants feel reasonably safe and secure in their local area, and the home meets a proximity benchmark to at least one of three key things: work, amenities or family/friend networks.

It is the dimension by which homes are least likely to fail the LHS, with 95% of the UK public living in homes in a satisfactory neighbourhood. However, this varies substantially between tenures. Housing association tenants are more than twice as likely as the overall population (11% vs 5% overall) to live in homes which do not meet the bar, and local authority tenants are three times as likely (14%).<sup>75</sup>

One of the prominent specific concerns about appears to be safety. According to the English Housing Survey, social tenants are the least likely of all tenure groups to feel safe when walking in their neighbourhood at night, the most likely to feel unsafe, and the most likely to report not going out due to feeling unsafe of any tenure type. Half (51%) of social renters said they felt safe going out at night (compared with 70% of owner occupiers and 73% of private renters).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Shelter & Ipsos Mori, *Living Home Standard: Neighbourhood*, <http://www.shelter.org.uk/livinghomestandard/neighbourhood>.

<sup>76</sup> EHS, *People's perception of their neighbourhood* (2015-16), pp. 16-18.

Social tenants are also the most likely of any tenure group to express dissatisfaction with three or more problems affecting their area, a proxy for overall neighbourhood satisfaction. 46% of social renters express dissatisfaction with three or more local problems, compared with 31% of owner occupiers and 33% of private renters. Among social tenants, local authority tenants (50%) are slightly more likely than housing association tenants (43%) to report three or more issues. Meanwhile, 23% of social tenants reported having no neighbourhood problems compared to 32% of owner occupiers and 33% of private renters.<sup>77</sup>

In large part, concerns about social housing neighbourhoods appear to relate to antisocial behaviour. In the 2011 British Social Attitudes Survey, 31% of social tenants identified antisocial behaviour on estates as the main problem of living in social housing.<sup>78</sup>

The wider population also perceives that is a major disadvantage of social housing. The single most commonly identified disadvantage of living in social housing was 'antisocial behaviour on estates' (39%). A further 7% identified anti-social neighbours as the main disadvantage. Taken together, the evidence suggests that almost half of the population felt that antisocial behaviour in local areas was the most significant disadvantage of living in the sector, exceeding the second and third ranked disadvantages – 'little choice over location' (12%) and 'difficult to move to other types of property when needs change' (8%) – by a significant margin.<sup>79</sup>

### *Stigma and desirability*

Survey data indicates that the general public's preferred tenure type is owner-occupation. In the 2011 British Social Attitudes Survey, 86% expressed a preference for home ownership in an ideal world. This figure has remained remarkably consistent over time: in 1999 87% expressed a preference for home ownership, and 84% in 1996.<sup>80</sup>

However, there is also a significant minority of social tenants who express a preference for social housing. As of 2005-6, 39% of council tenants expressed a preference for renting from the council. For housing association tenants, the combined preference figures for local authority or housing association rentals comes close to half, and exceeds the proportion who would prefer owner-occupation. In 2007 at least, in this respect social tenants are an outlier group: no other tenure expresses a preference for social housing in significant numbers.<sup>81</sup>

Previous research has identified that perceived drawback of the social rented sector expressed by social tenants themselves is stigma from other people or parts of society. This is an area where the evidence is mainly qualitative rather than quantitative. It does not, for example, register on the British Social Attitudes survey as a significant drawback of social

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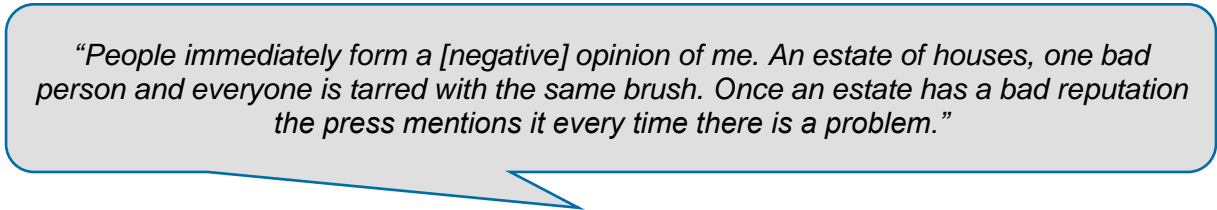
<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-15.

<sup>78</sup> British Social Attitudes 28, *Housing*, p. 136.

<sup>80</sup> NatCen, British Social Attitudes 28 (2011); *Housing: Homes, planning and changing policies*, p. 132.

<sup>81</sup> Hills, J., *Ends and Means: The future roles of social housing in England* (2007), p. 69.

housing. However, in a community tenant 'think tank' held in October 2017 with 54 social tenants, the negativity of other people towards social housing emerged as the single biggest drawback of being a social tenant, with more than half the overall responses.



*“People immediately form a [negative] opinion of me. An estate of houses, one bad person and everyone is tarred with the same brush. Once an estate has a bad reputation the press mentions it every time there is a problem.”*

Almost all participants had come across negative media coverage of social housing, and in particular coverage which focused on unemployment, crime and antisocial behaviour. There was a feeling that this did not reflect tenants' own experiences of the social sector, which were generally that it was a positive and community-minded place to live.<sup>82</sup>

The aim of the evidence review was to ensure that the research itself was grounded in a thorough understanding of social housing and the groups who have a stake in it. The findings contained some important implications for the research. We detail this in the next section

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<sup>82</sup> Power, A., 'Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing: Findings from Tenant Think Tanks' (2018), pp. 2, 5, 6.

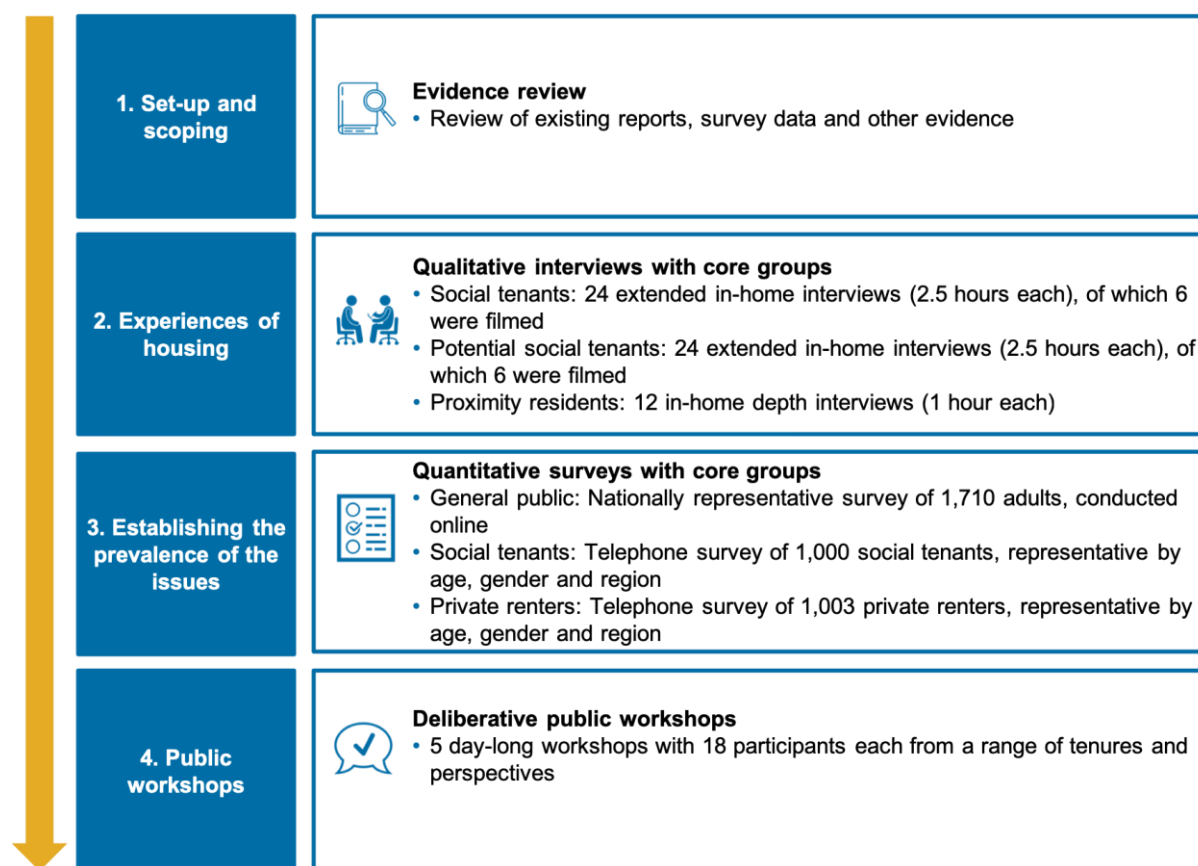
### 3.5. Summary of research approach

The research approach for this piece of work was designed to obtain:

- Rich qualitative detail on the lives and experiences of social tenants and potential social tenants;
- Robust quantitative data establishing the prevalence of views and experiences, and differences between groups; and
- Participant-led recommendations on policy around social housing.

The following diagram summarises our full approach to achieving these objectives. A rationale and more detailed approach summary of each element follows below.

Figure 3.5.1



#### *Detailed research approach*

#### **Recruiting research participants**

The above evidence review had a bearing on how the core groups were defined and selected.

## **Social tenants**

The evidence review revealed that social tenants are a demographically distinct group, containing a high proportion of BAME individuals, people with a disability, and individuals who are not digitally-literate. The specifications that we used to recruit participants imposed minimum quotas on each of those criteria to ensure that the research was representative of the social tenant population.

The data showed that, with the exception of London, the demographic profile of social tenants across English regions is characterised more by similarity than by difference. London is the big outlier and we reflected this through distinct recruitment quotas for the London research. The finding that social tenants are a disproportionately urban group informed our decision to conduct most of the research in urban areas, with one predominantly rural area (Pendle in Lancashire) included to capture its distinct perspective.

## **Potential tenants**

In the case of potential social tenants, the evidence made it clear that waiting lists alone would be nowhere near sufficient to capture the full extent of this group. There is a much larger group of people who express a preference for, or who could be in social housing if there was more of it. This informed a broad definition of the group which incorporates several overlapping categories. These were:

- private renters on low incomes,
- households on social housing waiting lists, or who express a preference for social housing, who are not currently in social housing. Within this latter group, we included some households who were renting privately and overcrowded, and some households who were statutorily homeless. In the main, these groups were in the private rented sector (with the exception of homeless households).

## **Proximity residents**

We found that the literature on proximity residents, as a group, was next to non-existent. This informed a decision to define this group broadly, as anyone living in a former Right to Buy property or living on a mixed tenure estate. Beyond this, we recruited a mix of different types of people within those categories to take part in the research.

## ***Phase 1: Evidence review***

This element is summarised in detail in sections 3.3 and 3.4 above. From the perspective of the research design, the findings from the evidence review were used to inform the following elements of the research:

- **Discussion guides, questionnaires and workshop agenda**, ensuring that research questions built on, and did not replicate, existing knowledge;
- **Recruitment specifications for research participants**, ensuring that we were speaking to a sample that is reflective of social housing tenants and potential social tenants; and
- **Research locations**, ensuring that any potential location differences have been accounted for when selecting research locations for the depth interviews and deliberative workshops.

### ***Phase 2: Experiences of housing***

This phase of the project comprised qualitative, extended in-home research with each of the core groups. In total, we conducted 60 extended in-home interviews across six locations in England.

These interviews were at the very core of the research programme and were fundamental to the development of a detailed picture of participants' lives and experiences. Conducting individual interviews (rather than, for example, focus groups) meant that the conversation could be fully participant-led, and provided the best platform to hear about individuals' own experiences of their housing in sufficiently rich detail. Beginning the primary research with a qualitative phase also provided us with an overview of the key themes and issues to quantify in the subsequent survey.

The six locations for the interviews were chosen off the back of the evidence review to reflect a balanced and varied picture of the reality of social housing in England. Harlow, in Essex, provided the perspective of a comparatively small town with a high proportion of social housing which was one of the first 'new towns' and has been affected by a significant re-location of people from London. In Bristol, we explored an area which has been affected by serious affordability issues with rapidly rising rents in the private sector, whereas Middlesbrough is an example of a city where the gap between private and social rents is relatively narrow. Pendle in Lancashire provided a distinct, rural perspective. In Birmingham we got the perspective of a large city with a large social tenant population. Finally, in London, we conducted interviews in two boroughs which have been characterised in recent years by re-development, gentrification and rising housing costs: Islington and Haringey.

The table below summarises the locations and some key information about their characteristics:

Region	Location	Social housing proportion (social housing % of total) <sup>83</sup>	Stock ownership (% of social total local authority owned) <sup>84</sup>	Area classification
London	<b>Haringey</b>	High (27%)	Medium (64%)	Outer London
	<b>Islington</b>	High (42%)	Medium (64%)	Inner London
South West	<b>Bristol</b>	High (20%)	High (71%)	City
South East	<b>Harlow</b>	High (31%)	High (86%)	Large town
West Midlands	<b>Birmingham</b>	High (24%)	Medium (64%)	City
North West	<b>Pendle</b> (Lancs)	Low (12%)	Medium (49%)	Rural
North East	<b>Middlesbrough</b>	High (24%)	Medium (44%)	City

In each location, we conducted a mix of interviews with the three core groups. The full breakdown of the interviews was as follows:

- **Social tenants:** A total of 24 extended (2-2.5 hours) in-home interviews with a wide range of social tenants, of which 6 were filmed;
- **Potential social tenants:** As with current social tenants, 24 interviews, each lasting 2 - 2.5 hours, of which 6 were filmed;
- **Proximity residents:** 12 in-home depths with this group, each lasting 1 hour. None of these interviews were filmed.

Each interview consisted of three component parts:

## 1. Diary task

Before their interview, each participant completed a week-long diary task, exploring their lives, experiences, homes and local areas.

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<sup>83</sup> Calculated using Census 2011 household tenure data. All local authorities in England were ranked in order of social housing proportion, and assigned to a band of 'low' (bottom 1/3), 'middle' (middle 1/3) or 'high' (top 1/3).

<sup>84</sup> Calculated using Census 2011 household tenure data. All local authorities in England were ranked in order of the proportion of local authority housing as the proportion of social housing total, and assigned to a band of 'low' (bottom 1/3), 'middle' (middle 1/3) or 'high' (top 1/3).

This diary enabled participants to familiarise themselves with the research and the style of questioning it would entail. It also provided us with rich, participant-led detail on their lives. Diaries were reviewed in advance of each interview to inform lines of questioning and tailor the discussion to the areas most important to each participant.

To ensure that the research did not exclude individuals who are not digitally enabled, participants had the choice of completing this either online or using pen and paper. Still images from the online diaries are used throughout this report.

## **2. Extended in-home interviews**

These interviews formed the heart of this phase of the research. With the exception of interviews with homeless participants, each was conducted in-home<sup>85</sup>.

The interviews were qualitative and flexible in nature, allowing participants to focus on the issues that mattered most to them. However, each one followed a similar flow designed to capture detail about participants' lives and experiences, their attitudes to their current and past housing, and their views on the social housing system.

The broad topic areas covered in these interviews were:

- Experiences of their current home and their housing history;
- An assessment of the kinds of things they would look for in a hypothetical home, and the extent to which their current housing reflects these;<sup>86</sup>
- Experiences of their local area;
- Attitudes towards social housing; and
- Predictions and hopes for the future of social housing.

The final discussion guides for these interviews are included in the appendix.

## **3. Accompanied home and local area tours**

Where appropriate (e.g. where time and mobility issues allowed, and participants consented to it), participants gave researchers a tour of their home and local area as part of their interview.

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<sup>85</sup> Case studies are used throughout this report. All named and photographed participants gave permission for these details to be shown publicly.

<sup>86</sup> Social tenant and potential tenant only due to time constraints



These tours allowed participants to contextualise their feedback by showing researchers some of the key elements they had been discussing in the interview. In line with this, tours were typically conducted towards the middle or end of the interview to build on and offer a new perspective on the conversation.

Where participants consented, researchers took photos of these tours. The photos are interspersed throughout this report.

### *Recruitment of participants*

Participants were primarily recruited using BritainThinks' network of qualitative recruiters. These recruiters are locally-based and use a variety of methods to identify participants:

- Utilising their own existing contacts;
- Snowballing through existing contacts;
- On-street recruitment; and
- Use of community networks or groups (e.g. local churches, community centres and voluntary groups).

All participants were recruited in line with pre-agreed recruitment criteria, which were informed by the evidence review. The full recruitment specifications for these interviews can be found in the appendix.

### ***Phase 3: Establishing the prevalence of the issues***

Following the completion of the qualitative phase, we conducted a series of national quantitative surveys aimed at establishing the statistical prevalence of the issues that had been identified. In particular, the polling:

- Quantified different tenure groups' experience of housing across a range of different measures; and
- Explored comparisons between different groups. This included comparisons between social tenants and potential social tenants, and subgroup analysis by length of time in social housing, socio-economic status, region, gender and age.

### *Survey of social housing tenants*

We conducted a telephone survey of 1,000 social housing tenants in England, using a questionnaire comprised of 15 questions. Data were weighted to be representative of social tenants by age, gender, region and tenure (i.e. council housing / housing association).

A sample of 1,000 social housing tenants across England has enabled us to gain a robust picture of experiences and attitudes of social housing tenants. The size of our sample also

allows for detailed sub-group analysis, meaning that important differences between different groups can be identified.

#### *Survey of the general public and private renters*

We conducted a nationally representative online survey of private renters in England, providing a sample size of 1,003 participants answering 15 questions. Data were weighted to be representative of private renters by age, gender, region and SEG.

To understand the perceptions of potential social tenants, we looked at a sub-group of private renters. This group was defined as the poorest fifth of private renters, and provided a sample of 213 potential social tenants.

#### *Comparability of the findings*

These two surveys were conducted using comparable questionnaires, with only small changes made to make each relevant to the specific group. These questionnaires can be found in the appendix of this report.

The surveys used two different methodologies: telephone for the social tenant survey and online for the general public and private renters. To ensure comparability of the findings, all data have been weighted to be nationally representative by age, gender and region. Both surveys were weighted using the same dataset – namely, the 2011 census.

Throughout the report, any differences highlighted are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

#### ***Phase 4: Public dialogues***

The final phase of the project involved a programme of five day-long workshops, each bringing together 18-21 participants.

The objective of these workshops was future-facing. We wanted to build on knowledge gained over the course of the research and involve our core stakeholder groups in developing possible solutions to some of the challenges facing the sector.

The aim of these workshops was to bring together diverse perspectives to understand how the social sector can be improved. We therefore brought together a broad cross section of those with a stake in social housing, composed of social tenants, potential social tenants and a wider group who may also benefit from social housing - private renters who are unlikely to own their own home in the near future. The sample of each workshop also broadly reflected the demographic make-up of each area, ensuring a mix of age, gender, life-stage, socio-economic grade, ethnicity and employment status. A full recruitment specification for these workshops is included in the appendix.

This stage of the research was deliberative in nature, providing participants with the time and information to reflect on the issues in depth and come to more informed conclusions. Over the course of the workshops, we presented participants with information about the social sector and helped them to develop recommendations for how (if at all) social housing should change in the future.

As with the interview stage of the research, the locations for the workshops were selected to involve a range of participants from different parts of the country and different types of place. Between the two phases, the eleven locations included coverage of every region in England.

The first workshop was conducted in Manchester, a city with a high proportion of social housing, one of the highest levels of deprivation in England, but facing an increasing affordability crisis due to rising house prices, and private rents. In Oxford, we explored a city with a serious private sector affordability problem, while Grimsby and Doncaster are areas with much lower private sector rents. We also conducted one of the workshops in London, to capture its unique status.

Region	Location	Social housing proportion (social housing % of total) <sup>87</sup>	Stock ownership (% of social total local authority owned) <sup>88</sup>	Deprivation (rank on Index of Multiple Deprivation / 326) <sup>89</sup>	Area classification
London	London	High (24%) <sup>90</sup>	56% (Medium)	High (96)	City
South East	Oxford	High (21%)	Medium (65%)	Medium (166)	City
East Midlands	Grimsby (North East Lincs)	Medium (15%)	Medium (33%)	High (31)	Large town
North West	Manchester	High (32%)	Medium (43%)	High (5)	City
Yorkshire & Humber	Doncaster	High (18%)	High (86%)	High (42)	Large town

<sup>87</sup> *Tenure, local authorities in England and Wales*, 2011, Census, Office for National Statistics, Table KS402EW.

<sup>88</sup> Source as above.

<sup>89</sup> *Index of Multiple Deprivation*, 2015, Department for Communities and Local Government. N.B. the index lists results by borough. This is where London would sit in the ranking if results were aggregated.

<sup>90</sup> Social housing as a proportion of overall housing stock rises to 34% when just accounting for Inner London boroughs. Source as above.

Following an introductory discussion on key priorities for social housing, we presented participants with draft ideas from the Shelter Social Housing Commission for reforming social housing that addressed issues through three key policy interventions:

- Tenant voice;
- Regulation; and
- Investing in neighbourhoods and communities.

The research aimed to understand reactions to these recommendations, explore potential challenges to their delivery of a positive impact for tenants, and develop any improvements to the recommendations. This feedback was then used to inform commissioners' thinking about the recommendations and ensure that they were grounded in the views of those with the most important stake in the future of social housing.

## 4. Experience of housing

### 4.1. Introduction

This section gives an understanding of the lived experiences of housing amongst social tenants. The experiences of potential tenants are also shown in order to give a comparison with those of social tenants and to understand how social housing differs from other sectors. To contextualise the findings, we have also drawn on the experiences of proximity residents. Taken together, these findings help to inform what social tenants experience in their day to day lives.

This section draws on the depth interviews and national survey, in the main. They are supported, where appropriate, with comment from the deliberative workshops.

During the depth interviews we asked social tenants and potential tenants for their spontaneous thoughts on their housing and local area. Throughout the interview we built up a picture of each participant's unique situation, as well as probing on the five core areas of suitable housing<sup>91</sup>, to compare and contrast experiences across the two groups:

- Affordability;
- Security;
- Conditions;
- Space; and
- Neighbourhood.

In addition, we explored their relationship with their landlord, given the importance that this can have on a tenant's experience of their housing. Where relevant, we also probed on tenants' experiences of accessing social housing.

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<sup>91</sup> These five core areas correspond to the 5 dimensions of the Living Home Standard, a measure created through public dialogue by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Shelter to define what an acceptable home should provide.

## 4.2. Summary of findings

Across all areas, social housing is more likely to meet the needs of social tenants than not. The majority of social tenants we surveyed report that they have positive experiences with the amount of rent they are paying, the security of their tenure, the condition of their home, their neighbourhood, and the day-to-day dealings with their landlords. Home visits revealed that this is also the reality, and further revealed other important aspects of their housing. Social tenants tended to give the impression of taking great pride in their home, often as a result of being able to decorate it how they want and feeling that it is their own, even if they do not own it. In addition, social tenants we spoke to talked about a strong sense of neighbourhood and community.

Nevertheless, there is a substantial proportion (albeit a minority) of social tenants whose housing is not meeting their needs. Most notably, this includes those who struggle to afford their rent, those who are living in cramped conditions and those whose landlord is failing to maintain the condition of their housing to expected standards. Moreover, social tenants we spoke to commonly pointed to issues in their neighbourhood with anti-social behaviour and crime, and there is a widespread feeling that social tenants have no voice in the wider decisions made by their landlords.

The experiences of social tenants appear particularly positive when they are compared with the experience of potential social tenants. Where social housing offers long-term, stable tenancies and affordable rents, many potential social tenants we spoke to described the stress of having insecure tenancies and of struggling to afford their rent.<sup>92</sup> We found that a lack of affordability is accompanied by other negative experiences of their housing, such as inadequate space or unreasonable conditions. In particular, potential tenants often felt powerless in relation to their landlords and therefore unable to challenge them on issues with their housing, or to ask them to address their basic housing needs, such as repairs and maintenance.

Yet some experiences are shared between both groups. As with social tenants, potential tenants we spoke to voiced concerns over crime and anti-social behaviour and did not feel included in wider decisions taken by their landlord. For potential tenants we spoke to on the waiting list for social housing (or social tenants on the waiting list for more appropriate housing), the shortage of social housing and the subsequent difficulty of getting appropriate housing was a key factor that characterises their experience.

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<sup>92</sup> For the purposes of the qualitative research, potential social tenants were defined as private renters on low incomes who are finding it difficult to pay rent (as well as those on social housing waiting lists and homeless households). For the survey, they were defined as the poorest fifth of private renters. Therefore, a struggle to pay rent is a natural outcome of the findings.

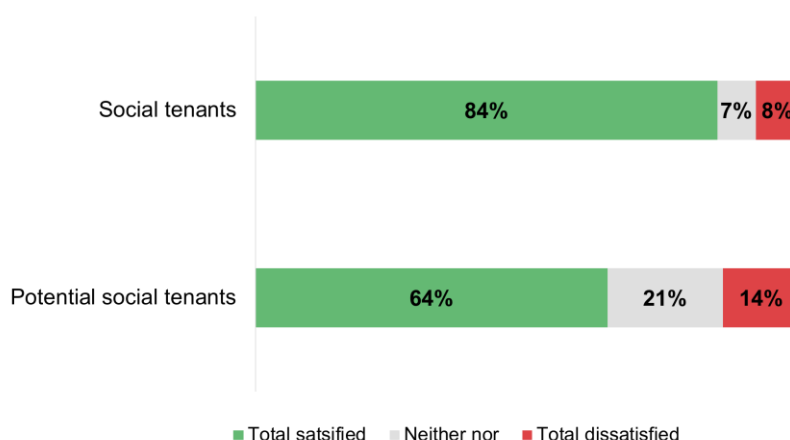
### **4.3. Overall satisfaction among social tenants and potential tenants**

As can be expected, our research revealed a great deal of variation in social tenants' and potential social tenants' experiences of their housing that defies a simple comparison. A great number of factors, including family or situation and location (to name just two), appear to drive differences in the experiences within both of these groups. There are a number of aspects where social housing seems to provide advantages over the private rented sector, yet there are also aspects where it fails to meet the needs of some social tenants, for example in providing adequate conditions. Therefore, whilst social housing provides a better experience for low income tenants than the private rented sector at an overall level, we cannot conclude that all social tenants are well served by their housing.

With this caveat in mind, it is important to acknowledge the overall trend that our data reveals. When we surveyed a representative sample of tenants, we asked them if they were 'satisfied' with their housing. This was chosen to understand how their housing meets their expected standards. Social tenants are much more likely than potential tenants to be satisfied with their home, with more than four fifths (84%) of social tenants saying they are satisfied with their home as a whole, compared with less than two thirds (64%) of potential social tenants. Although not a perfect measure for judging experiences of housing as a whole, as people can easily be 'satisfied' with their housing while still harbouring serious misgivings, this measure does demonstrate an important difference between social tenants and potential social tenants.

By speaking with these groups, we learned more about what could be behind these different levels of overall 'satisfaction'. This research identified that two of the factors that most often separate the experiences of social tenants and potential social tenants are the affordability and security of housing. These two factors were often the differentiators between a more positive housing experience (i.e. due to affordable and secure housing) and a negative housing experience (i.e. due to unaffordable and insecure housing). In the case of social tenants, where many we spoke to said they benefit from relatively affordable and secure housing, these factors lead to a deep feeling of reassurance and sense of stability. In comparison, many potential social tenants we spoke to expressed how the absence of affordability or stability leads to a strong feeling of insecurity that can permeate many areas of their lives. A more detailed exploration of these two factors, and the impact that they can have on tenant's experiences, is provided in the relevant sections of this report below.

Figure 4.3.1 Chart showing the percentage of social and potential tenants who are satisfied or dissatisfied with 'your home as a whole'



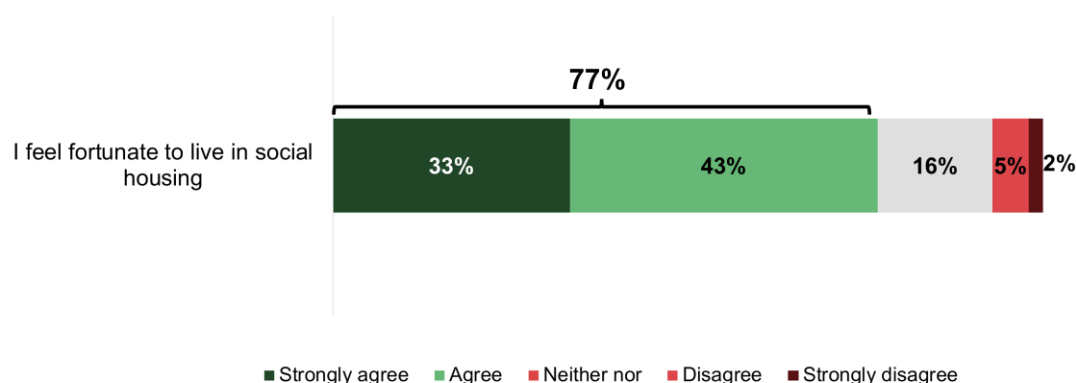
**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following: 'Your home as a whole'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

In addition to this difference in satisfaction identified between the two groups, it is also important to note the large degree of nuance in their experiences and how they are reported. Our interviews revealed a trend among potential social tenants where those with a more positive experience often felt that this is the result of being 'lucky' to find 'good' accommodation or a 'good' landlord. Indeed, many of these tenants acknowledged that they might be subject to significantly higher rents, greater insecurity or poorer conditions if they had to move, as they saw that as the norm in the private rented sector.

In contrast, social tenants give a much more substantiated impression of feeling 'lucky' with their housing, with 77% of social tenants saying that they feel fortunate to live in social housing, including a third (33%) who strongly feel this way (figure 4.3.2). Social tenants we spoke to frequently suggested that they felt happy and fortunate to live in social housing on the basis of two reasons. First, a substantial proportion of social tenants had previously rented privately, which allowed them to compare their experiences, and second, many social tenants made reference to long waiting lists (either based on their own or others' experience).

Figure 4.3.2 Chart showing percentage of social tenants who agree or disagree with the statement 'I feel fortunate to live in social housing'

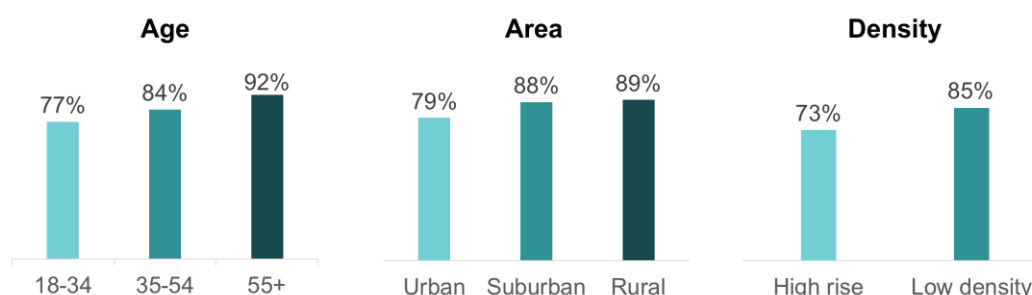




**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 'I feel fortunate to live in social housing'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000)].

Finally, the level of satisfaction among social tenants is consistent when comparing the views of males and females, or people from different areas or backgrounds, but older social tenants are more likely to feel satisfied, with the qualitative research pointing to the heightened importance of security and long tenancies as a factor in this. In addition, those in rural areas and low-density developments are also more likely to be satisfied. When we spoke to social tenants and potential tenants about what they liked about their area, they often mentioned the importance of space, as well as trees and green areas. This could explain the higher levels of satisfaction among people living in areas that more closely match this description.

Figure 4.3.3 Chart showing percentage of social tenants who are satisfied with their housing on the whole



**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following: 'Your home as a whole'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000)].

## 4.4. Affordability

The affordability of housing is ultimately one of the key areas that social housing attempts to address. It was important, therefore, for this research to understand the extent to which social housing is meeting this aim of providing affordable housing and the resulting impact on the lives of social tenants. At the same time, this research aimed to understand potential social tenants' experience of affordability in the private rented sector.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, our research revealed that the affordability of housing is a key differentiator between social housing and private rentals and that it can have an important impact on the lives of these tenants and how they think about affordability.

### **Affordability at a glance: social and potential tenants compared**

Social tenants are broadly satisfied with the affordability of their housing and for many this is not something that they think about regularly. In comparison, affordability is a major concern for potential tenants. It has a knock-on effect on all areas of their housing experience; it especially has consequences for the experience of security in their housing.

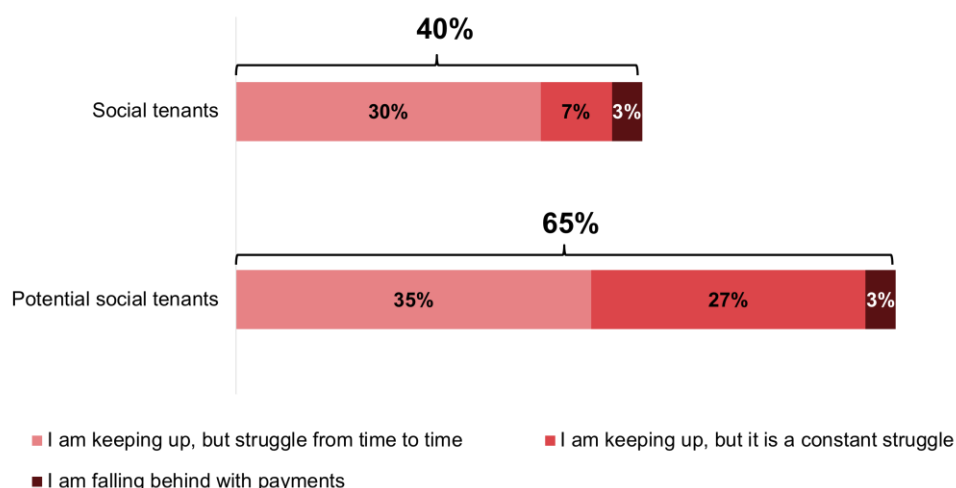
Government survey results show that nearly half of the poorest fifth of social tenants (48%) spend more than a third of their income on rent (a conventional affordability definition), in comparison to the poorest fifth of private renters, of whom nearly three quarters (73%) spend more than a third of their income on rent.<sup>93</sup> The proportion of people spending over a third of their income on rent is therefore substantially higher among low income private renters than social tenants.

As seen in figure 4.4.1, potential social tenants (low income private tenants) are much more likely to say they are struggling to pay their rent than social tenants (65% compared with 40% respectively).

Figure 4.4.1 Chart showing percentage of social and potential tenants who report that they are struggling to keep up with rent payments

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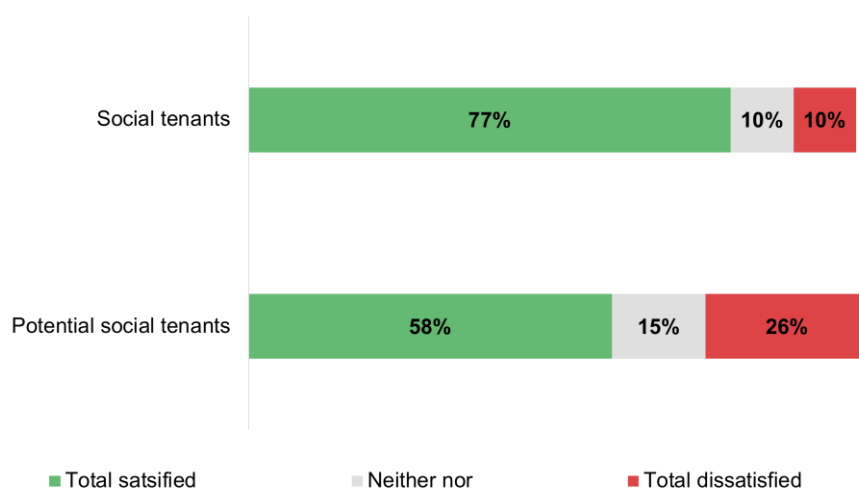
<sup>93</sup> JRF & New Policy Institute, *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion* (2016), p. 40.



**D15. Some people can easily afford to pay their rent, others find it more difficult to pay. Thinking about your situation, which of the following statements best describe how you feel about paying your rent?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

Social tenants are also much happier with the 'value for money' their housing provides. A total of 77% of social tenants say they are satisfied with the amount of rent they pay for what they get. Only 58% of potential social tenants are satisfied and are also more likely to say they are dissatisfied with the amount of rent they pay for the home they live in (10% and 26% respectively).

Figure 4.4.2 Chart showing the percentage of social and potential tenants who are satisfied or dissatisfied with 'the amount of rent you pay for the home you live in'



**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following: 'The amount you pay for the home you live in (please think about the value for money of your rent i.e. the cost of rent given the size and quality of your home)'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

Nevertheless, while these differences at the overall level are stark, it is important to note that there are some social tenants who also face great difficulties affording their rent. The implications of these cases are explored further in the following sections.

### *Social tenants*

**The majority of social tenants feel satisfied with the amount of rent they pay and talk positively about what this greater affordability means for their lives.**

More than three quarters (77%) of social tenants are satisfied with the amount of rent they pay, as seen in figure 4.4.1. In addition, more than half of social tenants say they are keeping up rental payments without any difficulty (55%). The social tenants we spoke to gave a sense that rents are reasonable and, for the most part, manageable.

Importantly, these conversations pointed to relative affordability providing a great deal of reassurance and sense of stability, having a significant positive impact on their lives. Indeed, when prompted, many reported that it gave them the autonomy to improve other aspects of their lives. These impacts are wide ranging: while some tenants told us how more affordable rents have allowed them to feel more secure by saving for the long term, others described how it has allowed them to afford such things as going away on holiday, treating their children or buying a car.

*“Social housing has really changed my life – I’ve booked my first holiday with the girls. It’s just really helped me to save that little bit more money.”*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

When discussing the experiences of social housing, social tenants rarely mentioned affordable rents spontaneously. This suggests that affordability is such an integral part of social housing that it becomes a back-of-mind consideration for many. When prompted to think about affordability, social tenants often talked about it in terms relative to the rental sector. While this is particularly true of those who had previously lived in privately rented accommodation, even those without first-hand experience of private rents were still acutely aware that they would seriously struggle to afford the rent in the private sector. Indeed, these social tenants said that it would be impossible to acquire accommodation of the equivalent size, standard or location for the same amount of money, and that living in the private rented sector would require numerous compromises that would have serious detrimental impacts on both their own and their family’s quality of life.

*“No way, I wouldn’t go private. They charge far too much and you get nothing in return.”*

Social tenant, London

**Case study: Mary, Social tenant, 61, Birmingham**

*"I didn't really want to view it - a tower block!"*

- Mary has only just moved into her flat, after previously living in a private rental. She had been looking to get out of the private sector and was grateful that an application for a social rented property was accepted. Nonetheless, she was initially reluctant to move into a high rise block (describing herself as a "bit of a snob") but says the flat exceeds her expectations and suits her well.

*"Social housing is an economical way to rent property."*

- For Mary, the big advantages of social housing over the private sector are the greater affordability and the security – not being at "the mercy" of one person. In spite of her concerns about the reputation of the high rise where she now lives, this was enough to make her want to make the move.
- Thinking about her current rent, she is grateful that it is so much cheaper than privately renting, but worries about what would happen in the case of a rent increase.

**Nevertheless, a substantial proportion struggle to afford their rent, raising the question whether social housing is truly achieving its aim of being affordable for all.**

Four in ten (40%) social tenants say that they struggle to pay their rent (figure 4.4.2). For this substantial proportion, the rising costs of living and stagnant wages or restrictions to benefits add up to make housing costs considerably less affordable. In these instances, social tenants we spoke to described the negative impact of unaffordable rents on their lives, including how social lives and family activities become limited with such a large part of their income having to go on rent.

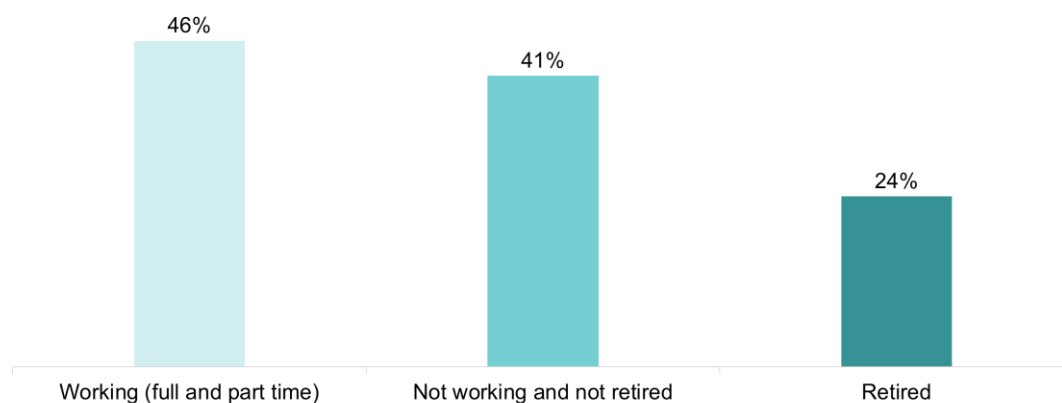
*"We cope, but we don't have a lot left over at the end of the week."*

Social tenant, Harlow

However, only one in ten (10%) social tenants say that they are dissatisfied with the amount of rent that they pay for the home they live in, suggesting that many are accepting of the struggle to afford rent. From speaking to social tenants, it was possible to link this acceptance to their perception that they were fortunate to be in social housing and that their rent was much more affordable in comparison to private rentals. In addition, it was clear from the interviews that, for low income households, it was a struggle to afford many aspects of basic living, of which rent is just one part.

For some social tenants, affordability is more an issue of income rather than cost. In particular, those we spoke to that rely on benefits reported that keeping up with rent is more of a challenge as fluctuating benefits income can add an element of uncertainty. Some of the social tenants in our research experienced fluctuations in the benefits they received because of changing circumstances. In these instances, it could become very difficult for them to manage how to pay their rent. In addition, some felt that the interaction of work and benefits could mean that affording rent became more difficult when in work because benefit payments were restricted. In the survey, social tenants in work are more likely to say they struggle to pay rent (46%), especially those who are in part time work (56%), compared to those who are neither in work nor retired (41%) and those who are retired (24%).


Figure 4.4.3 Chart showing the percentage of social tenants who report that they are struggling to keep up with rent payments by employment status



**D15. Some people can easily afford to pay their rent, others find it more difficult to pay. Thinking about your situation, which of the following statements best describe how you feel about paying your rent?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000)].

The struggle to pay rent among social tenants is also linked to space. Social tenants interviewed who were paying the 'Bedroom Tax' were more likely to express affordability concerns. They said that they felt an acute sense of unfairness at the price they are paying for extra space. On the other hand, those we spoke to who live in cramped conditions and were on the waiting list for bigger social housing told us that they worry that affordability is a

**Case study: Rosie, Social tenant, 41, Harlow**




*"I got offered a 3 bed a few years ago but had to turn it down - it was £200/month."*

- Rosie feels that her housing is affordable but she is currently in rent arrears.
- She describes herself 'not financially savvy' and so sometimes struggles to manage her finances.
- Her rent officer has been very supportive and she now has restructured payments, but this means she is paying more than she used to and can't spend as much on the kids.
- Part of the difficulty of managing her finances stems from having a variable income; usually she works part time but there have been on-and-off periods when she has been out of work for ill health, when she had a higher income from receiving more tax credits.

Affordability is also a contributing factor to living in cramped conditions: currently her 14 year old son and 11 year old daughter have to share a bedroom, but although she is on the waiting list, she cannot necessarily afford social housing with more bedrooms.

*"I've put a wardrobe up to separate the kids' room."*



barrier to getting a bigger house, as they felt that they can cost substantially more than they currently pay.

Affordability concerns are more prominent in the South of England. One in ten (10%) social tenants in London report that they are constantly struggling to keep up with rent, compared to

7% on average across England. Although not explicitly mentioned generally by social tenants, the impression is that problems affording their rent directly relate to the high cost of living in these areas.

### *Potential social tenants*

**The majority of potential social tenants struggle to afford paying their rent, which has negative implications for their lives.**

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of potential tenants report they are struggling to pay their rent, of which, more than a quarter (27%) say that it is a constant struggle to keep up with their rent. This compares with only 7% of social tenants (figure 4.4.2). This finding is supported by our conversations with social tenants that show affordability is a key concern for this group. Many of those we spoke to spontaneously raised their struggle to afford rent as a key aspect of their housing early on in the interview.

In the absence of adequate affordable housing, many of these potential social tenants said that they had to make a series of compromises about their housing. This often involved people accepting housing that did not provide enough space for their family, was in poor condition, or was in an area that they deemed to be unsafe or otherwise inappropriate (e.g. being far from family or their place of work).

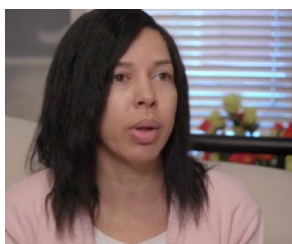
*“We need a bigger flat. We’ve out-grown this one and it would be great to have a garden...but it’s too expensive [here].”*

Potential social tenant, Stevenage

In addition to having to accept these compromises when searching for a home, unaffordable rents can have a large number of other effects. Many potential social tenants that we spoke to said that they were often left with little disposable income. For these tenants, this meant that there is little money to spend on their families or social lives or that they had to work such long hours that they had little time outside of work to see their family or to relax. In the most extreme cases this meant that some struggled even to afford the basics, such as food and

heating.

### Case study: Maria, Potential tenant, 38, London



*"Two weeks ago I was looking, I went to an agency and asked about a 2 bed or 3 bed. It's crazy, I couldn't find anything."*

- Maria is 38 and lives in a 1-bed flat in Tottenham with her husband, her mum, her 15 year old son and 2 and a half year old daughter.
- She has lived in London for 4 years and always struggled with high rents there. In her last place, she was forced to move on when her landlord decided to refurbish, though she did not have enough savings to afford a deposit on a new place.
- She has thought about moving on from this flat, but has found no houses with more bedrooms that she can afford on her income as a coffee shop assistant, although she has looked all over London.
- Friends of hers have recommended she move outside of London, but she doesn't want to sacrifice her job, or to disrupt her children's lives.

*"I don't dream about a big house, just a normal house like everyone has, a bedroom where my mum can sleep and where my children can sleep".*

Throughout all these circumstances, potential social tenants we spoke to reported a feeling of great anxiety and stress that came with struggling to pay rent. This anxiety was exacerbated by the difficulty these tenants face in trying to save any money, meaning that many were constantly cognisant of their lack of savings to cushion against unexpected costs or to be able to afford a deposit on better housing. Many of these potential tenants felt that they were in a precarious situation when they had to borrow money from friends or family when things went wrong, making their financial situation unsustainable.

### Case study: Sarah, Potential social tenant, 32, Harlow

*"This was meant to be temporary. Every single month I live beyond my means. My Nan tops it up for me, but she can't do that forever."*



*"This is the condensation in my damp trap just from this week."*

- Sarah moved out of her marital home to escape domestic abuse, bringing her two young children with her.
- Rushed into her current accommodation, she ended up in a derelict house that she cannot afford.
- The rent is £1000 a month. When she originally moved in she got housing benefit for £900 and she would top up the rest.
- She didn't realise the benefit then reduced to £780 after 13 weeks, otherwise she never would have signed on to the house in the first place. She felt the council had not communicated how the housing benefit worked clearly enough to her.
- This means her Nan has to help her out with rent because she cannot afford any more.
- She has no social life as all her money goes on rent or bills and often relies on friends to help her out with the basics, like dropping round fresh milk or covering petrol costs.
- Despite constant searching, she cannot find affordable housing in her area with enough space for her and her family and the choice is made even narrower by landlords specifying 'no DSS'.
- She feels she has no choice but to keep living in an unaffordable home in poor conditions that have a negative impact on her and her children's lives; damp and cold make it difficult to manage her child's sleep apnoea.

In addition, this group is acutely vulnerable to rent rises; many of those we spoke to voiced concerns over their landlord putting the rents up and neither being able to afford it nor being able to find cheaper accommodation in their area.



*"[The landlord] hasn't put the rent up ever, mainly because of the state of the house, but I know that he wants to, and I think that once he's done it up, I just won't be able to afford it because it's a nice, big sized house."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

When we spoke to tenants in this situation, it was clear that housing benefit was an important factor in why they couldn't afford their housing. Many of these potential tenants relied on housing benefit to help them pay their rent. Housing benefit for private renters has not kept pace with local rents since 2011.<sup>94</sup> This had clearly had an effect on participants in the research. Some of those we spoke to struggled to cover a shortfall between their housing benefit and their rent, despite searching for the cheapest rentals in their area.

*"The housing benefit that I get hasn't risen in the past six and a half years. Well, £12 it's risen, in the past six years. If you think about what rent out there has risen in that time. It doesn't compare at all."*

Potential Social tenant, Bristol

*"Housing benefit doesn't cover what the house rent is. So there is a shortfall in that, so I have to pay for that out of what I'm supposed to live on. It's a shortfall of £25 a week, which adds to £100 a month. That's a lot of money that you haven't got."*

Potential Social tenant, Middlesbrough

In addition, a few reported that housing benefits were not well suited to a sudden change in circumstances, as they could not adapt quickly enough, for example being in and out of work due to health conditions.

The issue with housing benefits was felt to be further exacerbated by discrimination from private landlords. Indeed, several potential social tenants reported that their ability to find suitable housing was greatly hindered by landlords refusing to accept tenants receiving benefits, which made finding affordable private rentals even more difficult.

*"I was looking again [to rent privately]. You get there, and they won't accept housing benefit, and I was working then as well. Even though I was working, as a single parent you can't help but part of your income be benefits, and they just won't accept it. I've encountered a couple of people that will accept benefits, and they're just awful, horrible, disgusting places that are really expensive. So, there's nothing really below about £800*

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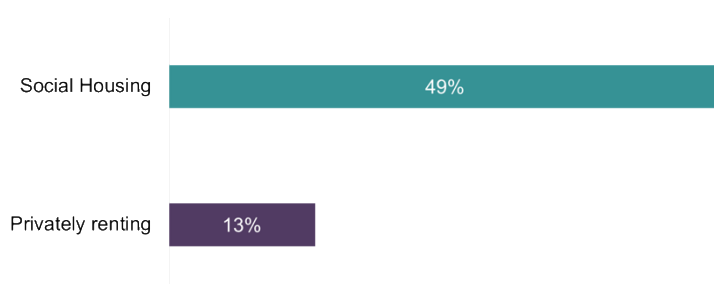
[https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_and\\_research/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/briefing\\_who\\_is\\_affected\\_by\\_the\\_lha\\_freeze](https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/briefing_who_is_affected_by_the_lha_freeze)

*which, on benefits is £200 over what my housing benefit allowance is, which is obviously 'where do you get an extra £200 a month from'?"*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

Given the struggle to afford private rents, it is not surprising that half of potential social tenants think they would be better off in social housing than privately renting, in terms of how much they pay. In fact, many of those we spoke to told us that this is often the main reason they apply for social housing. Nevertheless, we detected a lack of hope that they would get social housing, due to long waiting lists. This prospect intensified the negative effect of constantly struggling to afford rent.

Figure 4.4.4 Chart showing percentage of social and potential tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting regarding 'the amount of rent you would pay'



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately: 'The amount of rent you would pay'?** [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)]

Another factor that we picked up on from conversations with social tenants in some areas (particularly in the South - Bristol, Oxford and London) was concerns around the effects of gentrification pricing out those on lower incomes. In addition, there was an awareness amongst these tenants that rent rises in the private sector were creating a higher demand for social housing, putting a further strain on the amount of social housing available and making it even more difficult for those on low incomes to live in these areas.

*"They're forcing out poor people to make it nicer for rich people."*

Potential social tenant, London

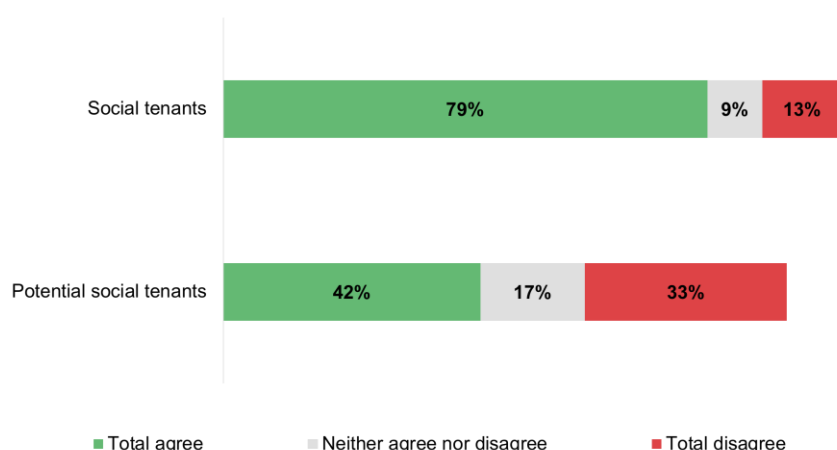
## 4.5. Security

The security of tenure has been a key differentiator between social and privately rented housing, particularly over the past thirty years where most private rentals are offered on a contract of six months or one year, with social tenants historically being offered lifetime tenancies. While this is still the norm, shorter term tenancies are on the rise for social tenants.<sup>95</sup> It was important for our research, therefore, to understand how the security of tenure affects experiences of housing and the attitudes towards a system in which short term tenancies might play a more central role.

### Security at a glance: social and potential tenants compared

Our research found that a sense of security is central to many of the experiences of social tenants. Most feel that they have control over how long they can live in their home. This compares to a minority of potential tenants. As seen in figure 4.5.1, social tenants are almost twice as likely as potential social tenants to agree that they feel they can live in their home for as long as they want to (79% and 42% respectively). Our conversations revealed that unaffordability, as well as actual security of tenure, contributed to a sense of insecurity for potential social tenants.

Figure 4.5.1 Chart showing percentage of social and potential tenants who agree or disagree 'I can live in my home as long as I wish to'

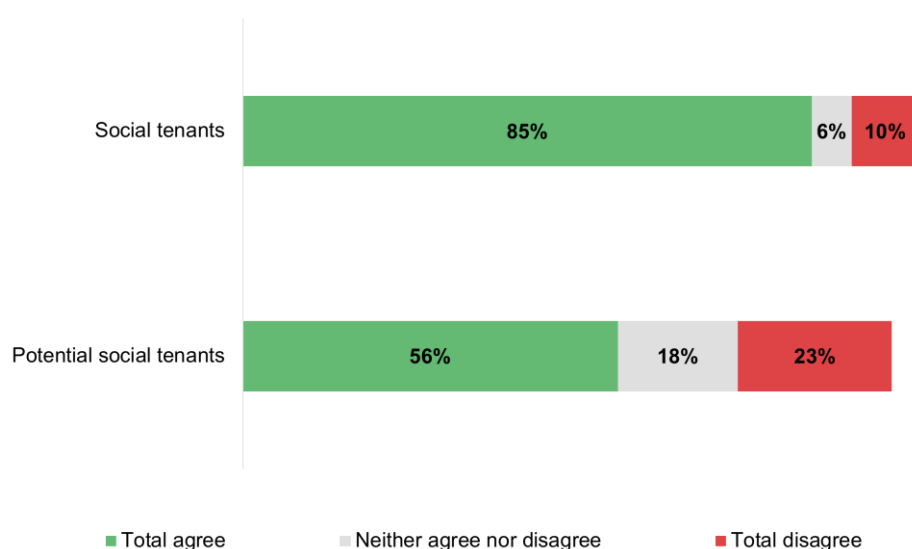


**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 'I feel that I can live in my home for as long as I wish to'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

<sup>95</sup> 13% of new social lettings were on let on a fixed-term basis, and 87% on lifetime tenancies. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Statistical Release: Social Housing Lettings: April 2016 to March 2017 (2018), p. 9.

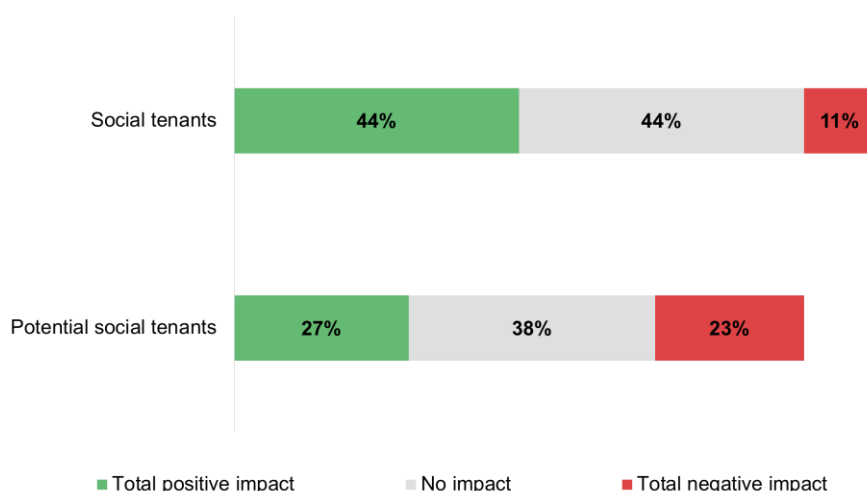
Our research also found that there is a correlation between secure tenures and a higher number of social tenants saying they ‘feel their house is their home’ in comparison to potential tenants (85% and 56% respectively) and a greater feeling that they can plan for the future (44% and 27% respectively).

Figure 4.5.2 Chart showing percentage of social and potential tenants who agree or disagree ‘I feel that my house is my home’



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: ‘I feel that my house is my home’?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

Figure 4.5.3 Chart showing percentage of social and potential tenants who report positive or negative impact of their housing on 'your ability to plan for the future'



**Q3. Thinking about your time living in social housing / private rental accommodation and the impact it has had on your life, for each of the following please say whether you think living in social housing has had a positive, negative or no impact: 'Your ability to plan for the future'?**  
 [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

### Social tenants

**Social tenants overwhelmingly feel secure in their housing, and, despite the fact that security is not always front of mind, it is a highly valued aspect of social housing.**

Our quantitative findings show that the majority of social tenants feel secure in their homes, with four-fifths (79%) feeling they can live in their home as long as they want to. This feeling of security is borne out in reality, with social tenants on average having lived in their homes for 19 years.

Importantly, we found that this security may be taken for granted by a number of social tenants we spoke to, particularly among those who had lived in social housing all of their lives. Indeed, among these tenants, security of tenure was rarely mentioned spontaneously.

In comparison, security was often talked about as a fundamental part of social housing among those that have previously lived in private rentals or temporary accommodation. In these cases, the security of social housing was often described as 'lifechanging', even when they do not have lifetime tenancies.

*"When I was in a hostel, there was no privacy. Everyone knew your business, there was a curfew. From then to now, the difference in my life is huge."*

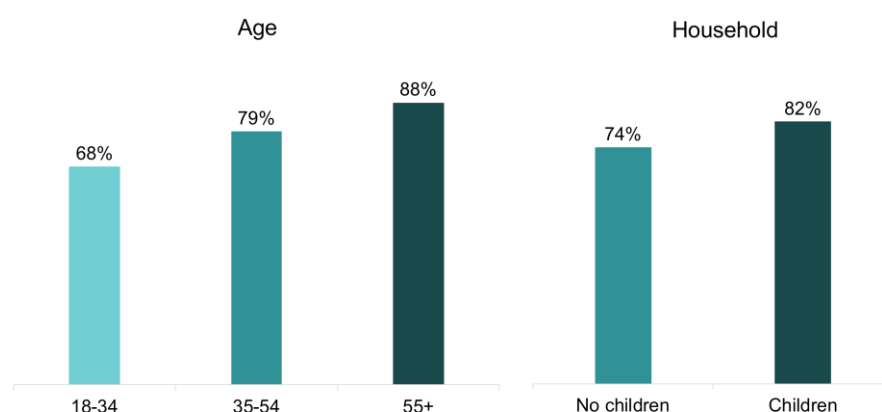
Social tenant, Middlesbrough

Older social tenants and those with children are more likely to feel they can live in their home as long as they want to, as seen in figure 4.5.4. Importantly, when we spoke to these groups, they seemed to take great comfort in having this sense of security. For older tenants, it was a great weight off their mind to know that they did not have to keep moving in their old age, which they saw as a real and concerning prospect in the private sector. Similarly, those we spoke to with children greatly valued not having to face disrupting their families, for example with their children having to move schools.

*“We don't feel like we're going to have to leave and we feel safe in our home. We have total peace of mind and there are no problems.”*

Social tenant (65+), Middlesbrough

Figure 4.5.4 Chart showing the percentage of social tenants who agree ‘I can live in my home as long as I wish’ by sub-group



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 'I feel that I can live in my home for as long as I wish to'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

However, as with affordability, social tenants in the South of England are more likely to be concerned about insecurity. Although still only a minority, 13% of social tenants living in London disagree that they feel they can live in their home for as long as they want to, compared with 8% of social tenants overall. This could be linked to a perception that it is more difficult for local Londoners to get social housing due to large numbers of people who cannot afford privately rented accommodation in London, combined with social landlords being less able to supply social housing in a highly competitive and pressured housing sector. This is a real concern for social tenants as those we spoke to seemed to value staying in the same area.

**This sense of security gives rise to a feeling that social tenants can call their house their home, put down roots in the community and plan for the future.**

The vast majority of social tenants (85%) say they feel that their house is their home (figure 4.5.2). Our research identified what feels like a clear link between having a sense that you can live in your home for as long as you want, and feeling that your house is your home.

People we spoke to gained a great deal of satisfaction from being able to personalise and decorate their house for their long-term enjoyment. Social tenants often said that redecorating was a key priority when they first moved in and were eager to discuss the changes they had made. This sense of pride, which was conspicuously lacking in discussions with potential social tenants, suggests social tenants are able to take a long-term outlook to their housing from the outset, confirming the strong sense of housing security among this group.

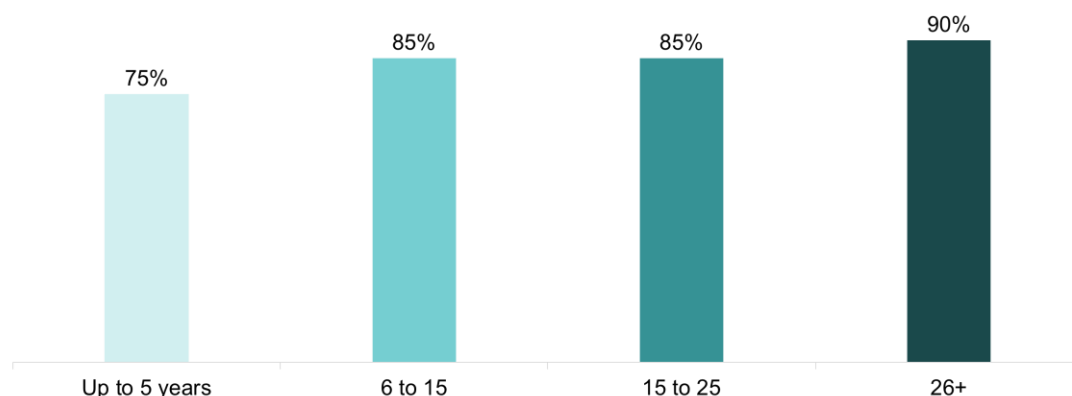


*"When I first moved in it was very much a shell, I gradually made it more homely. I was out shopping and saw this green candle. I loved the colour so much I matched everything in the front room to it."*

Social tenant, Harlow

There is also a correlation between living somewhere for longer and feeling that the house is your home; 90% of social tenants who have lived in their house for more than 26 years feel their house is their home, compared to 75% of those who have lived in their house for five years or less.

Figure 4.5.5 Chart showing the percentage of social tenants who agree 'I feel that my house is my home' by length of tenure



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 'I feel that my house is my home'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000).

As seen in figure 4.5.3, a substantial proportion of social tenants say that their housing has a positive impact on their ability to plan for the future (44%). To contextualise this figure, it is important to note that while it is not a majority, it is significantly higher than both potential social tenants (27%) and private renters in general (31%). Social tenants we spoke to reported feeling able to get on with their lives and being able to provide a stable life for their children as a result of getting social housing. In addition, nearly two thirds (63%) of social tenants feel a part of their local community (compared with just 37% of potential social tenants and 39% of all private renters).

Living in a home for a long time (one of the benefits of a stable housing contract) seems to have other impacts. On average, social tenants who have lived in their housing for more than 26 years are more likely to be satisfied with their home overall (91%) compared to social tenants (84%). Social tenants we spoke to who had lived in their homes for a long period of time described being able to build strong networks of friends and relationships with family living nearby. These were highly valued.

#### Case study: Peter, Social tenant, 44, Pendle



- Peter managed to get social housing when he was in his early 20s after becoming a single dad.
- Peter describes himself as a success story of social housing, and doesn't think his daughter would be at university now if he hadn't been given a home.
- He thinks security of tenure is one of the best things about social housing.

*"If I hadn't got a council house, I don't think my daughter would be in university now. I don't know where we'd be. It was that first step up."*

*"To us, it's a godsend living in a council house. Even though it's not yours, it feels like yours because it's a long lease. I would never rent off a private landlord. I wouldn't feel safe."*

#### Potential social tenants

**Short term tenancies, high rents and limited routes of redress against eviction mean that housing for potential tenants is inherently insecure.**

Less than half (42%) agree that they can stay in their housing for as long as they want to, with a third (33%) actively disagreeing with this statement (figure 4.5.1). The most important feature of this is not how long they actually live there (on average 9 years) – but how long they have assurance that they can live there at any one time. Short tenancies are one of the main causes of feeling insecure, with many potential social tenants on contracts of one year or less. Such short-term tenancies are a source of great concern for many of those we spoke to, as tenants felt that their housing could be taken away at any time.

*"A two-month rolling contract with kids? It keeps me up at night. I'm not happy here, this isn't a home. I've never felt so vulnerable in my life."*



Potential social tenant, Harlow

Unsurprisingly, our survey revealed that on average, potential tenants have lived in their homes for far less time than social tenants (nine years compared to 19 years).

A feeling of powerlessness in relation to their landlord adds further insecurity. Many potential social tenants we spoke to voiced concerns that their landlord might evict them and that they would have very little control over this decision.

*“It can just be taken away at any time.”*

Potential social tenant, Middlesbrough

Some of those we spoke to had experienced illegal practices, that they didn't feel they had the redress to challenge. In one instance, a potential tenant with young children described how, mid-lease, she was given 24 hours' notice to vacate the property. When she objected, she came home to find her family's belongings in the street, and the locks changed.

*“I was told that I had to leave the next day. I said that I had a contract for the year, and that I couldn't move because of my son's school.”*

Potential social tenant, London

### **Feelings of insecurity are exacerbated by lack of affordability.**

Many of the potential tenants we spoke to said that because they are spending so much on rent, they worry that even if it goes up a small amount they would not be able to keep up in the future. This led to intense feelings of distress for those who feared that they might have to leave.

The inability to save for a deposit, when combined with this insecurity of tenure, was also a cause of great distress for those we spoke to, as they feared the prospect of becoming homeless if evicted.

### Case study: Kevin, Potential tenant, 55, Birmingham

*"It's like a hand to mouth existence really. If I could get something in social housing, a bit cheaper, and a bit more in tune with a new pared down lifestyle and a fresh start that would be positive for me."*

- Kevin is single and approaching state retirement age. He doesn't work due to a long term health condition, and pays his rent to a private landlord from his welfare payments.
- He is currently being evicted from his flat in Birmingham as the landlord wants to sell the property.
- Without money for a deposit, Kevin has put off looking for a new place and feels stressed and uncertain.
- He is also worried about falling into further short term tenancies as he gets older, and having to repeatedly move home or deal with rising rents.
- He wants to move into social housing so he can have security as he gets older, but though he has been on the waiting list for over a year has not been offered anything.

*"I've got to think of my older age. It would be horrible to think you got to 70 and you weren't secure and comfortable in your old age and you had worries at that age. So I would like to establish something that's secure and comfortable."*

**Insecurity leaves potential tenants feeling that their housing is merely temporary and, in the worst cases, this leads to severe anxiety.**

The potential tenants we spoke to were much more likely to talk about their housing as temporary rather than a permanent option. This perception was particularly strong when tenants speak of home ownership or social housing as alternatives, with both routes seen to provide a much more permanent solution as opposed to rented accommodation.

*"It feels completely temporary."*

Potential social tenant, London

*"You don't have time to get settled in."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

This perception that privately renting is a temporary solution means that many of those we spoke to did not feel their house was a home. Only 56% of potential social tenants feel that their house is their home (compared with 85% of social tenants).

Nearly a quarter (23%) of potential social tenants report that their housing is having a negative impact on their ability to plan for the future (figure 4.5.3). In some instances, tenants we spoke to reported wanting to look for work but not feeling they would be able to do so until they had managed to find a more permanent housing solution. Insecurity and fear of eviction also caused or exacerbated feelings of anxiety for these tenants. This sentiment was particularly acute for those we spoke to with young children, as moving house was seen as a harmful disruption for children.

*"I have depression and anxiety, which is made worse by worrying over where I'm going to live."*

Potential social tenant, London

*"It's so important to have stable shelter, it's a vital part of the kids having healthy lives. All I need is a stable place for the future."*

Potential social tenant, London

Among those we spoke to, security seemed to be a particularly big issue for those who had experienced homelessness. These potential tenants described the stressful experience of having to constantly move between temporary provision and having no knowledge of where they might live from one day to the next.

### Case study: Jade, Potential social tenant, 47, London

*"It's a lot of stress knowing that you're going to move again."*

- Jade was evicted from her previous house which she had rented for 11 years.
- The council moved her into a hostel in cramped living conditions, where her and her husband, 15 year old daughter and 6 year old son had to share one room for six months.
- She has since moved into a larger flat but it is still on a temporary basis.
- Moving has caused disruption to her family; her children now have to take multiple buses to get to school.
- Jade has no idea when she might have to move again, which causes her stress.

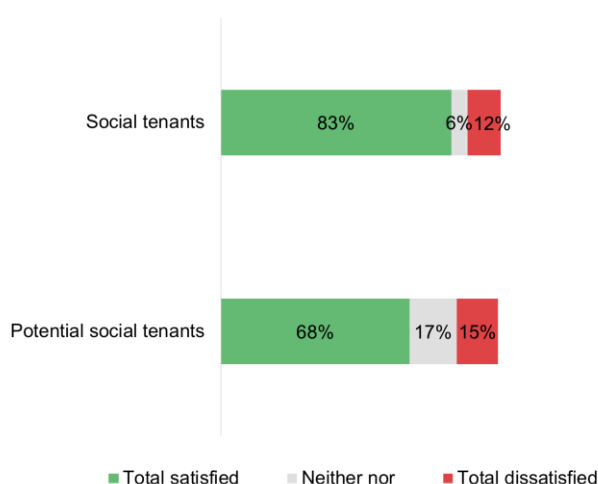
## 4.6. Conditions

There are many structural differences between social housing and the private rented sector. Our research explored social and potential social tenants' experiences of the conditions of their housing and the impacts that these had on their lives.

### Conditions at a glance: social and potential tenants

According to the English Housing Survey<sup>96</sup>, only 22% of social renters live in poor housing, compared with 38% of private renters. Our research supports this discrepancy, with social tenants more likely to be satisfied with the condition of their home (83%) than potential tenants (68%). Although the quantitative findings show that a majority of potential tenants are satisfied with conditions, home visits revealed a substantial disparity in the experiences of the two groups. Potential social tenants we visited were much more likely to be living in extremely poor conditions than the social tenants we visited. As ever, it is important to note that although they are less widespread, there are still significant cases where social tenants are unhappy with the quality or condition of their housing.

Figure 4.6.1 Chart showing the percentage of social and potential tenants who satisfied or dissatisfied with 'the condition of my home'



**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following:**  
**'The condition of your home'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

#### *Social tenants*

<sup>96</sup> Poor housing is defined as a home that has serious damp or mould, a Category 1 HHSRS hazard, is non-decent, or has substantial disrepair. These figures are taken from the most recent English Housing Survey (2016-2017).

**Social housing is generally felt to be of good quality and in good repair.**

A large majority of social tenants (83%) say that they are satisfied with the condition of their home. Furthermore, of those social tenants we spoke to, there was a widespread feeling that their homes were of decent quality and in good repair.

*"It's very spacious, it is clean, the building is very clean, and quiet... We have a community room. We have a washroom as well, which is really good. There are driers, so we get allotted a time each week, mine is a Thursday evening... Yes, I think the surrounding areas are kept clean, I think outside's nice. I think the hallway as you came in from downstairs is quite nice."*

Social tenant, Bristol

**This satisfaction is grounded in the understanding that any issues will be resolved by their landlord.**

Our conversations with social tenants revealed factors that contribute to this sense of satisfaction include homes being re-decorated in between tenancies, homes being well-built, timely renovations or re-fitting of appliances, homes being easy to heat, shared spaces being maintained, and having landlords who are responsive to any maintenance issues.

*"A lot of the good stuff comes from the landlord."*

Social tenant, Birmingham

*"This is very good [compared to housing I've lived in in the past]. We have mobile caretakers that come in. I'm not sure if they come in every day at the weekends, but they come in every day, make sure the bins are emptied, the chutes are clear, the hallways are kept clean. To have someone come in every day, I think it's good, you know."*

Social tenant, Bristol

Some social tenants we spoke to had also invested in substantial improvements to their own home, which kept it in good underlying condition. These improvements were not always part of the landlord's day-to-day remit, such as laying down new driveways, or installing new kitchen cabinets. This was felt to be worth doing as they knew they could stay in the home to enjoy the benefits of their work. It appeared that long term tenancies acted as an incentive for social tenants to invest in maintaining their housing themselves.

**However, some social tenants have a poor experience.**

At least one in eight social tenants (12%) say they are not satisfied with the condition of their home. We spoke to a few people who had issues, including cases of damp, tenants having difficulties heating their home affordably and poor build quality.

**Poor quality of housing stock, as well as the failure of social landlords to maintain homes were seen as behind this.**

Dissatisfaction with conditions sometimes seemed to be rooted in issues relating to the structural quality of housing. For example, some tenants we spoke to complained that their house was constructed with 'paper-thin' walls, which amplified noise from neighbours and created difficulties which would not otherwise exist. In some areas, these issues seemed to stem from older social housing stock. For example, one social tenant in Harlow, which was constructed as a New Town after WWII (it has Britain's first modern residential tower block), described frustration at their landlord being slow to renovate the properties.<sup>97</sup>

*"When we first moved in it was rough - dated, dirty, gross. We had to put a lot of effort in to make it pleasant again."*

Social tenant, Harlow

Social tenants we spoke to also reported bad conditions arising from long-term neglect of maintenance. Some blamed the landlord's refusal to invest in appropriate solutions or qualified professionals as the reason for persistent issues. For example, a social tenant reported that the council had refused to accept the severity of a damp problem in her house and would paint over it with anti-mould. It was only after years of 'pestering' from her that they agreed to install a ventilation system, which has finally resolved the issue.

*"They used to come and put a shelf up and it would fall down... the [repair people] were getting hired and paid as fully qualified and they had only done 6 weeks training...these cowboys were coming into your home and wrecking it because they weren't up to the job.... Luckily my friend's husband was a qualified electrician, and another friend was a plumber... so you tend to use those rather than a council man."*

(Previous) social tenant, Middlesbrough

Other social tenants we spoke to felt that out of date fittings and fixtures were rarely replaced, and that these problems were worse for long-term tenants due to a perception that updates are offered to new tenants and not to them.

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<sup>97</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20160303220058/http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmtlgr/603/60304.htm>

*"I've been in my house for twenty-four years, and all they have given me is one new white bath... I'd have to get someone to knock my door down to get a nice new PVC door."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

Some also felt that standards within social housing have become noticeably worse over recent years. In particular, some long-term social housing residents we spoke to, flagged that maintenance services that have previously been offered within their social housing had been withdrawn, such as dumping facilities, lawn mowing and minor repairs.

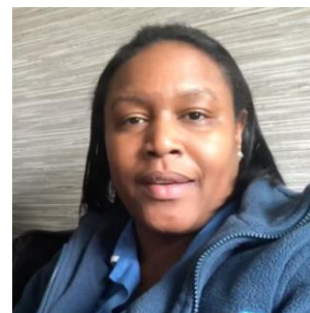
In addition, we found that the provision for maintenance and decorating varies between councils and housing associations. For example, some council tenants we spoke to in Middlesbrough described being offered a decorating grant when they moved in. This allowed them to ensure that the property is brought up to a standardised condition. In contrast, some social tenants we spoke to in other areas talked about how they were left to put in the time, money and effort to update a shabby property upon moving in.

Bad conditions and the visible signs of long-term neglect were also said to detract from tenants' pride in their home and neighbourhood. In the case of declining conditions of the exterior of housing, tenants also worried that this could lead to an increase in anti-social

### Case study: Martina, Social tenant, 41, Birmingham

*"At one stage when we first moved in the housing association put out skips, because it's social housing and people can't afford certain things."*

- Martina is a part time nurse and single mother of four children living in a Housing Association property on a street that is majority social housing.
- The way the streets are maintained doesn't help her feel like it's a good neighbourhood for her to raise children, she says. Her housing association used to put out skips on the road for tenants. Now that they have stopped doing this, people dump their items on the street, which makes it look shabby and uncared for.
- She pointed to a mattress lying in the road with its bed springs coming out and said it made her feel ashamed to live there.



behaviour.

### Potential tenants

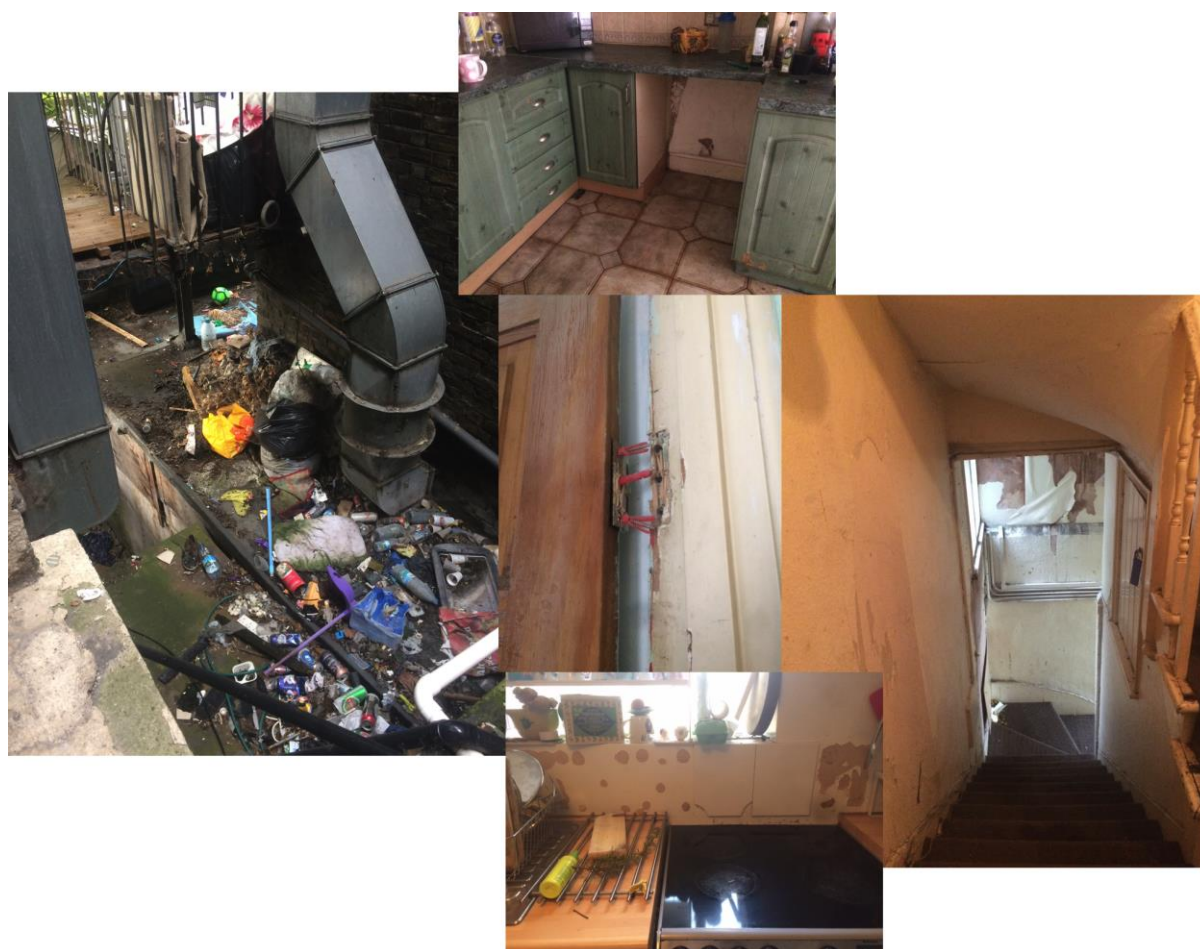
**Despite high levels of reported satisfaction, poor conditions are widespread in the homes of potential tenants,**



Although less satisfied than social tenants, more than two thirds of potential tenants still say they are satisfied with the condition of their housing (68%). Nevertheless, home visits revealed that housing for potential tenants was very often in poor condition, with widespread issues such as damp, mould, dry rot and rats, as well as broken appliances or fixtures, lack of insulation and being unable to heat the housing effectively.

As mentioned above, satisfaction, although a useful measure at an overall level, does not take into account the nuances of tenants' experiences and the way in which this differs to how they self-report these experiences. This difference between quite high levels of reported satisfaction and actual experiences of poor conditions appears to be linked to a greater acceptance of poor conditions among potential social tenants. There was a sense among potential tenants we spoke to that the vast majority of private rentals were of a similarly poor standard and must therefore simply be accepted, an acceptance which ultimately stems from the lack of standards for private rentals. (It should be noted that these perceptions are often based on the reality of seeing or living in other properties.)

Figure 4.6.2: Compilation of photos from potential social tenants' housing



In the most extreme cases, poor conditions caused a sense of despair for potential tenants we visited, as well as having an impact on their physical health. In a few cases, damp and cold worsened pre-existing health conditions, such as asthma.



*"It's depressing, all you can see is grot. We've all got asthma - I'm not sure if it's down to the damp or not."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

In addition, a lack of disposable income also made it difficult for potential tenants we visited to heat their homes properly or to invest in repairs to counter these issues, especially as they saw little point investing in the property when on a short-term tenancy.

## **4.7. Relationships with landlords**

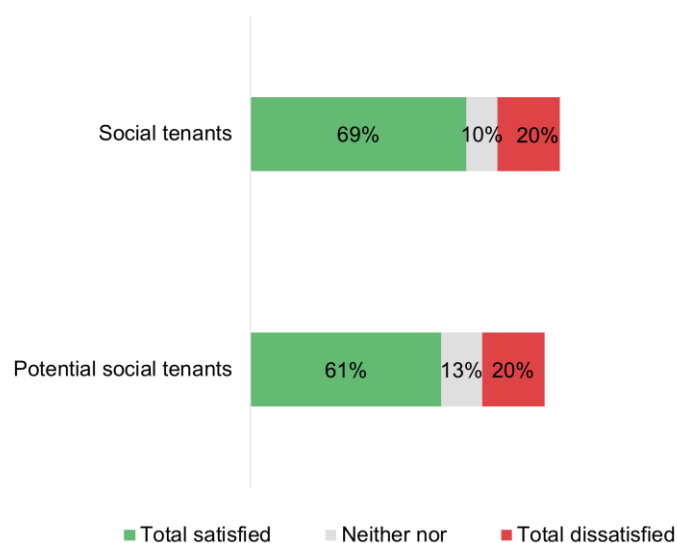
The fire at Grenfell Tower set the agenda for specific exploration of social tenants' relationships with their landlords within this research. In light of this, we set out to understand the ways in which social tenants interact with their landlords, their responsiveness to maintenance or other issues, and more broadly whether social tenants feel their landlords listen to their concerns, and those of their community. We were also interested to find out how this differs by location and by type of landlord – whether housing association or local authority. Again, we wanted to explore the day to day experiences of social tenants, as well as potential social tenants in the private rented sector.

### **Landlords at a glance: social and potential tenants**

Our findings revealed that social landlords meet the everyday needs of social tenants much more effectively than private landlords meet the needs of potential social tenants. Social tenants are more likely to be satisfied with their ability to get issues resolved with their landlords (69%) than potential tenants (61%). This is despite the fact that social tenants have higher expectations of their landlords to start with. Although this difference in satisfaction is again not large, our discussions with social and potential tenants revealed that there was an expectation that social landlords have a responsibility to keep social housing up to a certain standard. In comparison, there seemed to be a sense of acceptance in the private rented sector, where potential tenants may frequently not challenge their landlords over issues not being resolved.

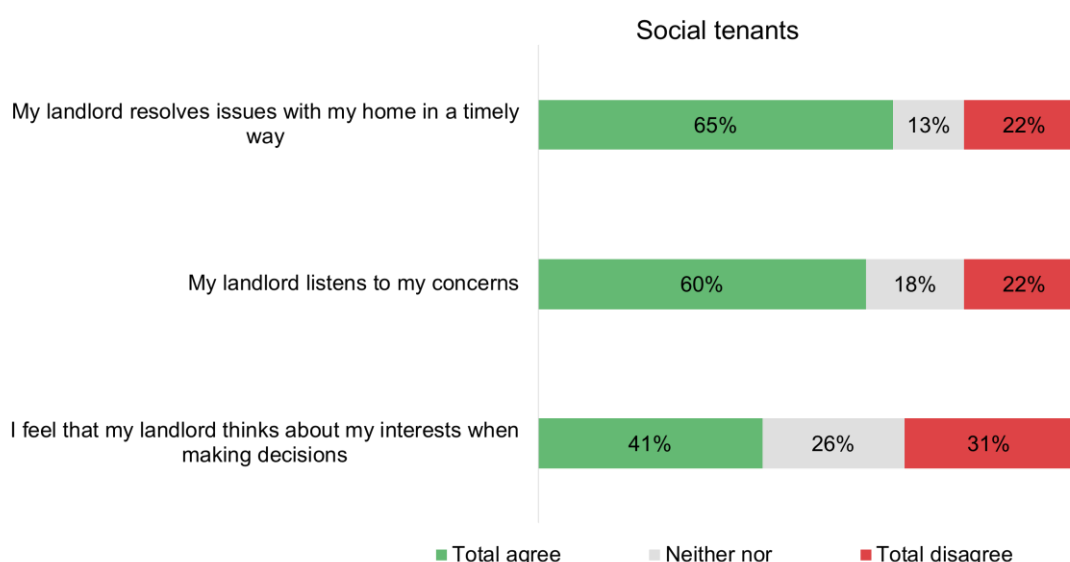
However, our research did also uncover cases where social landlords failed to keep housing up to the expected standard. Significantly, we found that, in social tenants' experience, there were no repercussions for these failings. Additionally, both social and potential tenants we spoke to felt that they do not have input in wider decisions about their housing; there is limited evidence of a 'tenant voice'.

Figure 4.7.2 Chart showing the percentage of social and potential tenants who are satisfied or dissatisfied with their ability to get issues resolved by their landlord

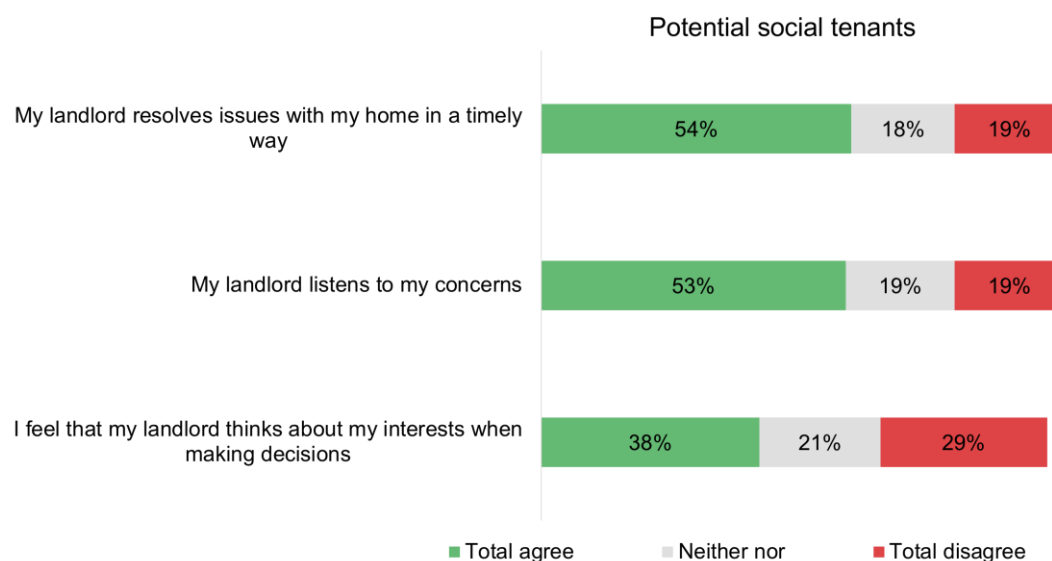


**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following: 'Your ability to get issues resolved by your landlord'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

Figure 4.7.2 Charts showing the percentage of social and potential tenants who agree or disagree with statements regarding their landlord



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

### *Social tenants*

#### **For day-to-day management, most social tenants have a good relationship with their landlord.**

As discussed in section 4.6, most tenants are happy with their landlords when it comes to resolving day-to-day issues and responding to repairs or maintenance requests: 60% of social tenants agree that their landlord listens to their concerns, while 65% agree that their landlord resolves issues with their home in a timely way.

Another indication of a good relationship is limited interaction between tenants and landlords. Our conversations with social tenants suggested that often they did not feel the need to interact with their landlord because there were no issues to report.

*“They don’t bother you unless you bother them.”*

Social tenant, London

The role of the landlord to keep up with repairs and maintenance was a highly valued feature of social housing. Some social tenants we spoke to saw it as a clear advantage over home ownership, and even over renting privately as they had less expectation that maintenance would be carried out in this tenure. For those we spoke to on low incomes or supporting family members, the knowledge that they would not have to bear sudden maintenance costs for their housing alleviated a significant worry.

In addition, social tenants we spoke to felt that they could rely on their landlords to fulfil their role in keeping up with repairs and maintenance as they saw this as the landlords' duty. People we spoke to who had experience of living in social and private accommodation gave the impression that this sense of duty made it easier for social tenants to seek out repairs and maintenance where needed than potential tenants because they felt confident in holding landlords to these standards.

*"I've found in social housing, they have to keep them clean, they have a certain reputation they need to keep up, whereas private landlords - they have that sort of gung-ho attitude of 'Oh well if you don't like it then leave.'"*

Social tenant, London

This sense of duty plays out in reality, with more than two thirds (69%) of social tenants saying they are satisfied with their ability to get issues with their housing resolved. Social tenants we spoke to described the processes their landlords had in place to address issues, for example a maintenance phone number or app. When these worked, they were felt to be convenient and made it easy to arrange for their landlords to do repairs around their lives.

*"The housing association has an online app which I can use for paying rent and [doing] anything maintenance related. I can see how long the waitlist is and I can pick a date and time for the visit...it's great I don't have to be on the phone on hold, I can just do it online. It works well with my work schedule and is really convenient."*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

### Case study: Ella, Social tenant, 23, Bristol

*"I can do what I want in the house: I love my new Laura Ashley wallpaper."*



- Ella recently moved into a Housing association property after being served an eviction notice in her previous private rental.
- Her last place was in very poor condition. Her previous landlord only ever maintained the property himself which meant things took a long time to be fixed and often weren't fixed properly. At one point there was an issue with a broken boiler and carbon monoxide which made her feel unsafe - she complained but it damaged her relationship with the landlord.
- With the Housing Association she now has a great relationship with her landlord. Any issues are addressed quickly; they have a text message system to book in appointments which works very well. She also has a housing officer who has dropped round to see how they were getting on and check on the house.
- In addition, she has a feeling of control and takes great pride in being able to decorate it how she likes.

*"It's very good, they keep in contact...if there is an issue I phone them straightaway."*

However, as discussed above, experiences are not uniformly positive, with more than one fifth of social tenants (22%), disagreeing that their landlord resolves issues with their home in a timely way and a similar proportion (20%) dissatisfied with their ability to get issues with their housing resolved by their landlord. Several of the social tenants we spoke to found their

maintenance service to be unreliable, difficult to schedule around full-time work, and liable to cancellation at late notice. They said that not all repairs are dealt with swiftly, for example a few living in high rise buildings said lift breakdowns were not fixed quickly enough.

In addition, some reported that minor issues, such as a leaking tap, were outright ignored by landlords and could take months to resolve or were never fully resolved, whereas more serious issues, such as electricity being down, would be dealt with quite quickly.

*"I was a carer for a while, I had clients that were in council housing that was just so poorly maintained. They never fixed anything. Like tiles coming off the floor, cupboard doors, kitchen tops coming off."*

Workshop participant, Oxford

Some social tenants we spoke to perceived that the discrepancy over waiting time was down to the landlord being more likely to deal with repairs if the tenant in question complained more persistently, creating an unfair system which favoured 'whoever shouts the loudest'.

*"You have to complain to get anything done."*

Social tenant, Harlow

When social tenants we spoke to experienced delays or neglect of maintenance, this was seen as a clear breakdown in their relationship with their landlord, as they viewed it as a failure of the landlord to fulfil their responsibilities. It was also a source of great frustration, with tenants feeling they had to chase their landlords repeatedly in these instances. Poorly scheduled repairs were also said to cause inconvenience and to lead to loss of earnings.

In addition, these social tenants described delays or neglect of duty as unfair because they did not have the time or the financial resources to do this maintenance themselves, and yet were still paying equivalent rent costs. This was particularly true for those who said that their landlord had withdrawn some maintenance services over time. This change made them feel they are not getting the same value for the amount of rent they pay.

*"A lot of the things the council used to do they've left alone. What're you paying rent for?"*

Social tenant, Doncaster

Finally, few social tenants in these circumstances felt that there was a clear avenue for redress when their landlords failed to fulfil their duty of keeping up with repairs and maintenance, leaving tenants stuck with unsatisfactory housing.

*"There should be penalties if they don't show up for the appointment. If the tenant misses an appointment they would get charged and so it should be the same the other way around."*

Social tenant, Birmingham

**There is a sense of fairness in relationships with social landlords.**

As discussed above, many social tenants we spoke to gave a strong impression that they enjoyed having a level of control over their home, in terms of decorating or other small changes (such as putting up shelves). The fact that their landlords allowed them to make these reasonable adjustments was an important part of the tenant-landlord relationship and made them feel they were on a more equal footing with their landlords.

Social tenants also feel that their landlords are quite understanding when rent payments are late. Those we spoke to who also had experience of private renting felt that social landlords were more understanding than private landlords. Although some tenants described receiving threatening automated letters when they fell behind, they said that when they queried this, the housing manager was usually apologetic and made an effort to understand their circumstances and, if necessary, allowed them longer to find the money.

*"They want to help you rather than take you to court."*

Social tenant, Harlow

**But social tenants felt that relationships could be improved by being more personal.**

However, many social tenants we spoke to felt that day-to-day landlord relationships should be more personal. They found it frustrating to have to ring up the generic housing line and explain all the details of their case on every call; or log in through a web portal (particularly for those who are less digitally enabled). These tenants felt that if they were able to speak to the same person each time and develop a relationship, it would be a much more effective way at pushing their case forward. Indeed, those that had dealt with a specific person on more than one occasion were likely to talk positively about these relationships.

*"I suppose with private it would be more one to one...usually with private you would contact the landlord and landlady for any issues, and because it's their building and it's their business they might take a little bit of pride in doing it. With the housing association it's not their house. It's not their building so the builders come around and do what they've got to do."*

Social tenant, Bristol

Notably, many long-term social tenants we spoke to reported that landlord relationships had been more personal in the past. They described how there often used to be one person responsible for managing a certain 'patch' of houses or flats, as well as maintaining the areas in between them, including community resources such as playing pitches and green spaces. These tenants felt that this structure encouraged residents to treat their neighbourhood well, and ensured tenants were supported by someone who understood their case.

*“When I first moved in the landlord wanted to take a picture of me to remember me, and she told me a lot about the neighbours, which made me feel good and like she was really invested in us. It was also a really nice and personal touch, I know I can call her if I need to.”*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

**Social tenants’ expectations of their landlords go beyond general maintenance and repairs.**

There is evidence that social tenants feel their landlords’ duties go beyond daily maintenance complaints to include building good neighbourhoods, and meeting housing need. In Haringey we spoke to tenants who were aware of proposals to redevelop the local area, involving the demolition of social housing and a proposed Development Vehicle, which had faced resistance from local residents. One tenant was involved in this resistance at the encouragement of other mums at her children’s school, many of whom are social tenants and, like her, suffered overcrowded conditions. She was motivated to get involved by a feeling that her landlord had a wider duty to provide sufficient supply of good housing in their area for her and other residents.

*“How they can be part social housing, part trying to get people on the housing ladder, just trying to sell cheap homes too? It doesn’t work, because then we don’t see any homes on our list that we can bid for.”*

Social tenant, London

**Yet tenants give little sense that they have a voice beyond the day-to-day issues – but this is not always perceived to be a problem.**

Only four out of ten (41%) social tenants feel that their landlord thinks about their interests when making decisions, leaving a third (31%) who disagree. In the interviews, a few tenants mentioned having little say, or any impact on the management of their housing, with landlords often appearing distant or intangible. A lack of information from, or communication with, landlords about housing issues on a wider level was felt to make it difficult for tenants to know what decisions they would even want to have an impact on.

*“I don’t hear anything from them.”*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

When it comes to wider issues such as rent increases, changes to their tenancies, or housing issues within the area, tenants we spoke to rarely felt their opinions had been sought. They felt that the council or housing association were often more concerned with their finances than with tenants’ wellbeing. For example, one tenant reported having the terms of their contract changed without forewarning.



*"[The tenant management board] don't listen to the everyday people in that sense...they think about themselves and their budget."*

Social tenant, Pendle

Nevertheless, most social tenants we spoke to felt that they did not need to be consulted on management issues, as long as things were going well. These social tenants were often reluctant to get involved with tenant associations for a number of reasons: they did not feel they had enough time to get involved; where resident associations did exist, they often met at inconvenient times; tenant meetings could be overrun by "busybodies"; and they had other more pressing issues to attend to.

However, some did share that one reason they wouldn't get involved is that they expected their views would not be listened to. This raises questions about how much tenants feel they wouldn't get involved as they don't mind the outcome, and how much as they don't feel they can realistically influence the outcome.

#### *Potential tenants*

**Potential tenants' experience relates to the fact that the majority of power resides with the landlord rather than a balanced landlord-tenant relationship.**

Speaking to people in the private sector gave a different perspective, where landlords were often perceived to shirk their responsibilities for getting repairs or basic maintenance done.

*"Yes, there's one hob that's not working anymore...The back door, the lock went on it. My dad had to replace it. She [the landlord] wouldn't replace that, and that's a security issue, isn't it? The only thing that she's ever responded to is [when] we had a gas leak. Then there was a problem with the boiler, so she had that repaired. They're the only things."*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

Our conversations with potential tenants revealed that they were less likely to attribute a sense of duty to their landlords to keep the property maintained to a certain standard. This meant that potential tenants were less likely and less confident in requesting repairs or maintenance than social tenants. Insecurity of their tenure and fear of rent rises meant that some even felt that it was not in their interest to challenge their landlords about repairs.

*"You know you could take it forward, but it's a bit scary because you have no security, she could just [kick you out]. You feel trapped."*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

Potential tenants we spoke to described how the lack of control and power over their housing left them feeling that they were in an unfair relationship with their landlord and meant that they had to put up with poor conditions.

*"I had no smoke alarms, and he came to fix them and put them up the wrong way, and they all fell down within a week. I offered to get the fire service in to put them up and he refused, saying he needs to do it."*

Potential social tenant, Pendle


Potential tenants also reported that it can be difficult to get in touch with their landlords. This is particularly the case for tenants we spoke to where the landlord lives abroad or outside of the local area. Reports show that private landlords are also less responsive than social landlords as they do not have to provide a phone number or other direct contact information in the same way that social landlords do. In addition, potential tenants felt that letting agents could act as a barrier to having direct contact with the landlord, making the process of getting repairs done slow and cumbersome.

*"I do find it difficult to ask him. I think that's my own feelings of guilt. For example, a tap broke and it took me ages to ask him, even though it's his responsibility. In the end, I just did it and we took the money off the rent, but he lives in France, so getting him to do anything is quite difficult."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol


Beyond day-to-day issues, potential tenants are unlikely to feel they have a say in their housing. Although 38% agree that their landlords take into account their interests when making decisions, it was clear from discussions around affordability and security that potential tenants often felt they had these decisions imposed on them, for example rent increases and short-term contracts.

**Case study: Harry, Potential tenant, 22, Pendle**



*"It's a wreck, everything's always breaking...Maintenance have only come out twice since we've lived here."*

- Harry and his partner moved here 2 years ago. They were forced to look for this place after the first flat they rented together was set on fire by the shop below, when dodgy electrical wiring used to grow cannabis caused an explosion.
- The 2-bed house looks homely, but is full of serious problems. The bottom step of the stairs has fallen through, the wall lining is coming off on the whole of one side of the house, and there is a damp patch around the first floor loo that looks like it's about to fall through. There is also a persistent issue with a blocked gutter.
- Despite this, Harry says the maintenance people have only been to visit twice since they moved in. One of those times was to tell them that the gutter can't be fixed.
- Since Harry and his partner are both currently looking for work, they pay rent through housing benefit and jobseekers' allowance and only have £20 left over each month once bills have been paid – they can't afford to make any repairs themselves. They feel abandoned by their landlord who seems happy to take their money but doesn't do anything to earn it, and the situation is impacting his mental health.



*"It messes with my head because I just don't like seeing stuff broke. It's another problem that comes on top of money problems and other problems."*

**And whilst contact with private landlords may be more personal, this does not mean potential tenants have a positive relationship with them.**

Potential tenants we spoke to that interacted with their landlord on a regular basis were able to form a more personal relationship with them, which could improve their attitude towards their housing. In some cases, these tenants described being able to pick up the phone and always talk to the same person, or being able to call round to their landlord as they lived nearby. Although there was less expectation that work would get done, these tenants appreciated the clear and 'human' route to interacting with their landlord.

However, those we spoke to who had more positive experiences often said that this was a result of 'good luck' in finding a reasonable landlord. Moreover, it seemed that potential social tenants were in some cases likely to put up with unreasonable behaviour, purely on the basis that their past landlords (or future landlords) had been or could be worse. For example, one person we spoke to described visits from her landlord that she found intrusive. She wrote this off as being an example of her landlord's 'eccentricities' rather than regarding it as unacceptable behaviour.

*"We had several issues at the beginning when we moved here. We are two ladies, we had a lot of clothes and furniture, and when I say a lot I mean a lot. So he said to the agent that we were not two, we were four and he wasn't going to rent us the property. We had the agreement signed and were homeless for four or five days... Because he didn't trust us, he had had bad experiences in the past... He also doubted if I was going to be able to pay the rent or not, because I was working part time... so for the first two or three months, he came into the house every single day to see how we behave... We were so used to dealing with the previous landlady*

*who was horrible, that we thought we can cope with this for three or four months."*

Potential social tenants, London

A personal relationship also does not change the power imbalance. For example, one potential social tenant we spoke to had been served an eviction notice because her landlord wanted to refurbish the entire house with the intention of renting it out for more money. Although she felt her landlord was being understanding about waiting for her to find a new place to live, it did not change the fact that she felt she no longer had any security in her housing and was relying on the goodwill of her landlord to prevent her from facing homelessness (rather than legal protection).

## 4.8. Space

### **Space at a glance: social and potential tenants**

Space is an important issue for both social and potential tenants. Existing evidence suggests overcrowding is not widespread in social housing: the EHS reports that only 7% of households in the social rented sector and 5% of households in the private rented sector were living in overcrowded accommodation in 2016-17. However, our depth interviews revealed that experiences were more nuanced. Whilst many we spoke to were very happy with the space they had, others experienced overcrowding due to the lack of availability or cost of larger accommodation.

Overcrowding is particularly an issue for young and growing families. The lack of social housing can mean that households with these changing circumstances sometimes get stuck in unsuitably small housing. As with conditions, we found that space can negatively affect tenants' mental health and greatly detract from family life.

#### *Social tenants*

### **Most social tenants we spoke to feel they have enough space to suit their needs.**

When people move into a social home, they are offered a property of an appropriate size for their household at that moment in time; a fact recognised and appreciated by social tenants we spoke to. As with other aspects of their housing, social tenants were particularly likely to praise the amount of space they have when prompted to consider the amount of space they might get when paying the same amount of rent in the private sector.

Those we spoke to that felt they had enough space reported the valuable impact on their social life, such as being able to enjoy time together as a family in a living room, or the ability to have family and friends to visit. Having enough space was felt to be important in allowing household members privacy, whilst also allowing people to store belongings, maintain hobbies, and help to keep their house tidy.

### Case study: Steve, Social tenant, 30, Pendle



*"I'm happy where I am, there's plenty of space and there is potential. The space outside is best."*

- Steve is a tradesperson, living with his partner, their 2-year old child, and his 10 year old son from a previous relationship in a 3-bed semi-detached house with a garden.
- He was offered the house ten years ago, when the mother of his 10-year old was pregnant and has been here ever since as it has managed to adapt to his changing family situation.
- His favourite thing about the house is the amount of space. There is a separate kitchen and living room, and a garden. There is space for the kids to play inside and outside and to keep a small dog.
- While the kids are still sharing a room, there's also space for him to use the small third bedroom as his music studio. His hobby is producing techno music, which often incorporates samples from nature recorded on long walks around the surrounding countryside.
- The comfort offered by this amount of space means Steve can envisage staying here for life. And due to his long term tenancy, he feels he could resolve any future issues with space by building out.



*"There is plenty of space out here if we want to barbecue. I can always build out the front garden into a driveway too."*

### But some social tenants suffer from a lack of space.

Several households we visited live in homes without enough space. We spoke to families with four or five family members sharing two- or sometimes even one-bedroom houses. These were often families who had outgrown the social housing originally allocated to them.

### A lack of space can affect people, even when they are not technically classified as 'overcrowded'.

A lack of space can affect people even if they technically 'fit' the house. For example, we heard from social tenants who felt that they lived in cramped accommodation, not necessarily due to the number of rooms, but also due to the small size of the rooms or lack of outdoor space. Others described themselves as living in overcrowded conditions, even though their household did not fit the definition of being overcrowded, for example where parents had children from previous relationships staying with them several nights each week (due to the other parent being the main carer).

Social tenants we spoke to who had experienced a lack of space spoke pessimistically about the prospect of being moved into a larger home due to long waiting lists. Those we spoke to that were classified as 'overcrowded' reported being on the waiting lists for a long time without being offered anything suitable. Those we spoke to that did not fall under the technical definition of 'overcrowded' felt they did not have the option of applying for larger social housing, or were classified as very low priority, with the result that they were unlikely to be offered suitable housing.

In addition, the lack of affordability in the private rented sector meant that these tenants felt it to be an unlikely option for finding housing with enough space. This lack of options meant that

social tenants we spoke to without enough space felt they were stuck in their inadequate social housing.

**Lack of space is caused by a housing system that cannot accommodate changing circumstances.**

The space required by social tenants changes as they progress through different life stages. This includes (but is not limited to) growing families, where extra bedrooms are needed as children are born or grow older, as well as families where children have moved out and the number of bedrooms required decreases. However, social tenants we spoke to reported that it could be very difficult to move into new social housing with the right amount of space to meet their needs.

The lack of available housing means that the wait for new housing is long. This seems to be exacerbated by the reactive rather than proactive nature of the social housing rationing process. For example, one social tenants we spoke to lived in an area where if a social tenant lived in a one-bedroom apartment but wanted to start a family, they would not be prioritised for larger accommodation until their child is over the age of three, at which point they would still face a long wait whilst living in overcrowded conditions. Another reported how a family with two children of a different sex under the age of 10 can be offered a house with only one bedroom for the children, which meant that the family would inevitably be living in overcrowded accommodation once their children grew older.

**Case study: Emma\*, Social tenant, 32, Harlow**



- Emma lives with her partner and two children in a one bed flat in Harlow, and feels that while her flat would be great for a couple, it is cramped as a home for four.
- To add to the overcrowding, her husband has another daughter who stays with them a few days a week.
- Her and her husband sleep on the sofa bed whilst her step daughter and elder daughter sleep in the one bedroom. The new born sleeps in the living room with them but they have no idea where she will go once she is too big for the cot.
- She complains that she can never have a moment to herself, and that she loses sleep due to the lack of privacy.
- Although she is on the waiting list for a bigger house, she has no confidence that she will be able to get one soon as there is such a shortage.
- She also feels that the council is dismissive of her situation; because both of her daughters are under the age of three, and her step-daughter is not a full time resident, her housing situation is not officially recognised as 'overcrowded'.

*"You go stir crazy if you spend too much time in our home."*



*"This is my new-born's cot. This is in the living room with us as there is not enough room for us all to sleep in the bedroom so to me this represents a worry."*

We spoke to some social tenants who felt their practical suggestions to alleviate overcrowding were not taken into account. These included a request to put in a partition to divide one larger bedroom into two, so that children of a different sex over the age of 10 would not have to share a room; and a request to be moved to an empty apartment in the same building with more space.



### Case study: Dan\*, Social tenant, 39, Birmingham



*"They said 'you can only bid on 4-bedroom houses', but there are no 4-bedroom houses available, so it doesn't make sense."*

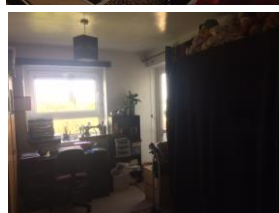
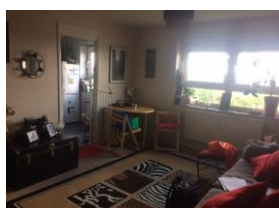
- Dan lives in a 3-bed first floor flat, with his partner, their 2 year old daughter, 8 year old son, and his 18-year old daughter from a previous relationship, who splits her time between her nan's and the flat, sharing a bunk bed with the 2 year old when she stays here.
- The family fits into the council's definition of 'overcrowded', and although they would like to move into a place with a garden, they know this is not possible within the social housing system owing to short supply.
- Recently the ground floor flat in his block was vacated – Dan suggested to his landlord that his family could move downstairs to that flat. By allowing the kids access to the green space by the house he thought it was a great solution to his problem.
- However, he was told this was not possible, as the ground floor flat was "too small" for his family, despite being the same size as the one they were already living in. He feels this shows the system is inflexible and computerised.



*"You feel so bad when you're trying to crack on with some work and your kid's hanging out over the balcony saying 'can we go out and play?'"*

At the other end of the spectrum, when family structures shrink rather than grow, social tenants can find themselves with extra space. Yet in these instances, the idea of downsizing is highly controversial. We spoke to older social tenants who were reticent to downsize as they valued the space they had and often put it to use when children or grandchildren visited. There was a feeling amongst these older social tenants that, if they moved, they would only be offered very small properties which would deny them the space they were used to.

### Case study: Alice\*, Social tenant, 65, Bristol



- Alice lives in a spacious 2 bedroom flat in a high rise block, exclusively for over 50s.
- She loves having a large living room, balcony and the extra bedroom which she can use to do paperwork as well as having space for when her grandchildren visit. There is also plenty of storage space.
- She hates the idea of a fixed term tenancy because she knows it would force her out of her 2 bed flat into a smaller one. Although she thinks it would be fair, she doesn't want to live in a smaller property.

*"They would offer me a 1 bed if I applied now. I feel it is fair but I don't like it. I don't like being squashed."*

However, those we spoke to who lived in overcrowded housing (or indeed, potential social tenants) stressed a strong sense of unfairness when smaller households were living in larger social houses whilst they were living in cramped conditions. In a few cases, social (and potential) tenants we spoke to expressed support for the principle of the 'Bedroom Tax' as a way to force social tenants to downsize and free up bigger social housing for those on the waiting list.



### *Potential tenants*

Overcrowding and cramped living conditions were a major issue for those we interviewed, affecting not only families but also those in flat-shares or living on their own.

Potential tenants we spoke to who were, or had previously been, homeless<sup>98</sup>, raised this as one of the most profound parts of their experience. Those who had spent time sofa-surfing or living in temporary hostels reported how these forms of accommodation are exceptionally cramped; for example, a family of four having to live in one bedroom in a hostel.

A potential tenant who had sofa-surfed for a number of years described how he never had any space to himself, making it difficult for him to sleep, impossible to socialise, but also meaning that he could not escape being present during arguments of the family hosting him; this ultimately led to long periods of depression.

*“It is tense every day... I haven't slept in a bed for nearly 4 years now. My ribs and back hurt every night.”*

Potential tenant, London

### **Affordability is the main barrier to finding accommodation with enough space.**

For potential social tenants, space often comes down to affordability, and for many, high rents lead to overcrowding. This seemed to be especially the case for potential tenants we spoke to who needed to upsize as their families grew. In some instances, potential tenants talked about trade-offs between space, affordability and conditions, with some opting to live in housing in a bad state of repair so that they could afford enough space to suit their needs.

Those potential tenants we spoke to who were on the waiting list for social housing also talked about the rigidity of the social housing system. As with social tenants, these potential tenants felt bound by the strict definitions used to classify overcrowding; for example, having to prove custody of a child through a lengthy paperwork process before it was taken into account in the social housing application.

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<sup>98</sup> Those who are classed under statutory homelessness.

### Case study: Michael, Potential social tenant, 29, London



*"Every day is a struggle: not letting depression get to grips with me. Now in this situation I feel completely abandoned by the local authority."*

- Michael was previously renting privately with the help of housing benefit.
- When he started studying at university his housing benefit was cut so he could no longer afford his home, however the council said they could not help him as he was not in a vulnerable position. He therefore sofa-surfed for a few years.
- Recently his ex-wife (who had custody of their child) became ill and asked him to look after their 8 year old daughter.
- Friends and family no longer wanted him sofa-surfing with a young child and he was forced seek help from the council again.
- The council would not accept that Michael had his daughter living with him without proof – so he had to wait two and a half months until the documents came through. Yet he was still not offered social housing.
- Eventually the council offered him help through a 'find your own' scheme that would place him in private renting. However, this resulted in a catch 22. The financial support through the scheme would only stretch to a one-bedroom apartment but no lettings agent or landlord wanted to let a one-bed flat to Michael and his daughter as they felt they would get penalised by the council for allowing overcrowding. This period caused a great amount of stress and led to a period of depression.
- Eventually the council located a 2-bed private rental through the scheme but it is very unaffordable and the rent is mostly covered by housing benefit, topping up his earnings from part time work.
- Now that he is no longer living in over-crowded conditions, he feels that he has no chance of getting social housing.
- He also worries that if his ex-wife gets better and his daughter stops living with him, he will be left completely unable to afford his home, which will likely result in becoming homeless again.

Other tenants we spoke to also discussed the system creating perverse incentives around overcrowding. For example, we spoke to families living in overcrowded accommodation who did not want to move to larger private rented accommodation, not just because of the expense and instability incurred by moving, but also because they feared that they would become deprioritised on the social housing waiting list.

**Whichever kind of housing a household is in, overcrowding, especially in the most extreme instances, has a detrimental impact on the household.**

Both social and potential tenants we spoke to living in these overcrowded homes reported negative impacts on their day-to-day lives and even long-term mental health. For example, where couples had to share a bedroom with a child, they were denied privacy, sleep and had no space to store their belongings. When family members were forced to sleep in the living room, it could mean they had no personal space at all. In the worst cases it had a negative impact on the mental health of these tenants.

A lack of space also affected household dynamics, causing tension and arguments for those we spoke to. For example, older children who were still sharing rooms tended to bicker and fight, increasing the stress on parents.

*“Our older son has recently been diagnosed with autism, which makes him difficult to deal with in a small house, and as the kids get older it is getting harder for them to share a room.”*

Social tenant, London

*“I think it’s important to eat together as a family. I miss not having a proper table and chairs, so that’s the first thing that I want [if I could get a bigger place]...We haven’t got a dining room. It’s just the living room and the kitchen and it’s just not big enough for us. We feel as if we’re all on top of each other.”*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

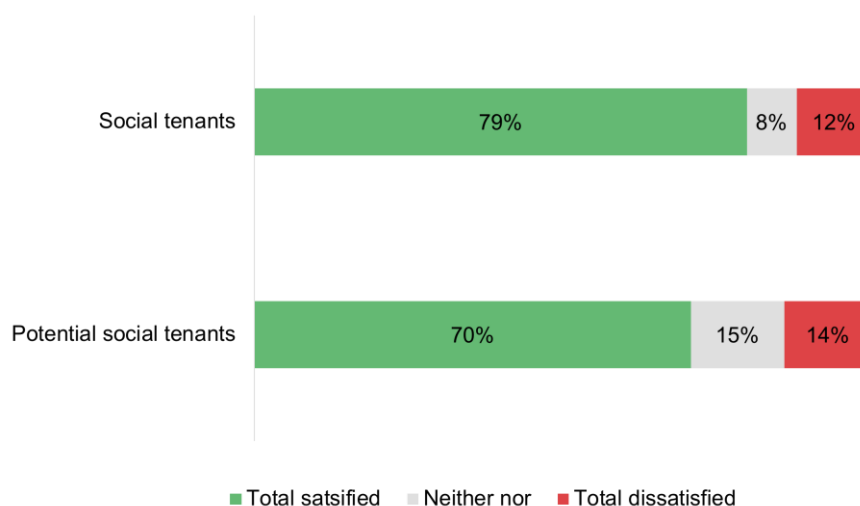
## 4.9. Neighbourhood and surrounding area

### Neighbourhood and community at a glance: Social and potential tenants

A clear finding from the research is that one of the real positives of social housing is the sense of community it fosters. It appears that long-term tenancies are responsible for laying the foundation for good neighbourhood relations, which are distinctly lacking in the private rented sector. As seen in figures 4.8.1 and 4.8.2, social tenants are more likely to be satisfied with their neighbourhood than potential tenants (79% and 70% respectively), as well as feeling part of the community (63% and 37% respectively).

On the other hand, complaints of anti-social behaviour and crime were common amongst social tenants we spoke to, and, for some, this is seen as a major flaw in where their housing is located. According to the English Housing Survey, social tenants are more likely to report three or more neighbourhood issues compared to other tenures.<sup>99</sup> Yet potential tenants we spoke to had similar experiences of these issues, suggesting that it is a wider problem and not limited to social housing. For both groups there is a perception that these problems have worsened over time and that there is no workable solution.

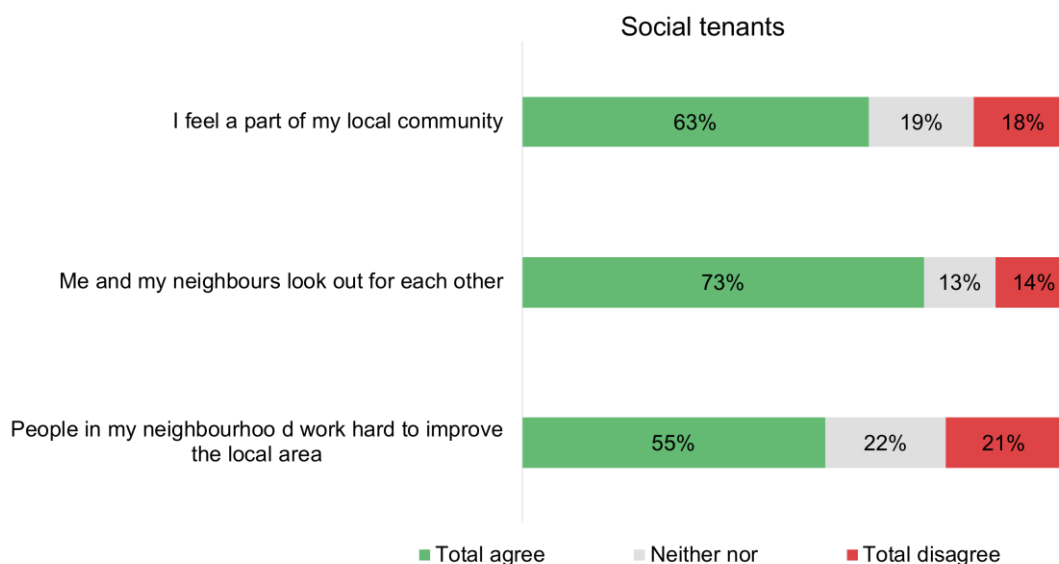
Figure 4.9.1 chart showing percentage of social and potential tenants that are satisfied or dissatisfied with 'the neighbourhood you live in'



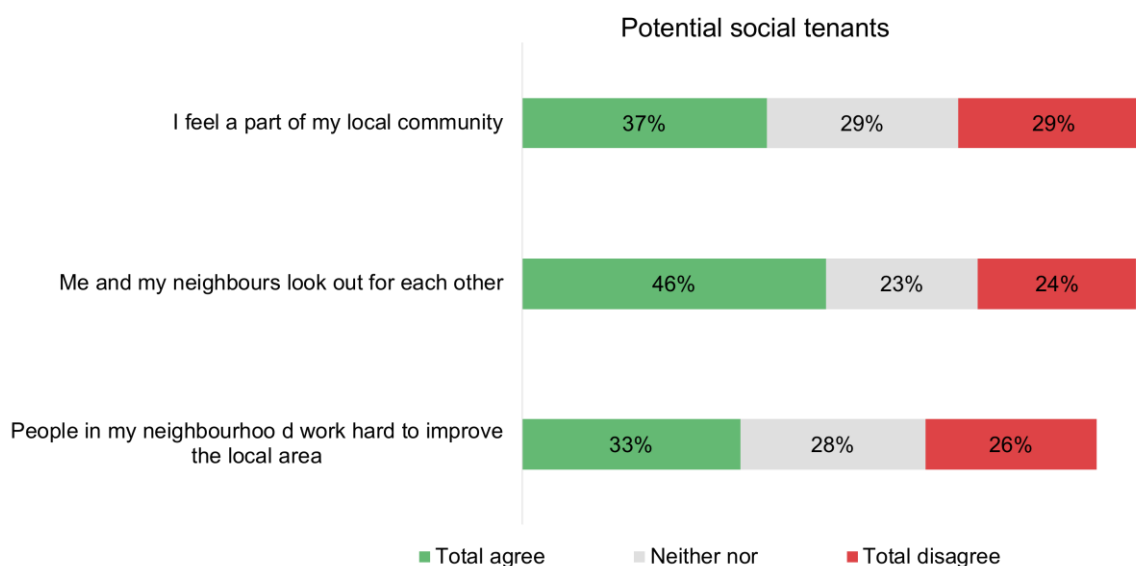
**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following:**  
**'The neighbourhood you live in'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

<sup>99</sup> In 2015-16, 46% of social renters reported three or more neighbourhood issues compared with 31% of owner occupiers and 33% of private renters.

Figure 4.9.2 Charts showing the percentage of social and potential tenants who agree or disagree with statements regarding the neighbourhood and community



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

### *Social tenants*

#### **Social tenants are on the whole happy with the area they live in.**

The majority (79%) of social tenants say they are satisfied with the neighbourhood they live in. Similarly, a majority agree that they feel part of their local community (63%), that they and their neighbours look out for each other (73%), and that people in the neighbourhood work hard to improve the local area (55%), as seen in figure 4.8.2. This paints a positive picture of social tenants' experience of their neighbourhoods and communities that is supported by the depth interviews.

When asked for spontaneous words or phrases to describe their local area, social tenants we spoke to often brought up the sense of community and their local amenities (see figure 4.9.3). In rare cases, social housing tenants even reported stories of grouping together to bring about change in the community or fight for services to be provided.

Figure 4.9.3 (Q. What 3 words or phrases would you use to describe your local area?)



#### **Satisfaction with the neighbourhood is due to community relations and good amenities.**

Our interviews found that being able to live close to friends and family was an important factor in whether social tenants like their neighbourhood. Many of the social tenants we spoke to had a wide network of friends and family living in the immediate area, (in walking distance or

sometimes even on the same street or estate), who they interacted with regularly and relied on for support.

There was a sense from these social tenants that these networks often resulted from social housing being allocated in tenants' own local area, meaning that they could continue living near pre-existing friends and family.

Additionally, the ability to live somewhere for a long time helps to foster these bonds and create a deeper sense of community. 72% of social tenants who have lived in social housing for more than 26 years feel a part of their local community compared to 58% of those who have lived in social housing for 5 years or less. Social tenants we spoke to talked of frequent interaction with neighbours and implied that, over time, this interaction led them to see these neighbours as friends. Social tenants we spoke to living in houses with adjoining gardens to others were especially likely to talk about this kind of interaction. This phenomenon was particularly apparent when comparing these interviews to those with potential social tenants, who were much less likely to refer to any interaction with neighbours, whether friendly or otherwise.

*"I feel really proud of the local area, we're not isolated and everyone is talking and taking care of each other."*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

Although not always the case, social tenants we spoke to sometimes gave the impression that their networks were made up mostly of social tenants, rather than the wider community. For example, in one instance, a social tenant referred to social tenants on their street forming a 'clique'. Again, this comes back to long tenancies as a differentiating factor. Social tenants are more likely to live in areas for a long time; they therefore have time to get to know the other social tenants. In contrast, private renters are around for shorter periods, and they therefore do not become part of the community in the same way.

*"We all know each other, we've lived in the same street for years. And then a privately renting family comes in and says it's really cliquey."*

Social tenant, Pendle

Local amenities were highly valued by social tenants we spoke to for their convenience and they commonly reported that they have sufficient local amenities in their neighbourhood or local area. Although there were a few anecdotal reports that some social housing was cut off from amenities, for example as a result of being built in isolated locations, or bus routes closing down, in only one instance did a social tenant report that this was the case for her housing – and she was personally unaffected because she has a car.

In addition, amenities such as green spaces and entertainment facilities (e.g. cinemas) were also said to be valued because having things to do in the local area was both convenient and fostered a sense of community through shared experiences.

Social tenants with children are more likely to report being a part of the local community: 67% of social tenants with children said they feel part of their community, compared to 58% of those without. Those we spoke to (with children) seemed to talk more often about making use of local amenities than other types of social tenant, which appeared to be linked to a higher proportion of amenities or activities aimed at young children, for example toddler groups. In our interviews, these social tenants also mentioned proximity to their children's school: another important local facility.

*"We've got great neighbours, we go walking, we go into town, visit local groups; we're really involved with the community."*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

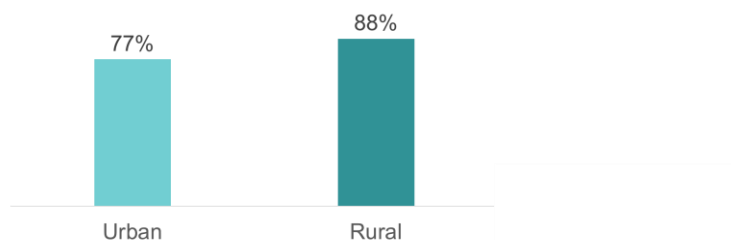
Those living in rural areas express a more positive experience of their neighbourhood than those in urban areas. As seen in figure 4.8.4, 88% of social tenants living in rural areas say they are satisfied with their neighbourhood, compared with 75% in urban areas. This finding is supported by the depth interviews, where tenants we spoke to in Pendle reported a very strong sense of community. This difference reflects trends in other housing types. For example, 83% of all private renters in rural locations are satisfied with their neighbourhood, compared with 71% in urban areas.

*"That's another good thing about the house - the neighbours. We're always looking out for each other. And that's what makes a home - the community around it."*

Social tenant, Pendle

There are a variety of differences between living in urban and rural locations that might contribute to this variance in satisfaction, for example crime-rates. Another factor that is particularly relevant here is access to green space. As discussed in the recommendations section (5.6), green spaces were felt to be very important in generating a positive atmosphere and sense of community, and those we spoke to felt that social housing in urban areas did not always offer this.

Figure 4.9.4 Chart showing the percentage of social tenants who are satisfied with 'the neighbourhood you live in' by area



**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following:**  
**'The neighbourhood you live in'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000)].



**But anti-social behaviour in the immediate area emerged as a potentially common experience for social tenants.**

Only one in eight (12%) social tenants are dissatisfied with their neighbourhood and around one in five disagree that they feel part of their local community, or that people in their neighbourhood work hard to improve the local area (18% and 21% respectively). Our conversations with social tenants suggested that negative feelings towards their neighbourhood stemmed largely from experiences of crime and anti-social behaviour. Moreover, the prevalence of this sentiment among a large number of social tenants we spoke to suggested that, this could be experienced even by tenants who were happy with their neighbourhood overall. In the workshops especially, it was common for one participant to raise their own experience of anti-social behaviour, followed by others agreeing and chipping in with their own experiences.

Complaints of anti-social behaviour and crime cover a variety of experiences. For example, some social tenants we spoke to, especially those who are older, complained about young people loitering or walking through their estate. Whilst they did not always cause damage, their presence was felt to be threatening and unwelcome. Other concerns included fly tipping, which is felt to make areas feel poorly maintained. On the other end of the spectrum, some social tenants we spoke to had experienced serious crime, including family members being violently mugged in the local area or issues with drug and alcohol abuse.

*"Before I had a neighbour living next door who had some issues. He was a drug user...going in and out of prison, but then his associates were also offenders and drug takers, and then he managed to somehow get involved with a gang, and the house turned into a crack house, and they were stealing things."*

Social tenant, London

We did not pick up on experiences of anti-social behaviour and crime varying by type of housing: we heard complaints from social tenants living in high-rises, terraced housing, low-density and high-density estates. However, there was variation between those living in rural areas compared with urban areas. Social tenants in Pendle said that they experienced very little crime or anti-social behaviour, especially in comparison to their perceptions of high crime-rates in local towns and cities. These research findings are supported by external evidence that crime rates are lower in rural areas.<sup>100</sup> As discussed above, this variance in experience

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<sup>100</sup> In 2016/17, the rate of violence against the person was 14.1 per 1,000 population in predominantly rural areas compared with 22.2 per 1,000 population in predominantly urban areas: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/676118/Crime\\_Jan\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676118/Crime_Jan_2018.pdf)

contributes to higher overall satisfaction levels of the neighbourhood among those in rural areas.

**Anti-social behaviour is difficult to tackle and has a negative impact.**

Importantly, despite anti-social behaviour and crime being a major issue for them, social tenants we spoke to reported that they struggled to get it resolved and felt that there is no way for them to get rid of problem neighbours. Indeed, some of these social tenants reported getting the police or landlords involved but said that it had little effect, leading to frustration among some that landlords could not evict problem tenants or put adequate protection in to keep trouble-makers out.

*“There’s a lot of down and outers who live with the council, because they can’t afford private... That’s one of the downsides [of living here], having rough folk about.”*

Social tenant, Pendle

Social tenants we spoke to facing these issues said that it had large negative impacts on their lives. They did not feel comfortable in their area and worried about their own or their family’s safety, sometimes not letting their children play outside. In the worst cases, feeling intimidated by other tenants deterred them from going into some parts of the neighbourhood.

*“I keep to myself. I wouldn’t let my daughter play outside, not with the guys across the road standing outside their house drinking and swearing.”*

Social tenant, London

**‘Problem neighbours’ as well as cuts to community services are blamed for anti-social behaviour.**

Social tenants we spoke to often, but not always, attributed these issues to other social tenants and ‘problem neighbours.’ Many of these social tenants could readily point to instances where they felt that neighbours did not maintain their own housing properly, leading to signs of dereliction, for example leaving rubbish out or not mowing the lawn. Many of them also complained of poor behaviour from neighbours such as loud arguments, drinking in the street, or playing loud music at night.

A lack of activities and amenities for younger people was seen as a major reason for anti-social behaviour amongst social tenants we spoke to. Local amenities were often seen as prioritising younger children and adults, leaving older children bored, with nothing to do. Cuts to community funding which led to facility closures were also blamed and there was a sense that this would only get worse in the future.

*“There is nothing for the older children - they hang around the street, it’s very intimidating.”*

However, it is important to note that social tenants' experiences of crime and anti-social behaviour are not unique to social tenants. As discussed below, potential social tenants we spoke to and those living in close proximity to social housing had similar experiences. In addition, discussion during the workshops revealed that private renters more generally experienced these issues as well. The widespread experience of crime and anti-social behaviour suggests that it cannot be linked exclusively to social housing.

### *Proximity residents*

We conducted interviews with people who lived in close proximity to social housing to understand their perceptions of social housing the areas it is located in. These interviews showed a different perspective on the same areas and neighbourhoods as those experienced by social tenants.

For proximity residents we spoke to, anti-social behaviour and crime were also prominent issues. Yet their experiences of crime and anti-social behaviour seemed to be less direct than social tenants (or potential social tenants) and they tended to be expressed as concern about the wider area rather than the immediate neighbourhood, for example concerns over knife crime in Birmingham or London. This was partly indicative of this group travelling outside of their immediate area more often, for example commuting to another town or village for work.

*"When I was growing up there was a lot of drugs, but not knife crime. Just in the past 12-18 months, I think there's been a lot."*

Proximity resident, Birmingham

A few of these proximity residents did report issues with 'problem' social tenants in their neighbourhood, for example playing loud music or shouting abusive language, but these incidents were generally isolated to one person or family and were not felt to be representative of the whole neighbourhood; just a minority reported issues with behaviour from social tenants more widely.

Our conversations with proximity tenants therefore corroborated the findings from social tenants: that the neighbourhoods they live in suffer from problems with anti-social behaviour and crime, but that this is not an issue unique to social housing.


### *Potential social tenants*

## **Potential tenants have similar experiences of crime and anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhood to social tenants.**

Many potential tenants we spoke to made very similar complaints regarding crime, dereliction and anti-social behaviour, which were again linked to amenities being shut down and lack of

community centres. As with social tenants, these experiences had a negative impact on potential tenants' lives, leading to worry, and a feeling of discomfort in their local area. This similarity in experience shows that these issues are not unique to social housing, but are a widespread reality for all people living in more deprived areas.

### Case study: Izzy, Potential social tenant, 27, Middlesbrough



*"There's not a great deal round here. The kids these days seem terrible."*

- The neighbours on her immediate street get on with each other. She feels she could rely on them if she needed and feels safe.
- There is a Middlesbrough news Facebook group which she reads.
- But despite having shops in walking distance, there are sometimes kids hanging around outside which Izzy finds intimidating, so she drives into town instead.
- There is a park close by, but again she doesn't like to go there as kids are always causing trouble – e.g. fires, graffiti and needles have been found in the park.
- For their son, they prefer to drive further afield for activities, e.g. to the beach or to a small farm in Hartlepool.

*"This is the community church on fire outside our house, this was arson."*



**Importantly, however, these potential social tenants are significantly less likely to feel the same sense of community.**

Again, reported levels of satisfaction with the area are lower among potential social tenants: although 70% of potential tenants say they are satisfied with their neighbourhood (compared to 79% of social tenants), only 37% feel a part of their local community (compared to 63% of social tenants) and only 46% agree that they and their neighbours look out for each other (see figure 4.8.2). Although not raised spontaneously, a link could be drawn between this group's widespread experience of accommodation that feels temporary and not being able to settle into the community, which lessens their ability to interact with their neighbourhood and make use of the local amenities.

*"I don't think I've spoken to one of my neighbours."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

## 4.10. Accessing housing

**Applying for social housing is a source of frustration for many social tenants looking to move, and for potential social tenants.**

People we spoke to who were on the waiting list for new or bigger social housing regularly reported long waits. These experiences were common across this group. Government data shows the majority of those who apply for social housing have to wait for more than a year, with over a quarter (27%) having to wait for more than five years.<sup>101</sup>

*“I didn’t think it would take as long as this. I thought that there were a lot of council houses around.”*

Potential social tenant, Pendle

There is also high awareness among all groups about how long the wait for social housing is. Many of potential and social tenants we spoke to referenced family members, friends or neighbours who had previously faced or were currently facing long waits.

*“I know people who have been on the list for 10 years.”*

Workshop participant, London

In many cases, applicants we spoke to – both social tenants and potential social tenants – felt little hope of ever getting suitable housing.

*“I think it’ll take years before I get a house. It’s enough to pull your hair out.”*

Potential social tenant, Harlow

Many pointed to the lack of social housing as the underlying reason for frustrating experiences.

*“I went about a year and a half ago. I don’t find the process too bad, it’s just long. I think there are a lot more people who need the housing than housing.”*

Potential social tenant, Pendle

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<sup>101</sup>

[https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_releases/articles/one\\_year\\_on\\_from\\_grenfell\\_millions\\_still\\_stuck\\_on\\_housing\\_waiting\\_lists](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/one_year_on_from_grenfell_millions_still_stuck_on_housing_waiting_lists)

### **A difficult application process adds to this frustration.**

Throughout our interviews, there was a great deal of variation in the circumstances of both social tenants and potential social tenants on waiting lists; they came from many different backgrounds and had many different needs and considerations. Many of them felt that there were limited ways to express their individual circumstances in the application process, or that it was not designed to help people in their unique situation.

*“[They have to] listen to everybody’s stories one to one rather than label them, because everybody’s different.”*

Social tenant, Pendle

Some people reported a difficult and inflexible system. We spoke to applicants from households whose structure differed from a traditional ‘couple and children’ who felt that their circumstances were not recognised. For example, one household included children from a previous relationship that only lived with them for part of the time. As they were not considered permanent residents, their needs were not considered when allocated housing, meaning that they were only offered homes that were felt to be too small for the family as a whole.

The application process also has strict requirements when taking health conditions into account. Some people we spoke to with health problems said that it can be difficult to disclose these and have them accepted and understood. For example, one potential social tenant said that he previously applied for social housing but did not disclose his anxiety and depression because he thought it would take months for his condition to be formally affirmed (as he needed to provide the necessary paperwork from the doctors). As a result, he felt he was unfairly banded with little hope of ever being allocated housing. This meant he was put off applying again at a later stage.

*“This time around I got put off even bothering to try - they make it seem like a really long, drawn out process.”*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

Other people we spoke to reported affordability assessments that seemed harsh, or even nonsensical. For example, we spoke to someone who said that even though he was able to evidence that he needed to borrow money to cover his rent, he was not considered to be in desperate need as he could technically ‘afford’ his accommodation.

Applicants we spoke to regularly talked about not understanding the allocation system. They appeared to be aware of set ups like the banding system and some of the elements that are considered when determining which band they go into. However, they also spoke of being moved between bands without explanation, which caused confusion about where they ‘stood’ on the waiting list. Even when the band was known, variable experiences with waiting lists, for example other people in the same band being allocated housing more quickly, caused confusion and frustration.


Frustration is made still worse by poor communication. Some of the applicants we spoke to said that they didn't feel the application process had been properly explained; one potential tenant suggested that this might prevent low income people from accessing social housing. Another issue raised by people we spoke to was that they did not have a consistent member of staff to talk to throughout the process, and that they were told different things by different people.

*"A lot of people are a pay-cheque away from being homeless, but they don't have a clue [about how to apply]. I didn't have a clue."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

For a minority, the application process itself is also inaccessible. Those we spoke to without internet access found it harder to apply and, if they had applied, felt excluded from the bidding system.

### Case study: Mike\*, Social tenant, 32, Middlesbrough



- Mike had been living in and out of hostels and B&Bs after falling into rent arrears in a private rental.
- Because he is not online, he could not bid for social housing, despite having applied.
- But after hearing that his brother in law was moving out of his council flat, Mike decided to move in.
- It then took him a while to sort out the lease with the council.
- Although he liaised with his housing officer, it was also passed around her supervisor and manager.
- Lack of continuity in who he was speaking to made him feel like he was jumping through hoops.
- But he is happy that he finally has a place of his own.

*"[The bidding system] is a nightmare."*

*"They need to make the system more accessible, some people don't have a clue."*

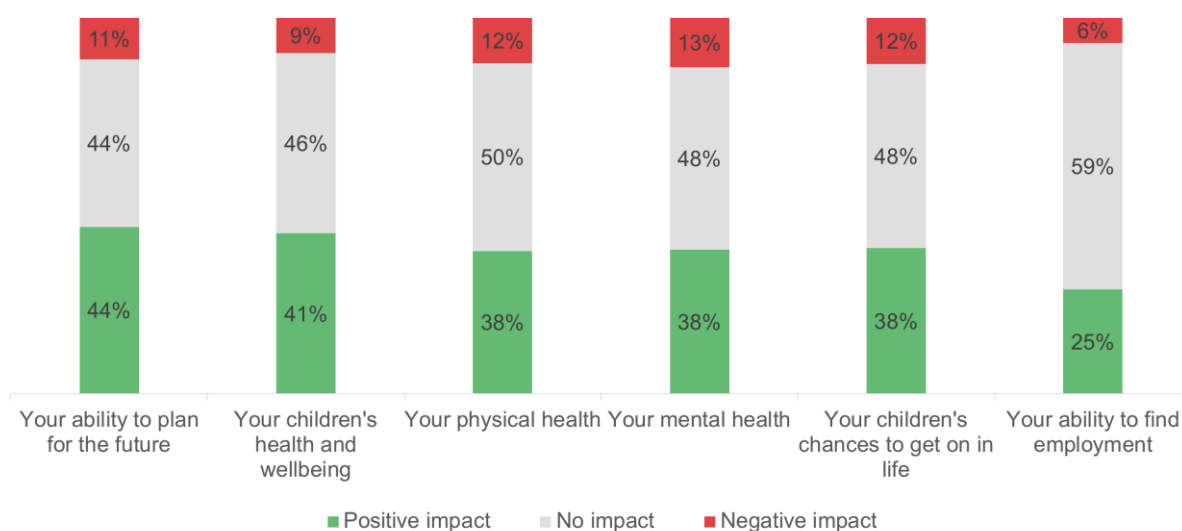
*"It's my own now, I feel secure."*

The difficulty of applying for and being allocated social housing is also a recurring theme brought up by settled social tenants. As discussed in the overall experiences section (4.3), the majority of social tenants feel fortunate that they live in social housing (77%). Many social tenants we spoke to related this sense of 'good fortune' out of an awareness of how difficult it is for other people to access social housing. Those we spoke to who had recently moved into social housing tended to express this sense of fortune more strongly, as the difficulty of applying and the shortage of social housing felt more immediate.

## 4.11. Impact of housing

Broadly, our research shows that social tenants have a positive experience of their housing. While there were problems for a minority of those spoken to as part of this research, that need to be addressed, the majority were happy with their housing and report a positive impact on their lives more widely. As seen in figure 4.11.1, the positive impacts of social housing are felt in a variety of areas, where social tenants are more likely to report a positive than negative impact of their housing, on their own and their families' lives.

Figure 4.11.1 Chart showing perceived impact of social housing in tenants' lives



**Q3. Thinking about your time living in social housing / private rental accommodation and the impact it has had on your life, for each of the following please say whether you think living in social housing has had a positive, negative or no impact...?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000)].

In comparison, our findings suggest that the private rented sector is failing those on very low incomes or in difficult situations. As seen in figure 4.11.2, potential social tenants are less likely to report positive impacts of their housing on their lives than social tenants.

The biggest difference between social and potential tenants is seen in the perceived impact of their housing on their ability to plan for the future (44% and 27% respectively), which links to a lack of security for this group. As discussed in section 4.5, insecurity emerged as a central aspect of potential tenants' housing experience due to short-term tenancies, high rents and a power imbalance with their landlords, which could have a detrimental effect on their lives.

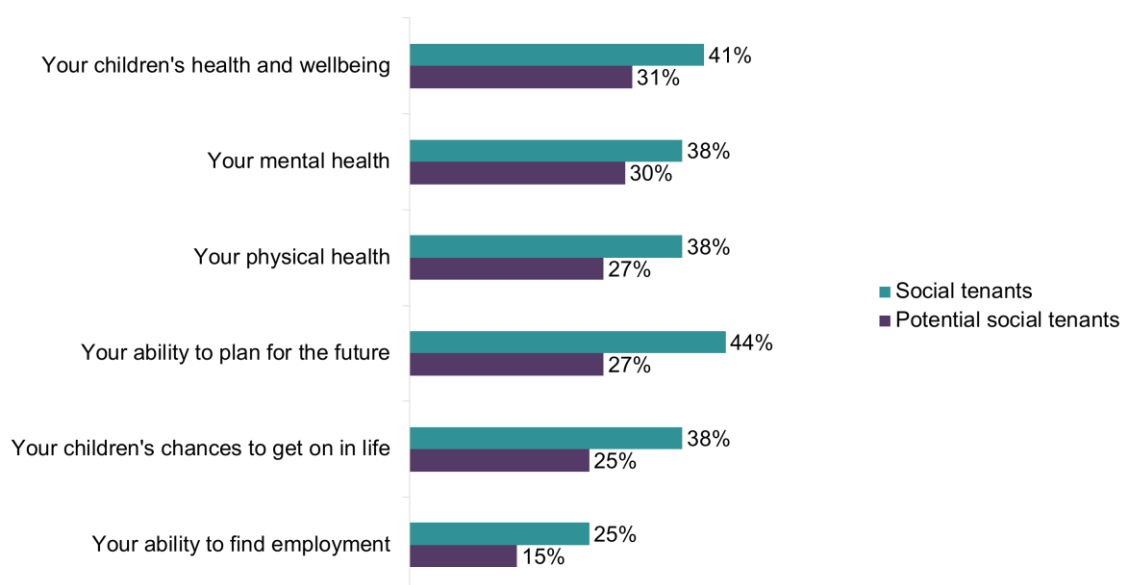
*"I know that I won't have to look for another place to live. I can put down roots, I can plan for mine and my children's' future."*

Social tenant, Bristol



The contrast between the impact of social housing and privately rented housing is highlighted by those social tenants we spoke to who had previously rented privately, enabling them to compare the two types of housing from their own experiences and thus to reveal a much more positive impact from their experience of social housing than privately rented housing.

Figure 4.11.2 Chart showing the percentage of social and potential tenants who report a positive impact of their housing on their lives



**Q3. Thinking about your time living in social housing / private rental accommodation and the impact it has had on your life, for each of the following please say whether you think living in that housing has had a positive, negative or no impact: 'Your ability to plan for the future'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)].

## 4.12. Conclusion

From a detailed exploration of the experiences of social tenants and potential social tenants, we have found that social housing meets the needs of low-income renters better than privately renting in several ways:

- Social housing is more affordable than privately renting
- Social housing offers more security and stability than privately renting, which has a positive impact on the lives of social tenants
- Social housing has better conditions than the private rented sector
- Social landlords are better at maintaining housing to a good standard than private landlords
- Tenants, regardless of tenure, do not have particularly good relationships with their landlords, although potential social tenants face worse issues
- A lack of space, although not widespread, is an issue that can be found both in social housing and privately rented housing
- There is a stronger sense of community among social tenants than potential social tenants
- Crime and anti-social behaviour are problems common to both social and potential tenants

For potential social tenants, these negative experiences and subsequent impacts on their lives are also a failure of the social housing sector as these people are left in terrible circumstances with little hope of respite due to a lack of social housing.

Nevertheless, for all these measures, there are a minority of cases where social housing is failing to provide acceptable standards for social tenants:

- Although comparatively more affordable than privately renting, it is still unaffordable for some
- Social housing is not always maintained to acceptable standards
- Social landlords are sometimes unresponsive and fail to include social tenants in wider decisions about their housing
- Social housing does not accommodate the needs of growing households, leaving some in cramped conditions
- Whilst neighbourhood relations are strong, social tenants have strong concerns over crime and anti-social behaviour

In conclusion, social housing, on the whole, functions well as a provision for low income renters but changes need to be made to ensure that it can meet the needs of all social tenants.

## 5. The reputation of social housing

### 5.1. Introduction

In the previous section, we explored our core groups' lived experiences of their housing, neighbourhoods and communities. In this section, we focus on perceptions of the social housing system as a whole. While these perceptions are, of course, often embedded in and informed by personal experience, this is only part of the story. We found that, across our sample, virtually everyone had an opinion about social housing, whether or not they had ever lived in it themselves. Their views were informed not just by their experiences but also by media coverage, word of mouth stories and their impressions of the social housing and social tenants who live in their local areas.

This section begins by exploring social tenants' perspectives on the reputation of the social housing system and social tenants themselves. In particular, we delve into the extent to which social tenants feel stigmatised because of their tenure, and if so, the extent to which this stigma has an impact on their lives. Next, we explore a series of issues that emerged particularly prominently in the qualitative research about perceptions of the wider system, starting with the allocation systems used to determine who gets social housing and moving onto changes in affordability over time and fixed-term tenancies. Finally, the discussion covers the question of how far social tenants feel that their (usually positive) experiences of housing reflect the system as a whole.

Next, we move onto consider potential social tenants. Although most are generally satisfied with their housing, the previous section has uncovered some of the serious problems many experience. This section explores how far they feel social housing would be a good substitute and, if they do not think that it would be, the barriers which deter them from feeling that it is right for them.

Finally, this section concludes with a summary of what all our core groups foresee as the future of the social housing system.

### 5.2. The social tenant perspective

#### *Perceptions and experiences of stigma against social housing*

**There is a widespread perception among social tenants that social housing is stigmatised by society.**

By stigma, we are referring to the perception that social housing and social tenants are routinely dismissed, looked down on or marginalised with a series of negative assumptions made about them just because of their tenure. This theme emerged spontaneously in the

qualitative interviews as one of the drawbacks of living in social housing, as well as in response to a direct question towards the end of the interviews.

Specifically, social tenants we spoke to often felt that a series of lazy, negative assumptions are made about them by society. The most prominent is that social tenants are likely to be dependent on welfare benefits and out of work, and that living in social housing is a way in which they can take money from the state. The most commonly used term for this cluster of assumptions is 'benefit scrounger'.

*"They think that we're a waste of space, money grabbers, that we want handouts. It's just that we've been stigmatised and given a label."*

Social tenant, Pendle

In our research, social tenants felt that there was a gendered element to these perceptions. Tenants emphasised that social housing is strongly associated with single mothers and talk about the resentment directed towards single mothers who do live in social housing (owing to a perception that they are unfairly prioritised in considerations for who should be placed in social housing).

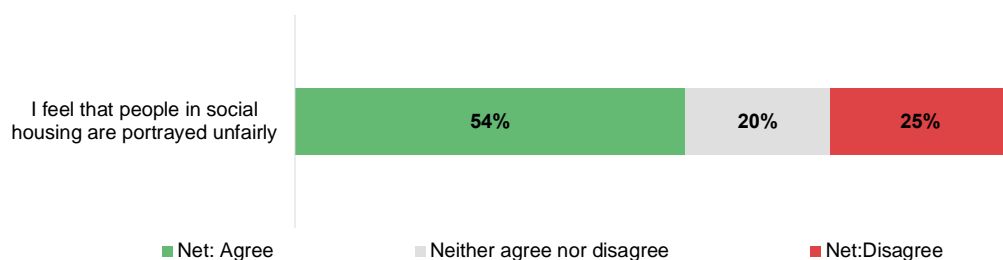
*"You hear council housing and people think of people on benefits, single mums with kids who are out of control."*

Social tenant, Bristol

Other elements of the perceived stigma that were raised include that social housing is characterised by crime, anti-social behaviour, neglect and disrepair.

A majority of social tenants agree that the sector is affected by stigma. As shown in figure 5.2.1, 54% agree that "social housing is portrayed unfairly", compared to 25% who disagree.

Figure 5.2.1 Chart showing the percentage of social tenants who say 'social housing tenants are portrayed unfairly'



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 'I feel that people in social housing are portrayed unfairly'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000)]

### **The media was seen as a significant driver of this stigma.**

When questioned about the reasons for this perceived stigma, social tenants frequently (but not exclusively) laid the blame on the media. The media was seen as influential in promulgating myths about social tenants to a mass audience who may have little or no experience of social housing themselves. The television show *Benefits Street* in particular was referenced in the qualitative interviews as an example of a sensationalist show which promotes misconceptions about social housing.

*"The media are actually quite vile. They only show the worst side of social tenants."*

Social tenant, Harlow

**Importantly, although the social tenants interviewed felt that there is stigma against social housing on a macro level, few said they have ever been personally affected by it.**

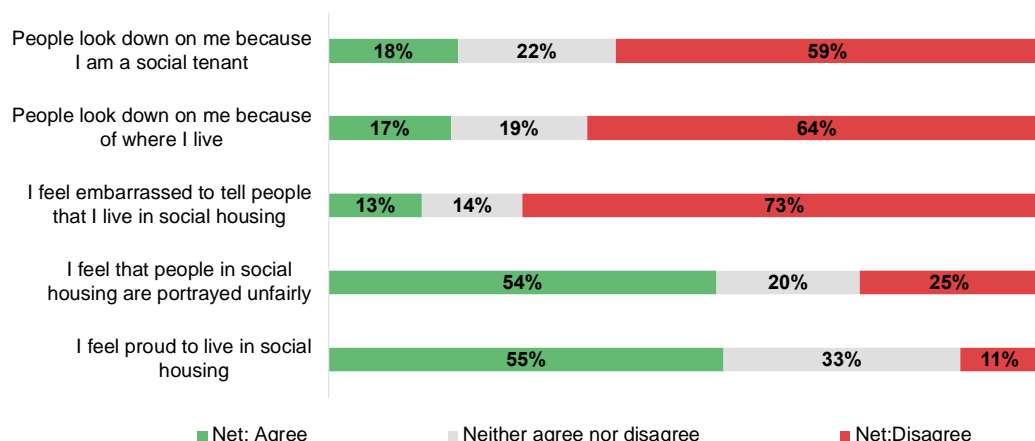
Overall, the evidence suggests that any stigma around social housing does not affect the majority of social tenants on a day-to-day level. The vast majority of social tenants we spoke to said they couldn't point to a time when they have experienced stigma or how stigma at a wider level might affect their lives.

*"There can be stigma...but that's not my experience."*

Social tenant, London

Moreover, the majority of social tenants disagree (59%) that people as a whole look down on them because they live in social housing. This corresponds to findings that the majority of social tenants feel proud to live in social housing (55%), and nearly three quarters (73%) say that they aren't embarrassed to tell people they live in social housing.

Figure 5.2.2 Chart showing the percentage of social tenants who agree or disagree with statements about stigma



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000)].

However, there is a substantial proportion who do report having personally experienced the effects of stigma against social tenants. One in eight (13%) of social tenants say they feel embarrassed to tell people they live in social housing and almost one in five (18%) agree that people look down on them because they are social tenants.

In the qualitative interviews we heard a small number of specific stories from social tenants with personal experiences of stigma. At the extreme end, we heard from one social tenant who was harassed by a private sector neighbour and abused for being a social tenant. After the two of them had an argument, she got a note through the door the following day calling her a 'scrounger' and accusing her of worklessness.

*"I got in an argument with a neighbour, and the next day I got a note through the door calling me a scrounger. They assumed I didn't have a job because we were the council house on the street."*

Social tenant, Birmingham

Other reports were that stigma can manifest itself in subtler ways, particularly dismissive treatment by other people or institutions. One social tenant in Pendle interpreted his interactions with his landlord as a manifestation of this. After ownership of his property transferred from the council to a Housing Association, he reports being treated with increasing derision and believes that his history of arrears meant that he was not taken seriously. This culminated with a visit to the housing association's office in which he was promised a face-to-face meeting, then taken into an empty room to discuss his situation with another person in the same building by telephone.

*"They look down on you more. They've already made up their mind."*

Social tenant, Pendle

A few social tenants in the qualitative interviews reported that they would not want to disclose their living situation to anyone who was not also in social housing, out of a concern of being perceived negatively.

*"Sometimes I've got to bite my lip and not say anything. It makes me feel a bit little."*

Social tenant, Bristol

### ***The reputation of social housing allocation systems***

**Among those interviewed, there was a lot of uncertainty about how allocation systems works.**

The allocation system is generally an area of considerable uncertainty for social tenants. In discussions of the topic, social tenants tended to emphasise how little they know about how allocation systems work or differ across the country and their views on the system were often deeply rooted in their personal experiences of applying for it (which are discussed in detail in section 4.11). There was, however, a broadly-held perception that the system is designed to prioritise certain groups who are considered to have greater need. When pressed as to who these groups are, the default position tended to be to presume this includes households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There was also a strong perception that the allocation system prioritises families with children over single people. Other groups mentioned are those with disabilities, elderly people, those on low incomes and households in receipt of benefits.

*"I would say, it's varied, because you got people in council housing who work, and then a majority who have loads of children. [Mainly] single parents."*

Social tenant, London

### **The needs-based principle carried wide support.**

Discussions of this issue tended to involve a marked sense of frustration that there is a need for any kind of prioritisation system. Tenants emphasised that, in an ideal world, social housing would be available and accessible to everyone who needs it, regardless of demographic criteria or circumstances. In light of this, the most popular proposed solution to reforming the allocation system was to increase overall supply (an issue explored further in section 5.4).

There was, however, an acceptance that, in the current context of limited supply, systems need to make tough choices and prioritise some groups over others. This principle was widely

supported and many of the groups assumed to be prioritised are seen as legitimately in high need (including families with children, homeless people and those with disabilities). However, tenants emphasised that this assessment should be a holistic one in which each case is assessed on its merits and the applicant's personal circumstances, not just a 'box ticking' exercise.

*"It would be nice to find the best bits of having an overall system, but then if certain cases don't quite fit, to [accommodate that]. It's like ticking boxes. It's very black and white and there are no greys. Life is not black and white, it is loads of tones of greys and so people end up being missed."*

Social tenant, London

In the interviews, a small number of social tenants disagreed with the needs-based principle and explicitly support replacing it with a merit-based system. Among this group, there tended to be a feeling that the current system unfairly penalises those who have worked hard and more deserving of social housing. They also expressed a view that a needs-based system incentivises dependence on the state and bad behaviour, lowering the reputation of social housing for everyone who lives in it. In our research, however, this was very much a minority view.

*"It gripes me that so many people lean on the system, and everything's paid for. It's a shame they can live like that and not contribute anything back."*

Social tenant, Birmingham

**Despite this support for the needs-based principle, there was some criticism of current allocation systems for being opaque and unfair.**

One area of concern was the perception that allocation systems are opaque, confusing and difficult to understand. There was particular criticism of the banding system, which is seen as confusing and capricious, with little sense of how or why the bands are determined. It is worth emphasising, however, that this stance was more likely to be adopted by potential social tenants who have applied for social housing but not been prioritised to get it.

*"They seem to swap the labelling around as and when they please".*

Social tenant, Harlow

Within the needs-based umbrella, there was some criticism of the specific categories of people assumed to be prioritised. Among those in work, this included households in receipt of benefits; some of those without children also pointed towards single parents. The stance tended to be that all groups should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and no one group should receive blanket priority.



*"Give help to the people that need help. Assess every situation individually."*

Social tenant, Bristol

Finally, there was a perception that the system is open to abuse. This included the perceived prioritisation among some social tenants of immigrant applicants over British-born applicants. Those who did hold this perception almost universally wanted to see the prioritisation reversed and believe that British-born applicants should be prioritised, regardless of degree of need. An additional concern was that, while the allocation systems might have their heart in the right place, they are open to being rigged by applicants who know the system and who can engineer themselves into a priority position above more deserving candidates.

#### *Changes in affordability over time*

**Although social housing is viewed as the most affordable option, there was a perception that social housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable.**

As outlined elsewhere in this report, there is an almost unanimous perception that social housing is more affordable than privately renting, and this is viewed as one of its most significant advantages. However, it is important to note that in interviews social tenants emphasised the affordability of the sector most when making the comparison to a private sector that is viewed as a 'rip off'. In and of itself, the social sector was not always seen as particularly affordable by any objective standards.

*"It is obviously a lot better [than privately renting]. But it should be more affordable on a real budget."*

Social tenant, Pendle

In interviews, rising unaffordability was not raised spontaneously by social tenants. However, when explicitly asked about this issue, there was a perception among some that social housing has become increasingly affordable over time. This was generally put down to rents going up. In a number of cases in the depth interviews and (in particular) the workshops, social tenants expressed the view that their rent, or the rent of other social tenants they know, has risen substantially in recent years.

*"It's gotten a lot more expensive to rent, even from the council. The waiting lists are really long, and by the time you get in, the rent is more expensive than when you signed up."*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

*"It's not regulated, they can charge what they want to an extent. I've noticed housing association rents go up massively in the last couple of years."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

*"For private accommodation, there's less regulation compared to council. But my mum's rent has increased by £200 - it's still not enough."*

Workshop participant, London

Beyond this, some tenants emphasised that, regardless of rents going up, social housing has become more unaffordable due to legislative changes and non-rent increases in the cost of living. The most prominent of these mentioned in the research was the 'bedroom tax'. Those who experienced it tended to have seen their costs go up significantly and have had to cut back on other areas as a result. The benefits freeze, austerity and inflation were also raised as factors in a generalised increase in the cost of living that makes it harder to get by, even if rents stay relatively consistent.

*"Everybody's wages have been frozen, child benefits and tax credits have been frozen, the austerity of the last 8 years has taken its toll. People are really struggling."*

Social tenant, London

#### *Attitudes to fixed-term tenancies*

**Among those interviewed there was very little awareness of the introduction of fixed-term tenancies.**

In the depth interviews and workshops, the issue was almost never brought up spontaneously as an example of how the social sector has changed. Among tenants who are on fixed-term tenancies themselves, few talked about this being a recent change or how their experience is distinct from the wider social tenant population.

**When explicitly asked, the issue is divisive, provoking strong opinions on both sides.**

In discussions of this issue, the balance of opinion was that fixed-term tenancies are a negative development, which undermines the unique security offered by social housing and would put tenants in a more precarious position. Another, less commonly identified drawback was that fixed-term tenancies would make social housing more transient and damage the sense of community cohesion that builds up over tenants remaining in the same place for a long period of time.

*"I don't like that at all. That would make me feel very insecure."*

Social tenant, Bristol

*"To me, that's wrong, because you'll lose the community spirit as people come and go."*

Social tenant, Pendle

There was, however, a strong view to the contrary. Some social tenants welcomed the idea and saw it as a way to make the social housing system fairer. In particular, the change was seen as a way to free up social housing for those who need it most, a priority in a context of limited supply. Those who expressed this view tended to talk about tenants using social housing as a way of 'finding their feet' for a limited period, before handing the home over to someone in more pressing need.

Tenants who criticised the social housing system for encouraging dependency and complacency among tenants, making it too easy not to work, expressed particular support for this change. Among this group, there was a view that fixed-term tenancies are a way to encourage a work culture in social housing and get rid of tenants who cause problems more easily.

*"I think they need to make tenants know they haven't got a home for life. That should be the ethos."*

Social tenant, Birmingham

Based on the small number of qualitative interviews conducted with them, tenants on fixed-term tenancies themselves did not appear to differ much from the wider population in their stance on this issue. Their position tended to be that, while a lifetime tenancy would be preferable, they still felt relatively secure in social housing and do not see it as a problem. This view was particularly prominent among those who have previously lived in the private rental sector and see a fixed-term tenancy as a big step up.

*Social tenants' perceptions of social housing beyond their personal experiences*

### **Social tenants tended to feel that their experience is typical of the wider sector.**

In the qualitative interviews, we explored the question of whether social tenants felt that their (usually positive) experiences of social housing were typical of the social tenant population as a whole. This line of questioning rarely generated strong opinions in either direction. Most of our interviewees had not considered the issue before and tended to default to a position that their experience was probably typical.

In some cases, this stance appeared to be characterised as a kind of 'myth busting' of false assumptions about social housing. In the course of the discussion, some social tenants emphasised that, contrary to popular and media assumptions, they and the social tenants they know are typically 'ordinary', hard-working people. Problems with social housing in this view are restricted to a 'few bad apples' who cause trouble for other tenants.

*"I live in a block of flats with a whole heap of other people. We pay rent, live similar lives and are in similar situations."*

Social tenant, Bristol

**However, a small number of social tenants who were critical of social housing distinguish themselves from the 'norm'.**

In a few cases, social tenants who were more critical of social tenants as a group take pains to emphasise that they are not 'typical' of their area or the wider social tenant population. Sometimes, this view is expressed in terms of a geographical divide between different social housing estates in the local area. One Pendle social tenant, for example, emphasised that her estate is generally known to be respectable, clean and safe. However, the estate down the road has a poor reputation that she believed to be deserved, characterised by physical dereliction and high levels of crime.

*"[Nearby] there's a lot of junk in the gardens. And I know a lot of people won't live in that area. You can tell from looking at the houses."*

Social tenant, Pendle

*"Nobody wants to live in the estate down the road. There's lots of house burglary, theft and there don't seem to be any parents bringing up the kids – it's known as smackhead city."*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

Other people talked about 'getting lucky' when they had a positive experience. In one interview conducted in Birmingham (referenced as a case study in section 4.4), the tenant was very positive about her spacious, comfortable and affordable flat. However, she had been reluctant to move into the building when initially offered because of her discomfort at living in a high rise. In spite of her positive experiences, she believed that she has had a fortunate experience of good management and neighbours.

**Some tenants also thought that social housing might be different in different areas.**

This view was particularly prevalent in Pendle, one of the areas in which the depth interviews were conducted. Social housing in Pendle was perceived very positively and associated with spacious, single family homes. Social tenants in Pendle also placed particular emphasis on the strength of community relations in the area.

*"That's another good thing about the house - the neighbours. We're always looking out for each other. And that's what makes a house - the community around it."*

Social tenant, Pendle

However, tenants in Pendle tended to feel that their area is not typical of social housing on a national level. Instead, there was a tendency to perceive social housing elsewhere (particularly

in larger cities like nearby Burnley) in far more negative terms – linked with crime, disrepair and neglect.

*"It [the stoops Estate, Burnley] is well rough, it's well known, it's been on the telly. There's no way I'd live somewhere like that. It's a lot nicer here.*

Social tenant, Pendle

### 5.3. The potential social tenant perspective

#### *Introduction*

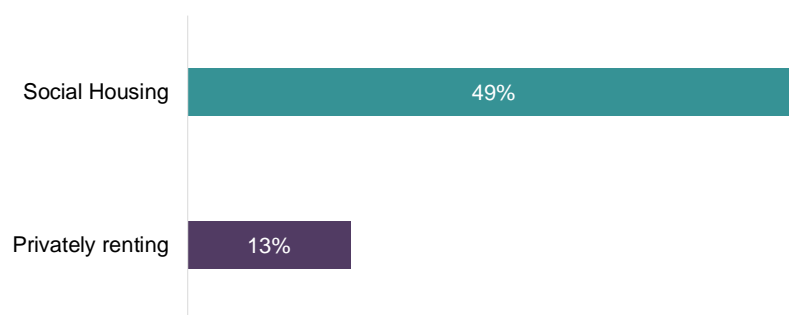
In this report, we have shown that, on the whole, social housing often offers a better experience than privately renting for those on the lowest incomes. Below, we explore the comparison from the potential social tenant perspective. How do they feel about the prospect of living in social housing and do they agree that, in many cases, it would be a better option for them? If not, what is it that is putting them off?

#### *Perceived advantages and disadvantages of social housing compared to the private sector*

**Greater affordability is widely regarded as one of the main advantages of social housing over privately renting.**

There is a strong, baseline assumption among potential tenants that social housing is characterised by lower rents than the private rented sector. It is unsurprising, then, that potential social tenants see social housing as a more affordable option than renting privately. Figure 5.3.1. shows that half (49%) of potential social tenants feel that, from an affordability perspective, they would be better off in social housing than privately renting. This is almost four times higher than the 13% who feel they would be better off in the private sector.

Figure 5.3.1 Chart showing the percentage of potential social tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting regarding 'the amount of rent you would pay'



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately: 'The amount of rent you would pay'?** [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)]

In the qualitative research, this held even in locations where there is not much of a gap between private and social rents, particularly Middlesbrough. Beyond lower rents in and of themselves, potential social tenants highlighted additional features of social housing which could be likely to make it more affordable for them. Firstly, rents in social housing are expected to be less volatile and less likely to rise sharply. Those living in social housing would therefore be less likely than private renters to find themselves stuck in a property which is outside their means due to a sudden rent increase.

Secondly, potential social tenants emphasised the benefits of maintenance being paid for in social housing. This is especially compelling for those who have spent their own money on maintenance of a privately rented property that they felt should have been the landlord's responsibility.

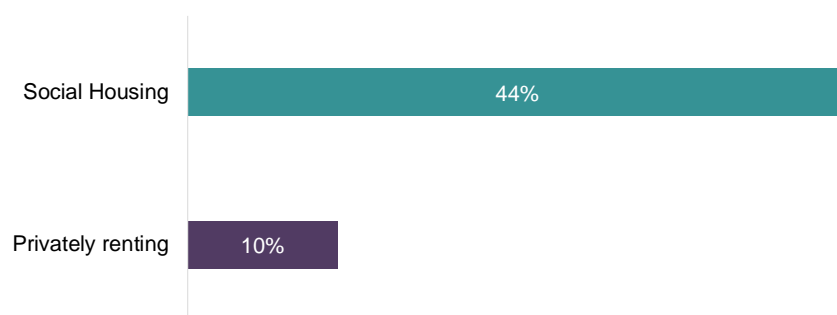
*"It [social housing] will be more affordable than my current house. It would be a big help to move into a situation where you're not having to pay so much money. The maintenance would help."*

Potential social tenant, Pendle

**Security of tenure is seen as the other clear-cut benefit of living in social housing compared to the private rental sector.**

The quantitative data shows that, when thinking about the risk of losing their home to eviction, potential social tenants are four times more likely to say they would be better off in social housing than privately renting (figure 5.3.2).

Figure 5.3.2 Chart showing the percentage of potential social tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting regarding 'your risk of losing your home to eviction'



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately: 'Your risk of losing your home to eviction'?** [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)]

The qualitative research suggests that there are two main factors driving this. Firstly, even among potential social tenants with little or no direct experience of social housing, there was a widespread understanding that tenancies in social housing are longer, and usually for life. Compared with private renting, social housing means less risk of being forced out at short notice when the tenancy runs out.

Secondly, there was a perception that social landlords are less profit-driven than private landlords. Following from this, the expectation was that social tenants in vulnerable positions (for example, those who have fallen behind on their rent) are less susceptible to eviction than those in the private sector.

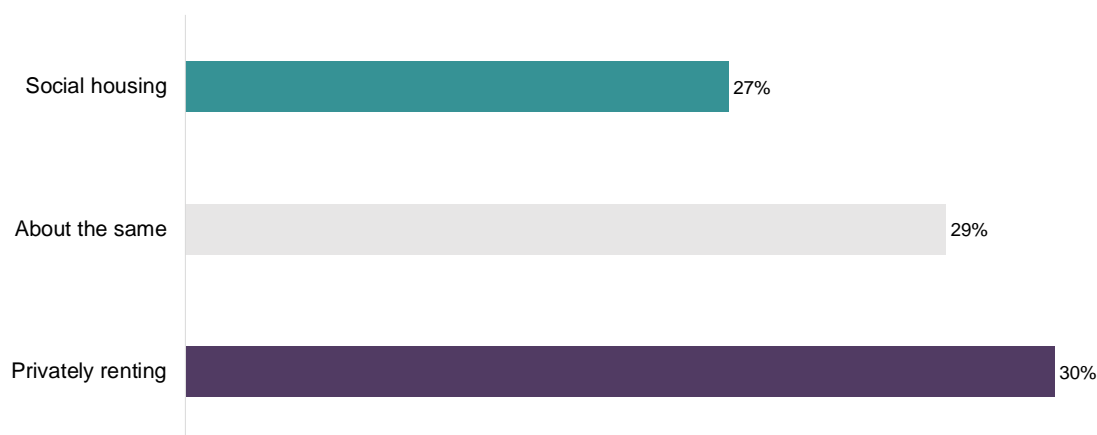
*"I think [social housing] would work a lot better, we would have that security...I don't think the council would want to evict a family like us. We're just a regular family."*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

**When it comes to landlord relationships and housing condition, the picture is more mixed.**

The research found mixed views among potential social tenants when comparing private and social sector landlords. Figure 5.3.3 below shows that almost identical proportions of potential social tenants feel they would be better off with a social landlord than a private landlord as those who believe the opposite and those who feel there would be little difference either way.

Figure 5.3.3 Chart showing the percentage of potential social tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting regarding 'your ability to get issues with your housing resolved by your landlord'



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately: 'Your ability to get issues with your housing resolved by your landlord?'** [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)]

This appears to be an area where the potential social tenant perspective differs from the lived experiences of social tenants themselves. As explored in section 4.10, social tenants appeared to have more positive experiences with their landlords than potential social tenants and record higher agreement that their landlords respond quickly to problems and listen to their concerns.

The qualitative research suggests two factors play a role in this mixed picture. Firstly, because so many private landlords are individuals rather than large organisations, tenants tended to assume that there is a lot of variability amongst private sector. Those with positive, supportive relationships with their landlords may therefore feel that they would not be able to re-create that relationship in social housing.

Secondly, landlords in the social sector were sometimes perceived as distant and bureaucratic. Potential social tenants who have personally experienced social housing (or who have social tenant friends and family) sometimes commented on the lack of landlord responsiveness as one of the big downsides of the social housing system for tenants.

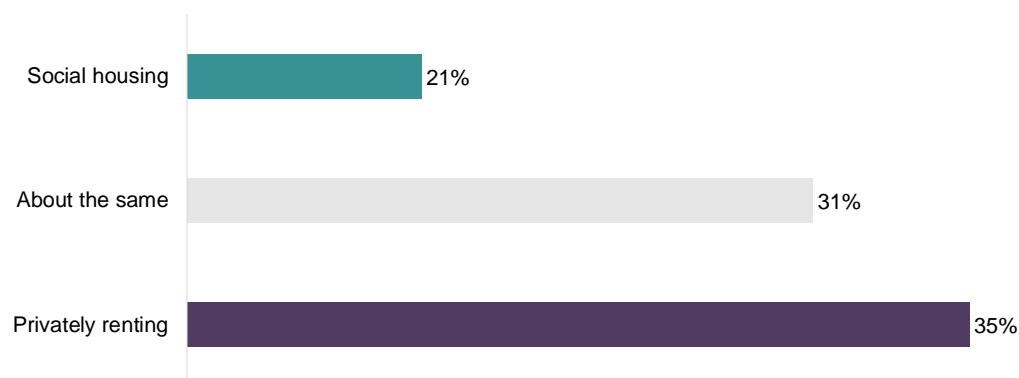
*"[In social housing] the lack of communications is horrendous."*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

We see a similar picture when we look at potential social tenants' comparison of the condition of housing condition in privately rented and socially rented housing. Figure 5.3.4 below shows that a larger proportion (35%) of potential social tenants think their housing condition would be better in the private sector than in social housing (21%). 31% feel that their housing condition would be about the same in either tenure.



Figure 5.3.4 Chart showing the percentage of potential social tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting regarding 'the conditions of your home'



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately: 'The condition of your home?'** [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)]

Again, this is at odds with the experience of social tenants themselves, who are considerably happier with the quality of their housing condition and maintenance than potential social tenants, and with 'objective' measures such as the decent homes standard<sup>102</sup>. On this issue, the poor reputation of the physical environment in which social housing is located may play an important role. Potential social tenants whose impression of social housing is of depictions of rubbish piled in stairwells and crumbling concrete estates are unlikely to think that the condition of their home will be better in social housing. High rise social housing appears to have a particular reputational problem here, with a widespread perception that it is associated with physical neglect and an absence of community.

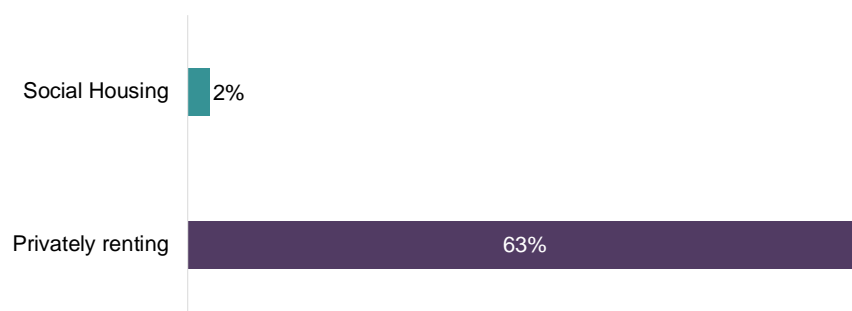
### **Potential social tenants see neighbourhood as the single biggest drawback of social housing compared with the private rented sector.**

The quantitative data shows a remarkable degree of unanimity on this point. As shown in figure 5.3.5 below, 63% of potential social tenants feel that they would have a better chance of living in a decent neighbourhood as private renters than as social tenants. Only 2% feel that they would be better off in social housing on this dimension.

Figure 5.3.5 Chart showing the percentage of potential social tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting regarding 'your ability to live in a decent neighbourhood'

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<sup>102</sup> 27% of homes in the private rented sector fail the governments decent home standard, compared to 13% of social homes. MHCLG, 'English Housing Survey Headline Report 2016/17', 2018 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/705821/2016-17\\_EHS\\_Headline\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705821/2016-17_EHS_Headline_Report.pdf)



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately...?** [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)].

This perception does not appear to be driven by particularly favourable views of the areas in which privately rented housing is located: as explored in section 4.8, potential social tenants are generally less satisfied with their local areas and communities than social tenants. Instead, it represents a perception that the neighbourhoods in which social housing is located are in some ways seriously defective. In the qualitative research, we uncovered a strong sense that social housing is associated with areas with high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. When pressed on the reasons for this perceived link, a number of suggested factors are raised. Some potential social tenants suggested that the physical environment plays a role: because of funding shortages, social housing is liable to fall into dereliction and disrepair. This can reduce pride in the area and encourage anti-social behaviour among residents. Another suggested reason is that, particularly in large estates, social housing concentrates poverty and disadvantage, entrenching behaviours that are perceived as more common in deprived areas.

*"It's like they bunged all the poor people in one place...it is really bleak".*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

High rise social housing and large estates appear to have a particular reputational problem. Among potential social tenants, high rise estates were often the first thing to come to mind in any discussion of the topic, and carry stronger negative associations than low rise social housing. In particular, high density was seen to contribute to the risk of neglect and disrepair, as well as depriving residents of privacy. The result, according to this line of thinking, is that the area is not cared for or treated with respect, exacerbating social problems and tensions among tenants.

*"I don't want to sound like a snob but I don't want to end up in a high rise... I don't want other people's drama to encroach on us."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

Many potential social tenants were at pains to emphasise that their views were a reflection of social tenants as a group and the picture was more complex than this. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to feel that this impression is rooted in fact to some extent.

*"[When I think of social housing] I think 'dodgy', 'unemployed'. I feel bad for saying it because it shouldn't be like this."*

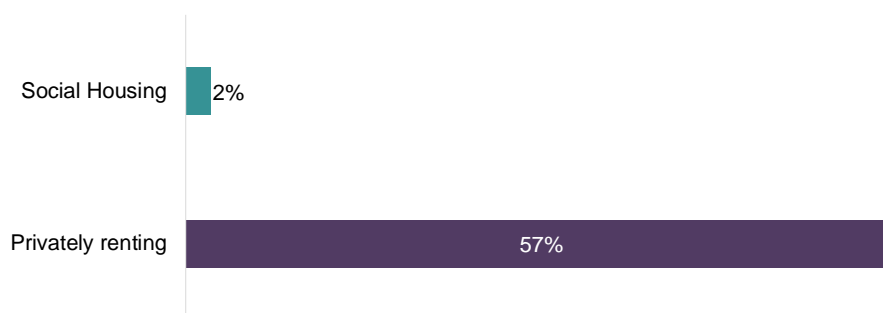
Potential social tenant, London

Even amongst those most negative toward social housing neighbourhoods, diversity and integration in social housing is still valued. When probed specifically, potential tenants saw social housing as a valuable part of society and some actively welcome social housing being situated in their neighbourhood. Integration between private and social housing was seen to create diverse communities where people from different backgrounds can learn from each other. In addition, negative associations were more strongly felt towards large social housing estates, further revealing that integration is looked on favourably.

**There are also concerns about the possibility of being stigmatised for living in social housing, though these tend to be less prominent.**

The other measure on which private renting is perceived to have a clear advantage over social housing among potential social tenants is stigma. As figure 5.3.6 shows, 57% feel that, when it comes to how they are perceived by others, they would be better off privately renting than in social housing. This compares to 2% who feel they would be better off in social housing.

Figure 5.3.6 Chart showing the percentage of potential social tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting regarding 'how others perceive you'



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately...? [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)].**

In discussions of this issue in the interviews, one theme we heard among potential social tenants was that social housing is viewed as an extension of the benefits system, and

therefore that living in it carries the same stigma as being 'on benefits'. Others emphasised the perception that there is a generalised stigma against social tenants which could lead to worse quality of life across the board.

*"There is a stigma attached to living in estate...people look down on you and don't give you the same opportunities."*

Potential social tenant, Bristol

On the whole, however, worries about stigma were not particularly prominent for potential social tenants and tended to only be brought up when explicitly prompted. When assessing the benefits and drawbacks of life in social housing and private renting, core issues of security, affordability and neighbourhood tended to be the most important considerations.

### **Summary: How far do potential social tenants see social housing as an option for them?**

This section has explored potential social tenants' perceptions of the advantages and drawbacks of social housing compared to the private rental sector. The findings on this issue are nuanced. Social housing is seen to have some distinct advantages – security and affordability – as well as elements where it seriously falls down compared to the private sector.

For some potential social tenants, the benefits are compelling enough that they would like to live in social housing. In these cases, many described themselves as being desperate to get into social housing as quickly as possible. For this group, the biggest single concern was the insecurity of privately renting, with affordability a close second. Those with negative experiences of landlords also found the prospect of guaranteed maintenance in the social sector to be attractive. Parents with dependent children were particularly likely to reject privately rented housing in favour of social housing, with the impression that privately rented housing is simply not suitable for families.

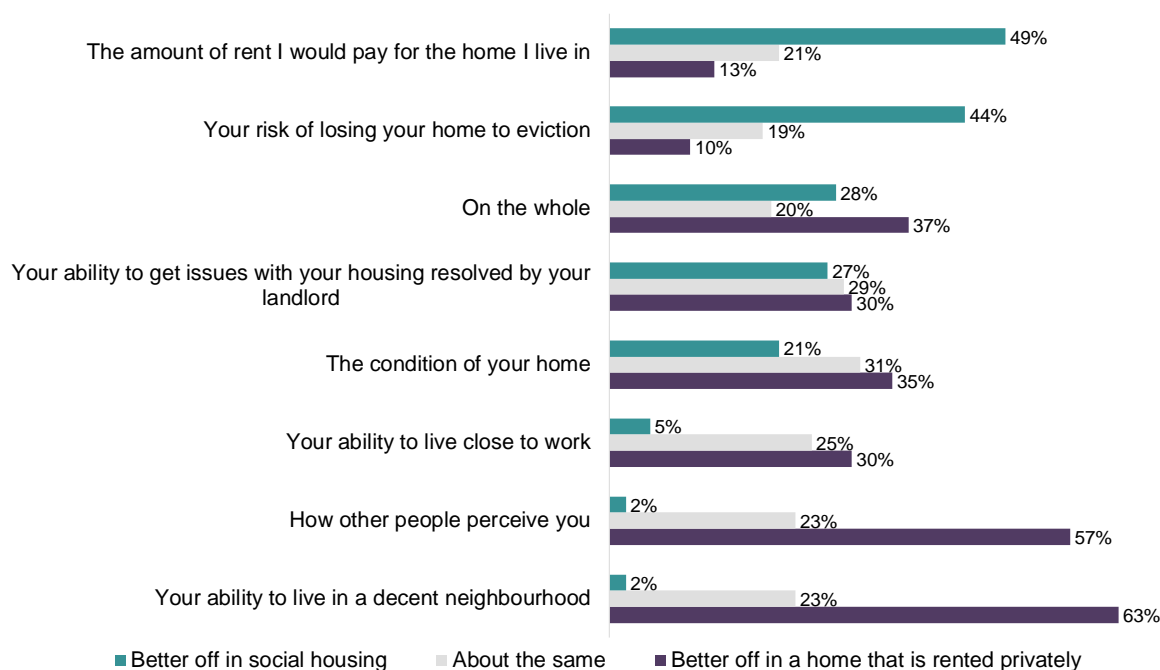
*"[Social housing would give me] a better quality of life. We'd have more money, more security, we'd feel safe, that would make it more of a home."*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

A second, distinct, group of potential social tenants were very eager to get into social housing, but fatalistic about their prospects of getting it. This group tended to either have personal experience of spending time on a waiting list or felt that their chances were hopeless because of their personal characteristics or circumstances (e.g. single men). This was a cause of some resentment to those who felt that other groups were being unfairly prioritised. While this group may have seen social housing as an option for them in the abstract, in practice it felt like a distant prospect and some have given up hope entirely.

In comparisons to these two groups, both of which see the benefits of social housing as compelling and desirable, there is also a large number of potential social tenants who feel that they would not like to live in social housing. Indeed, as outlined in figure 5.3.7 below, 37% feel they would be better off on the whole in a home that is rented privately, compared to only 28% who feel they would be better off on the whole in social housing.

Figure 5.3.7 Chart showing the percentage of potential social tenants who feel they would be better off in social housing or privately renting across all factors tested



**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately...?** [Base: Potential social tenants (n=213)].

The qualitative research suggests that there are several reasons behind this preference. For some potential social tenants, their attitudes to social housing were characterised by the perception that it is a 'last resort' for those who are very vulnerable or on extremely low incomes and therefore not appropriate for 'someone like me'.

*"I'd like to see more [social housing] built. Obviously not for me, but for the people who need it."*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

In other instances, some potential social tenants felt that they had been relatively 'lucky' with their landlord, meaning that, while they knew that their situation wasn't typical for the rest of the sector, they currently enjoyed better conditions than they could hope to expect in social housing. For example, one potential social tenant in Bristol described how her landlord was

a good friend who allowed her to pay relatively little rent (compared to prices in the area) and allowed her to have control over how she decorated. This situation allowed her to live in a 'nicer' area than she could have expected to otherwise. Even though she felt that she would be eligible for social housing, she had no immediate plans to apply.

Importantly, however, the interviews revealed that this preference for living in the private sector was often also true among potential tenants who described being deeply dissatisfied with their housing situation – with this being driven by strongly held negative perceptions of social housing. While this group tended to acknowledge the benefits of social housing in the areas of affordability and space, they felt that these were outweighed by what they saw as the negatives of social housing. Predominantly these tended to be negative perceptions of social housing estates being in poor condition and in undesirable locations that suffered from anti-social behaviour and problem neighbours. For example, in Birmingham, one potential social tenant described how she didn't feel safe in her local neighbourhood (meaning that she wouldn't let her children play outside), had a landlord who neglected problems when they arose and was living in a home that was too small for her family of five. Despite these issues, she felt that she was better off in her current home than in social housing, with this perception being driven by a strongly held belief that social housing is often in a poor state of repair and the estates were dangerous because of anti-social behaviour.

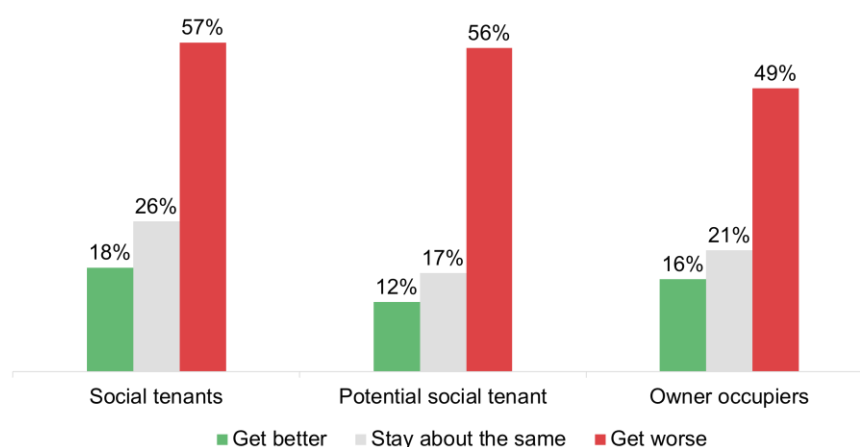
#### 5.4. Predictions for the future of social housing

This section has explored the reputation of the wider social housing system among social tenants and potential social tenants. We now turn to how these groups see the situation changing: what direction is the social housing system going in, and how it will change in the future. We also surveyed a representative sample of English adults to understand the views of the country as a whole.

The overall mood about the future of social housing, across all households, is pessimistic, with widespread agreement that it is likely to become more inaccessible. There is a strong sense that social housing is not seen as a high priority for politicians, or 'elites' generally. However, predictions about the quality of housing and social tenants' ability to buy their home are more mixed, with few strongly held views either way.

**There is pessimism about a number of aspects of social housing, from supply to the length of waiting lists.**

Figure 5.4.1 Chart showing the percentage of all groups predicting what will happen to social housing in terms of the amount of social housing



**Q6. Thinking about the future of social housing, do you think that each of the following will get better, worse or stay about the same?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213), all owner occupiers (n=962)]

When thinking about what will happen to the amount of social housing over time, a majority of social and potential social tenants say they think it will get worse (57% and 56% respectively), and just under half (49%) of owner occupiers say the same. In contrast, less than one-fifth in each group think it will get better over time, with potential social tenants the lowest at 12%. Our interviews with potential social tenants showed that this pessimism is often linked to anecdotal evidence (either personal or from friends and family) of people being on waiting lists for social housing for years, with little sign of progress.

*"We have had our name down for years now. We're no closer. We are never going to get a house."*

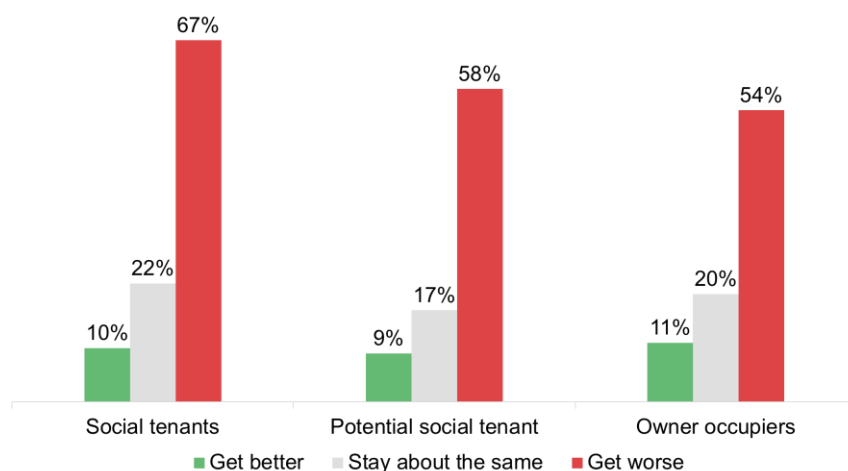
Workshop participant, Oxford

Linked to worries about a diminishing amount of social housing being available, participants were concerned about waiting lists for social housing. Over half of potential social tenants (58%) and owner occupiers (54%) say they expect the amount of time people will have to wait to access social housing to get worse over time; more than two-thirds (67%) of social tenants say the same.

*"When I grew up there were millions of council houses - now it's rarer and rarer."*

Proximity resident, Bristol

Figure 5.4.2 Chart showing the percentage of all groups predicting what will happen to social housing in terms of the time people will have to wait to access social housing



**Q6. Thinking about the future of social housing, do you think that each of the following will get better, worse or stay about the same?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213), all owner occupiers (n=962)]

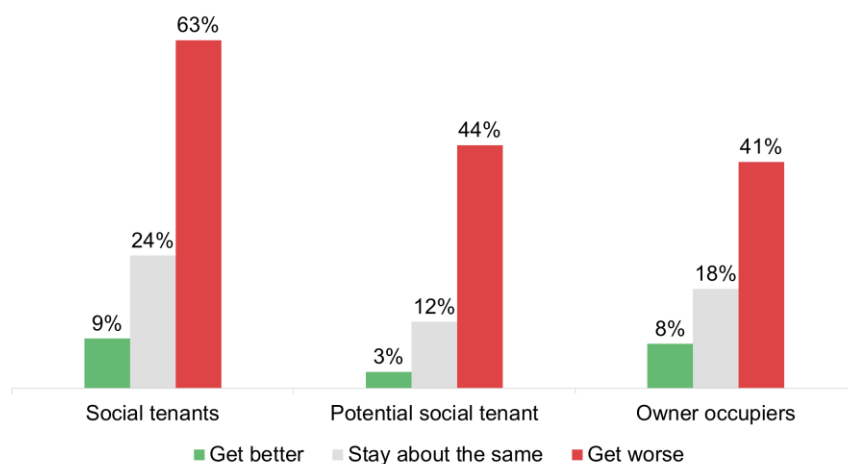
The impact of lengthening waiting times and diminishing housing stock particularly worries social tenants, 63% of whom think their children's chances of getting social housing will get worse over time. These concerns are less prominent for potential social tenants and owner occupiers, possibly with them feeling that their chances of getting social housing are already poor (44% and 41% respectively).

*"It will probably get worse...The waiting lists are going to get longer."*

Social tenant, London

Figure 5.4.3 Chart showing the percentage of all groups predicting what will happen to social housing in terms of their children's chance of getting social housing



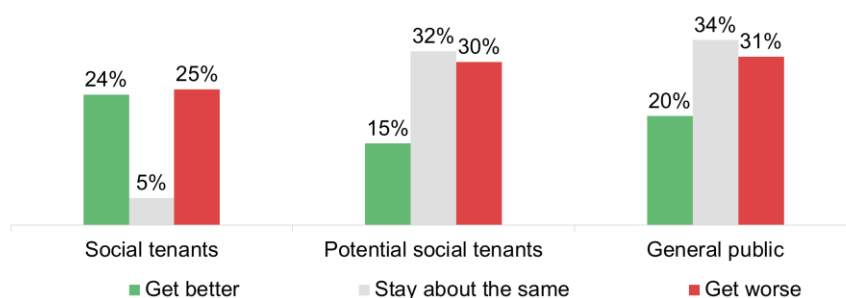


**Q6. Thinking about the future of social housing, do you think that each of the following will get better, worse or stay about the same?** [Base: All social tenants with children (n=607), all potential social tenants with children (n=98), all owner occupiers with children (n=576)]

#### **Predictions about other areas are more mixed.**

When it comes to predicting whether the quality of social housing will get better or worse, the attitudes of social tenants are mixed, with a similar proportion feeling that it is likely to get better (24%) as those feeling that it will get worse (25%).

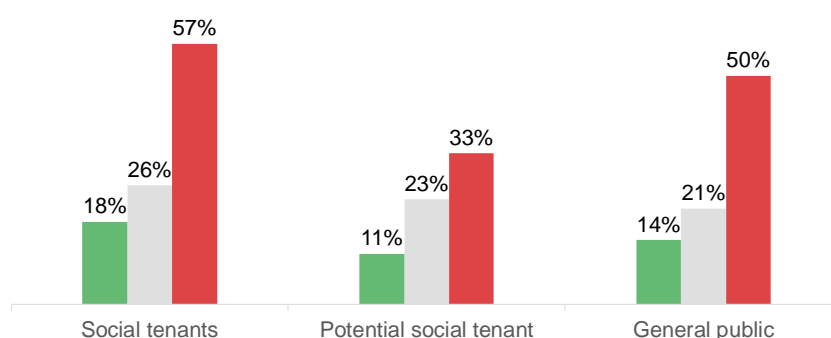
Figure 5.4.4 Chart showing the percentage of all groups predicting what will happen to the quality of social housing



**Q6. Thinking about the future of social housing, do you think that each of the following will get better, worse or stay about the same?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213), all owner occupiers (n=962)]

While nearly half (45%) of social tenants feel that social tenants' ability to buy their home will stay the same in the future, a significant minority (33%) feel that this will get worse.

Figure 5.5.5 Chart showing the percentage of all groups predicting what will happen in terms of social tenants' ability to buy their own homes



**Q6. Thinking about the future of social housing, do you think that each of the following will get better, worse or stay about the same?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213), all owner occupiers (n=962)]

### A lack of political will is blamed for the gloom about the future of social housing.

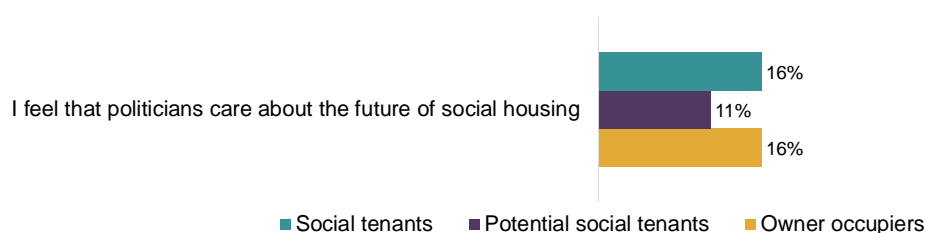
Social housing is not seen as a high priority for political leaders – only 16% of social tenants and 11% of potential social tenants think that politicians care about the future of social housing.

Our conversations with tenants revealed that as well as general perceptions that politicians are untrustworthy, tenants felt that politicians do not care about people on low incomes, and austerity means that there is no money for public services.

*"I think they would love to sell everything off."*

(Social tenant, Harlow)

Figure 5.5.6 Chart showing the percentage who agree with 'I feel that politicians care about the future of social housing'



**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: 'I feel that politicians care about the future of social housing'?** [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213), all owner occupiers (n=962)].

## 6. What the future of social housing should be

### 6.1. Introduction

This section begins with the key principles that social housing should aim to achieve, as identified by social tenants and potential social tenants during our research. Following this, we reflect back on the findings outlined in sections 4 and 5 to give a short commentary on how the current operation of social housing measures up to these key principles.

After this, we explore spontaneous perceptions of social tenants and potential social tenants towards the priorities for the future of social housing.

Finally, this section concludes with a detailed analysis of the feedback on ways to improve the way social housing is run. This took the form of five day-long workshops across England in which we tested draft policy proposals from the Shelter social housing commission with social tenants, potential tenants and other private renters.

### 6.2. Summary

When thinking about what social housing should be like, there is widespread agreement that it should be widely accessible, affordable, good quality, secure and stable. It should also be human-centred, fairly and transparently allocated, stigma-free, with safe neighbourhoods and good communities.

Generally, there is a feeling that social housing today is good quality, and offers social tenants secure and stable housing. However, the accessible and affordable nature of social housing, as well as the extent to which it is human-centred, fairly and transparently allocated, stigma-free, with safe neighbourhoods and good communities, are all areas which could be improved.

When looking to the future, there is broad agreement among both social tenants and potential social tenants that the priority should be to build more social housing in order to meet the demand. Additionally, participants also spontaneously raised:

- The need to improve the speed and quality of landlord repairs.
- The need for action to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in neighbourhoods with social housing; and
- The need to reform the allocation system to make it less opaque and 'fairer' (by considering people's broader context rather than just whether they meet set criteria);

We tested policy proposals from the Shelter social housing commission to address issues in social housing through three areas of policy:

- A strengthened regulator of social housing;
- A new tenant voice organisation; and
- A series of principles for the neighbourhoods and communities in which social housing is located.

The policy recommendations were broadly well received, though with some suggested improvements. The proposed, strengthened regulator was a very popular suggestion and seen as a workable solution to key issues affecting social housing. A new body designed to amplify tenants' voices was warmly received in principle, but was not a particularly high priority for reform. Finally, the principles for high-quality neighbourhoods and areas was welcomed, but were not seen as such a high priority as other interventions.

### 6.3. What should social housing be like?

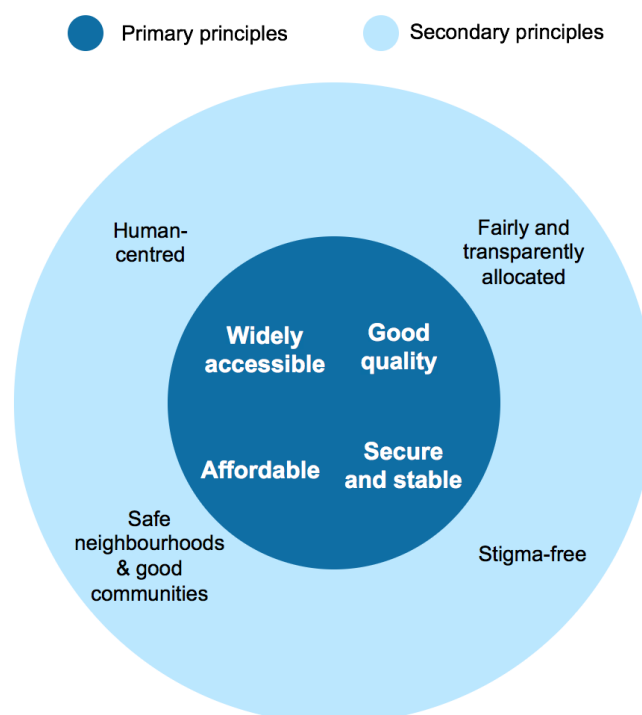
Part of the discussions during both the in-home depth interviews and the workshops focused on what social housing should be like in the future, centring on the following question: 'What should social housing aim to achieve?'. In response to this question, workshop participants worked together to generate a set of key principles for social housing.

This stage in the overall research programme brought those who live, or may in the future live, in social housing into a discussion about what it should be like. This is particularly important given that the first phase of the research demonstrates that social tenants often feel that decision makers (landlords, councils, politicians) rarely think about them when making decisions about social housing. Furthermore, these groups' experiences give them unique first-hand knowledge of the key challenges facing the sector and an understanding of what it needs to do to be successful in supporting them.

This section summarises what participants, including current social tenants, potential social tenants, and proximal residents think should be the key principles behind social housing.

The key principles identified by participants broadly fall into two categories:

- **Primary principles:** seen as being fundamental to a *functioning* social housing system
- **Secondary principles:** seen as being important to a *high quality* social housing system



In what follows, we provide a description of each principle as well as commentary on the extent to which social tenants and potential social tenants feel social housing currently delivers against it and what we found through our research. By providing these two elements, we are able to identify both what participants saw as the most important aspects of social housing and the extent to which these are being currently met. By establishing this here, we are also able to shed light on the drivers behind participant responses to specific tested policies later in this section.

Throughout, this commentary is based on how social tenants and potential social tenants *perceive* the current state of social housing and not external measures of performance in each of these areas. Importantly, these perceptions are often formed through a combination of personal experience and impressions gained through word-of-mouth or depictions of social housing in the media.

The extent to which our groups feel that social housing is meeting each identified principle is indicated by a five-star ranking.

One star indicates that the principle is not being met at all, and five stars indicates that the principle is being fully met.

## 1) Primary principles

### ***Widely accessible***

There was a strong view that social housing should be widely accessible to everybody who needs it, particularly working households on modest incomes who would struggle in the private sector. Widely accessible social housing was seen as an antidote to the many issues currently facing the housing system, including rising homelessness, high rents in the private sector, and difficulty getting on the housing ladder.

However, in instances of social housing shortages, there was a widely held belief that social housing should prioritise the most vulnerable in society: those who cannot afford to rent privately, households with serious medical conditions or disabilities, single parent families and homeless people.

#### ***Evaluation***



Social housing was widely recognised as being oversubscribed, with the shortage of social housing frequently identified as the biggest issue facing the system by current social tenants, potential social tenants and proximal residents.

Participants were in agreement that a shortage of social housing leads to a need to prioritise the vulnerable. However, the extent to which this is happening at the moment, and the

resulting exclusion of many from the system was seen as indicative of a failure of social housing.

### ***Affordable***

Affordability was seen as a crucial aspect of social housing and all participants believed that social housing should be affordable for all, allowing tenants to achieve a basic quality of life and to better their situation.

#### ***Evaluation***



Overall, social housing was seen as being relatively affordable, particularly in comparison with the private rented sector.

However, there was some perception that it has become less affordable over time.

From our conversations with social tenants it was clear that many did struggle with affordability – and, that this may be a growing issue with the introduction of the benefit cap, the application of the bedroom tax and with an overall rise in rents.

### ***Good quality***

Social housing should be good quality housing, contributing to positive physical and mental wellbeing. Good quality housing is safe, clean, spacious and has adequate heating, ventilation, and lighting.

#### ***Evaluation***



Social housing was generally felt to be good quality, particularly by those who live in it. Factors contributing to this included a belief among social tenants that homes were well-built, renovations or re-fitting of appliances were carried out, homes were easy to heat, shared spaces were maintained and responsive landlords. However, this view was not shared by most potential tenants. Our survey shows that the majority of potential tenants feel they would get a better quality home in the private rented sector.



Our research shows that the majority of social tenants are happy with their home. However, a significant minority of social tenants do have issues with the condition of their housing. This appeared to be rooted in issues relating to the structural quality of housing, such as thickness of walls, insulation and window glazing. Moreover, some social tenants reported bad conditions stemming from the long-term neglect of maintenance. This can lead to problems that are difficult to solve. .

### ***Secure and stable***

Social housing should allow people to feel safe and secure in their homes, giving them a stable base from which they can build their lives.

#### ***Evaluation***



Overall, social housing was perceived to provide a stable home. In particular, potential social tenants saw long-term tenancies as a desirable feature of social housing. Many – especially those with young families – often pointed to short-term tenancies in the private rented sector as a key source of anxiety and frustration.

Our research found that this was the case for most tenants. The majority of social tenants feel secure in their homes. Many social tenants reported that the long tenancies associated with social housing help them to feel settled in their homes and neighbourhoods.

## 2) Secondary principles

### ***Human-centred***

Social housing should be human-centred and flexible, treating residents as people, not numbers. This consists of two main elements:

- Social housing should be appropriate to people's changing needs over the course of their lives, for example ensuring that people are able to move homes as their needs change (especially important for growing families); and
- The relationship between tenants and landlords should follow good customer service principles, including listening and promptly acting on complaints.

#### ***Evaluation***



Among social tenants, there was a strong perception that the social housing system is rigid, inflexible and does not treat tenants as a 'person first'. This sentiment arose from two key concerns.

#### 1) A lack of responsiveness to changing needs and circumstances

- This inflexibility leads to some tenants living in housing unsuited to their needs and individual situations, e.g. younger families in properties with too little space or located in inappropriate locations.

#### 2) Poor information provision and communication

- Many tenants were frustrated by a lack of knowledge about where to go or who to talk to for information regarding specific issues with their housing.
- Some also disliked the lack of face-to-face contact, which contributes to the feeling that the housing system is impersonal and complicates often simple requests.

### ***Fairly and transparently allocated***

Participants felt that a fair allocation system, that treats each case holistically and on its merits, should be a central part of social housing. As part of this, the allocation system should be transparent, clear and easy to understand. There was also a sense that the social housing system should place value on local connections.

**Evaluation**



Social tenants and potential social tenants felt that the allocation system is confusing and difficult to navigate, and often cited a lack of clear information and guidance as the cause.

There was also a feeling that the system does not see tenants holistically, and that it fails to consider circumstances and wider contextual issues when allocating housing. Instead, the allocation system was perceived to rely on strict criteria that can lead to the wrong groups being prioritised or people being able to 'game the system'.

**Safe neighbourhoods and good communities**

Social housing should be located in safe areas and good neighbourhoods with strong communities, with an absence of anti-social behaviour and crime.

**Evaluation**



Social tenants feel social housing neighbourhoods are generally good, although some were unsure about whether this would be the case across the country, or in an inner city. Potential tenants are more sceptical, with many saying that they feel this would be one of the biggest drawbacks of living in social housing.

Our research found that overall, social tenants felt positively towards their neighbourhoods, citing strong community relations and both good access to and good quality local amenities.

However, many said that they have witnessed anti-social behaviour and worry about crime. (It is important to note that this is not necessarily thought to be specific to social housing, but speaks to a broader decline in community-mindedness across society).

Social tenants did tell us that they struggle to get issues with crime or anti-social behaviour resolved. Often this was due to not knowing how to go about solving the problem or where to turn to for help.

**Stigma-free**

Social housing should be accepted by society and seen as a mainstream option, with neither it nor its inhabitants being subject to stigma.

**Evaluation**



Whilst stigma was not a top-of-mind concern for current social tenants themselves, there was widespread acknowledgment across current and potential tenants that it does exist.

Specifically, social housing was widely seen to be associated with:

- Benefits and worklessness;
- Single parent families;
- Crime and anti-social behaviour; and
- Dereliction and poor maintenance.

Inaccurate and negative media portrayals, as well as a lack of integration of tenure types, were often cited as the main causes and drivers of this stigma.

## 6.4. Priorities for action for the future of social housing

This section explores potential social tenants' and social tenants' recommendations for how social housing should evolve in the future, with these developed over the course of the research programme.

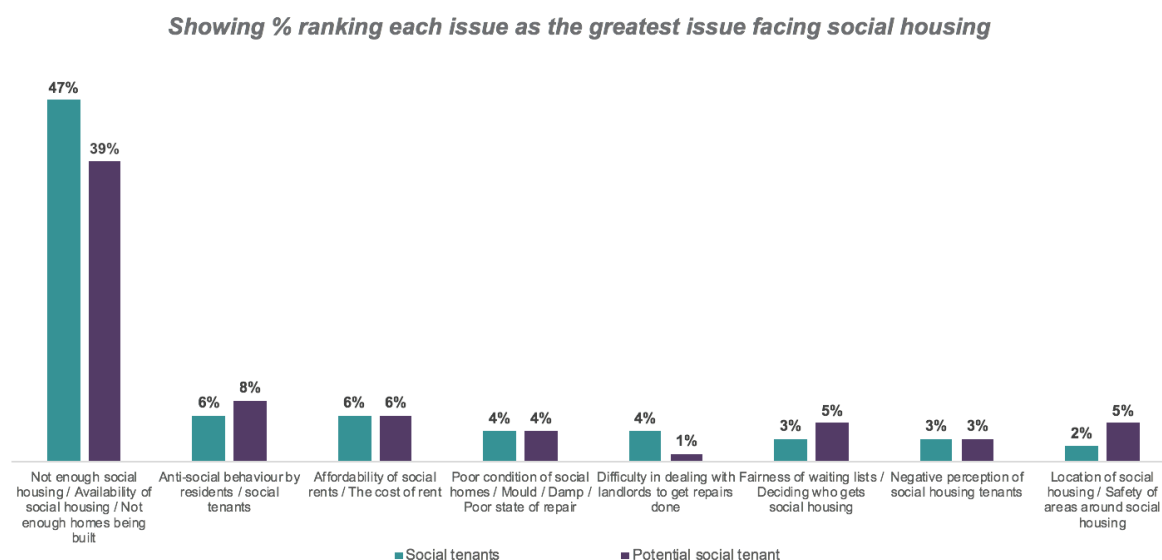
In this first part, we present recommendations given spontaneously by participants throughout the research, before being prompted with specific ideas. These include:

- Increasing the supply of social housing;
- Reform of the allocation systems;
- Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour; and
- Improving speed and quality of landlord repairs.

**By some distance, the leading recommendation was to increase the supply of social housing.**

There was a consistent, clear appetite for increased supply of social housing across all the core groups. Half (47%) of social tenants and 4 in 10 potential social tenants (39%) identify a lack of social housing as the greatest challenge facing the social sector. This dwarfs the proportions who identify any other concern as the top issue facing the system.

Figure 6.4.1



Q4. What do you think is the greatest issue facing social housing? [Base: All social tenants (n=1000), all potential social tenants (n=213)]

The qualitative research sheds some light on the reasons for this preference. First and foremost, an increase in supply was seen as necessary to meet the current high demand for

social housing. This in turn would reduce the length of waiting lists that were seen as a significant drawback of the system, as well as helping to ensure that it is not only the most vulnerable who are able to access the system.

*“In general, we don't have enough [social housing]. They are trying to address the housing issue but only for some [people].”*

Social tenant, London

*“More social housing is needed. There's just not enough for people to move into.”*

Workshop participant, Oxford

In explaining their support for an increase in supply, all core groups also touched on wider social benefits. These included an expected reduction in homelessness, a key challenge that seems, to many people, to have recently been getting worse. There was also a perception that more social housing is a way to tackle increasing costs in the private sector by putting downward pressure on rents.

Even after discussion of other potential changes to the social housing system in the deliberative workshops, as discussed below, increasing supply remained the top priority for reform of the social sector.

**There was also appetite for reform of an allocation system that is perceived as opaque and unfair.**

The quantitative data shows that 3% of social tenants and 5% of potential social tenants identify the fairness of allocation systems as the greatest issue facing social housing. However, this is likely to considerably underplay the support for allocation system reform, which was a source of considerable frustration. In the qualitative research, increasing supply (the top-ranked issue) was seen as a way to tackle unfair allocation systems by ensuring that social housing is available to all.

When discussing this question, criticism of the current system centred around there being an unfair prioritisation of some groups over others: archetypally, single mothers over single men. When pushed on what an alternative system would look like, there was a reluctance to deprioritise any particular groups (with some exceptions, as discussed below). The consensus position is that all applicants should be assessed on their merits, according to the greatest need. This should be a holistic exercise that takes all circumstances into account, and not a 'box ticking' or restrictive exercise that relies on a small number of set circumstances or demographic characteristics. It was felt that this more considered process would mean that those who live in complex circumstances, that don't strictly fit into current criteria, would not fall through the net and would be able to access social housing.

*"I do agree with all that [need-based allocation] but there should be an 'other' box. They should know that I am living beyond my means."*

Potential social tenant, Harlow

The criticisms of the banding system, discussed in section 5.2 fed into a recommendation that the system should be more transparent and accessible, so that applicants can understand exactly how likely their application is to succeed and why.

*"I'd like the system to be easier to understand and more accessible. Lots of people don't have a clue."*

Social tenant, Middlesbrough

Other suggestions for changing the system were raised, but are more divisive. Firstly, there was some appetite for prioritising applicants in work over those in greatest need. This tended to be borne out of a close association between social housing and people receiving benefits.

*"I don't feel like someone on benefits should have more of a need than someone that works...some people don't want to work."*

Potential social tenant, Birmingham

Secondly, there was some support for explicitly prioritising British-born applicants for social housing over immigrants. Those who support this position tended to feel passionately about it, but it is also a divisive view, with many not mentioning it at all or dismissing it out of hand.

*"British citizens should be put first, before any foreigner."*

Social tenant, Pendle

Through our interviews, we found that eagerness for reform of the allocation system was highest among the group of potential social tenants on waiting lists, or who would like social housing but have not applied out of fatalism at their prospects of getting it. This group was often motivated by a personal sense of grievance and frustration at their own experiences (which are discussed in depth in section 4.11). However, there was also robust support for allocation reform among social tenants and the reasons given for this position tended to be the same.

### **Many said they would like to see robust action to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime in social housing.**

As discussed in section 4.8, these were often identified as among the most significant downsides in social housing and there was a desire to see them tackled. Often,

recommendations for how to address this focused on the importance on prevention and deterrence. In particular, a more obvious official presence, either formal (more ‘bobbies on the beat’), or informal (e.g. local volunteer wardens) was seen as a way to address the problem at root. Another suggestion was to address cuts to local service provision (particularly youth centres) to provide local residents, especially young people, with other things to do and deter them from causing problems.

There was also demand for stricter enforcement measures to tackle these issues, both by landlords and the police. Financial penalties were the most frequently referenced suggestion, but some would also like to see easier eviction of serious trouble makers.

When pressed on this point, there was some agreement that evicting ‘problem tenants’ is not a silver bullet and could lead to the problem being moved elsewhere. However, the argument for stricter enforcement remained compelling for participants in principle.

*“The majority of problems with social housing are kids running around, causing trouble. I don’t think they should be as tolerant of it.”*

Workshop participant, Manchester

**Improving the speed and quality of landlord repairs was also raised spontaneously as a priority (especially among those who have personally experienced problems).**

As discussed in sections 4.6 and 4.10, there was a perception that repairs in social housing are not always up to scratch: landlords can be slow to respond to requests and the work done is not always to a high standard.

When assessing possible solutions to these issues, the most popular suggestion was a stricter enforcement mechanism for landlords, specifically, an independent enforcement agency or regulator which can hold failing landlords to account and penalise them for breaches. Some reference was also made to not cutting corners in repairs, resulting in poor quality work which deteriorates and wastes money in the long run.

This tended to be an area where opinions aligned with experience: tenants who have had personal experience of poor landlord repairs were likely to raise this as a more significant issue. However, the proposed solutions were uncontroversial and attract wide support.

## **6.5. Feedback on recommendations for reform**

This section summarises feedback on the three specific policy responses proposed by the Shelter Social Housing Commission, to address some of the issues raised through the research, and tested in a series of deliberative workshops.



Throughout the research, the need for an increased supply of social housing was raised as a clear and unambiguous priority. With this in mind, we decided to focus the workshops on areas where there was more uncertainty and use the perspective of those with the greatest stake in the sector to understand how to improve social housing, alongside building more of it.

To do this, Shelter's Social Housing Commission digested findings and recommendations from the early parts of the project. From this they drew up three possible policy responses that aimed to address perceived challenges across all the areas of social housing laid out above. These included ensuring that social housing stayed high quality, ensuring that issues that tenants cared about were reflected in future policy making, and addressing concerns around stigma, and neighbourhoods. The potential recommendations were:

- A new social housing regulator;
- A new body designed to amplify tenant voice; and
- A series of principles for ensuring well-designed neighbourhoods and communities.

This section explores recommendations by:

- Providing an outline of the spontaneous attitudes towards each of the associated themes;
- Reporting initial reactions to the recommendation; and
- Outlining developments to the recommendations made by workshop participants.

Throughout this section, 'participants' refers to findings that were common to people in all tenures. Any findings specific to one group are identified.

## 6.6. Regulation

### *Awareness of and attitudes towards the current regulation of social housing*

**Across social and potential tenants, there was an assumption that there *must* exist some minimum standards in social housing that are subject to regulation. While awareness of what these may be was shallow, most intuitively felt that these are likely to be more robust than those governing private rental accommodation.**

For all groups, the fact that social housing was the primary responsibility of local government leads to an impression that it would be subject to strict government regulations, particularly around safety and environmental standards. For some, other areas that might be governed by minimum standards included space, conditions and tenants' rights.

In comparison to social housing, all groups tended to conclude that there are fewer standards of regulations governing housing in the private rented sector. This perception was largely driven by anecdotal evidence (either personal or from friends and family) of poor conditions,

cramped housing and rogue landlords. The sheer number of private landlords also led to a perception that it is too hard to have effective oversight.

**Despite the perception that there are minimum standards in social housing, social tenants felt that the monitoring and regulation of these standards is lax, and that there are few mechanisms for holding social landlords to account. This can often lead to feelings of powerlessness.**

While some social tenants felt that there may be minimum standards for factors including space and conditions, anecdotal evidence of overcrowded or poor conditions often led to an impression that these are not enforced or taken seriously.

Moreover, some tenants felt that there are few avenues for recourse when things go wrong. This was largely driven by personal or word-of-mouth experiences of landlords being slow (or failing altogether) to fix problems when they arise. The problems raised are discussed more extensively in section 4, and include poor quality repairs, little to no action to tackle anti-social behaviour / 'problem neighbours', or long waits for essential work.

*"I didn't have hot water for three months. I had to spend a whole day heating water every time I wanted a bath... If there was regulation, they wouldn't be able to get away with that."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

*"My neighbour has been walking around naked in full view. For 3 months now I've been on the case. Nothing."*

Workshop participant, London

Landlords' own complaints procedures were rarely mentioned – and even less frequently seen as an effective way of getting redress. For many social tenants, there was a concern that these complaints procedures are not subject to monitoring, meaning that landlords can 'mark their own homework'.

**Participants were presented with information about the concept of regulation, and the way social housing is currently regulated.**

*The following slides illustrate the information participants were presented with.*

## Introduction

Lots of different parts of our society are overseen by organisations called **regulatory bodies**:



Gas and electricity  
companies



Food and restaurants



Schools



Media (e.g. TV)

These are organisations set up to monitor and guide various industry sectors and oversee specific practices within these sectors. E.g. it is the responsibility of restaurants to serve food hygienically, but the Food Standards Agency conducts inspections and forces them to improve if they are not up to scratch.

## Regulation of social housing (1/2)



Regulator of  
Social Housing

**The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)** oversees social housing rules in the UK.

They check 'economic standards', and 'consumer standards'

The regulation of consumer standards of social housing is relatively weaker than other areas. This can be seen in two important ways:

1. They only regulate housing associations – not councils
2. The regulator sets consumer standards for social housing, but it does not proactively police that these are being met (like how Ofsted examine schools). Instead they only investigate when a failure to meet their consumer standards could lead to "significant risk to tenants"
3. Secondly, there is no programme aimed at improving standards beyond the minimum requirements

## Regulation of social housing (2/2)

Today, the Regulator of Social Housing can only intervene when a failure to meet standards has caused or could have caused "*serious harm or detriment*" to tenants in the following ways:

Health and safety

Loss of home

Unlawful discrimination

Loss of legal rights

Financial loss

loss

The majority of problems are expected to be resolved through the landlord's own complaints procedure and if necessary through the Housing Ombudsman

- But this is not always the case: more than a fifth of social tenants (22%) disagree that their landlord resolves issues in a timely manner or listens to their concerns
- The courts have very little scope to intervene where a social landlord is breaching the standards

**There was little to no awareness of the existence of a social housing regulator, and there was dismay (though not surprise) at finding out about the regulator's relative lack of enforcement power.**

Participants generally had a clear understanding of what a regulator does, and why they are in place across certain industries. There was name recognition of the FSA and Ofsted in particular. By contrast, the Regulator of Social Housing had no name recognition, and no tenants had ever had any personal interactions with it<sup>103</sup>. Participants viewed this as an indictment of the regulator, since, if no tenants have heard of it, they are not able to benefit from it or use it as a means of redress.

*"Well they can't be doing much if none of us have heard of them."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

All groups were disappointed by many of the limitations of the Regulator of Social Housing. The restriction of oversight to only housing associations and not councils was seen as a major flaw with no obvious reason behind it, and the lack of 'proactive policing' led to a feeling that standards are close to useless without a robust enforcement mechanism (which was seen as 'letting landlords off the hook'). Finally, the lack of any programme to improve standards beyond minimum requirements led some to believe that the regulator is not interested in the wellbeing of tenants, as it does not have quality at the forefront of its mission.

*"What is the point of it? if it can't do anything, what is the point of the standards?"*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

In addition, participants felt that the minimum standard of having caused or having the potential to cause "serious harm or detriment" is insufficient and allows important issues for tenants (such as repairs) to fall through the gaps. The resolution of problems "through the landlord's own complaints procedure and if necessary through the Housing Ombudsmen" was not seen as an effective form of redress, while there was also little to no recognition of the Housing Ombudsmen.

*"I don't know [what I'd do if I had a problem]. You can't complain to your landlord."*

Workshop participant, London

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<sup>103</sup> The Regulator of Social Housing was formed as a standalone body in 2018, which may account for low levels of name recognition

Overall, the current regulator was seen as comparing unfavourably with Ofsted, which was viewed positively and seen as effective overall (with high name recognition and active policing of standards).

*“With the schools – they get told what they have to do by Ofsted, and they crack on with it. The [social landlords] don’t answer to anyone.”*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

#### *Responses to the recommendation*

**Participants were presented with a recommendation for a new social housing regulator with more powers.**

### **Recommendation...**

**A new regulator working like Ofsted to identify good as well as inadequate practice.**

Key features of this regulator include the following:

1. Regular inspections of social landlords. This would result in a rating which could lead to intervention by the Government if they were found to be failing
2. Raising awareness of the regulator so that tenants know how they can raise concerns about their home or community
3. Investigating tenant complaints and enforcement action for social landlords that are found to be in breach of standards
4. Lowering the conditions at which the regulator can intervene themselves from what it is currently “*in the event of serious detriment*” to a lower standard like “*if there is a risk to the wellbeing of residents*”. Or removing the requirement completely.
5. Complete transparency about how they work, the conclusions of their investigations and the reasons behind these conclusion

**Overall the recommendation was viewed very positively and seen as an effective way to address tenants’ sense of powerlessness.**

The idea of a stronger, more visible and more proactive regulator was welcomed by all participants. In particular, the idea of an inspection-based rating system was seen to provide a number of intuitive benefits. If conducted regularly, inspections were seen as an effective way of ensuring that poor standards and landlords who are not living up to their responsibilities in a transparent, tangible way are identified. In addition to preventing bad practice, tenants also felt that they could also act as a ‘carrot’ to encourage landlords to make improvements beyond the minimum standards.

*“That’s good and useful – somebody higher up can intervene basically, someone with more clout.”*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

*“People will want to make improvements, to get the higher score.”*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

Importantly, potential concerns about the rating system leading to stigma were largely dismissed by participants. Instead, many felt that tenants living in housing that do not meet the minimum standards may feel reassured upon receiving a bad rating, as they would have tangible proof that their landlords need to make improvements.

*“I don’t think there is a downside, it’s more transparent and helps the tenant have their say.”*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

**There were, however, some concerns about how the recommendation would work in practice, including the independence and cost of the regulator.**

For participants, there was a key concern that a social housing regulator (as with any regulator) may be at risk of capture by special interests or Government; there was therefore appetite for reassurance that it would be truly independent and this reassurance was seen as essential to building trust. A transparent record of effective enforcement action was seen as the most effective way to provide that reassurance.

Furthermore, while social tenants generally agreed that the regulator would deliver benefits for tenants, there was some concern that the cost of the regulatory process may be passed on to them through their rent.

*“If it’s the landlord paying, they might shove up the rent.”*

Workshop participant, Oxford

**Participants further built on the recommendation by making suggested improvements in four key areas.**

### **1. Building a system of penalties and rewards**

Participants broadly agreed that the most effective way to ensure that the inspections and ratings lead to tangible change is to build into the system a programme of penalties and rewards. In this system, financial rewards could be given to social landlords who are seen to be meeting standards above and beyond the minimum required. By contrast, fines could be levied on those who were shown to be failing.

Importantly, participants tended to agree that failing landlords ought to have the opportunity to make improvements to meet the minimum standards before giving out fines. In these cases,

landlords could be given a set time to improve, and only be fined if they failed a subsequent inspection.

This process was deemed to be fair, and the most effective way of eliminating poor standards and encouraging higher quality social housing.

## **2. Conducting inspections unannounced and interacting directly with tenants**

While inspections were widely seen as a positive step in the right direction, many worried about landlords being able to ‘paper over the cracks’ if these visits were arranged in advance, leaving tenants’ concerns unaddressed. In order to ensure that this is not the case (and that inspectors have an accurate picture of the housing they are inspecting) participants saw unannounced inspections as the best approach.

*“It needs to be unannounced.”*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

If the regulator is required to make a home visit, participants felt that the tenant(s) – and only the tenant(s) – should be informed about the visit in advance. This would, participants felt, build trust in the regulator as well as allowing tenants the opportunity to decline the visit.

Finally, some participants felt that there should be an open opportunity for any tenants to feed into these rankings by submitting their own concerns or complaints to the regulator.

## **3. Extension to private landlords**

Finally, there was near consensus that extending this regulator to private landlords would be a positive step. Many felt that, if standards did exist, these should apply across the board. Private tenants were also seen as more vulnerable to bad landlords than social tenants.

*“It doesn’t have to be separate – it should be tenants and landlords. Not social, private. It should be: here are the regulations, stick to them.”*

Workshop participant, Manchester

## 6.6. Tenant voice

### *Attitudes towards tenant voice and 'having your say'*

**Among all participants, there was widespread agreement that it is important for tenants to have their say in the decisions that affect them. Notably, while some social tenants felt that they do have their say when it comes to decisions about their own home, few felt that they have any say in wider issues to do with their estate or social housing more broadly.**

While many of the workshop participants struggled to think of contexts in which they can voice their opinions, many said that it is important to make people feel involved in decision-making. Tenants felt that the possibility of having their say is an important part of being shown that their views matter to those in positions of authority.

*"It's about making sure underdogs can be heard."*

Workshop participant, Oxford

*"If it affected me, then yes I would go along and have my say."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

Social tenants broadly agreed that they have a degree of control, and can make their voice heard, when it comes to decisions about their own housing. Primarily, this revolved around decisions regarding decorating and renovating aspects of their home. This feeling of control, however, is tempered by the frustration felt by many when things go wrong; in these instances, many social tenants felt that it is very difficult to hold their landlords to account.

*"We have tried every channel to try and get our properties updated, but there is nothing we can do until the housing association say it's your phase."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

Importantly, beyond tenants' immediate housing, few felt that they have any voice on decisions made about their wider estate (e.g. decisions around services provided, renovations that are being made and parking). For tenants, this was often derived from a sense that the opportunities to have their voice heard are either unavailable (e.g. cuts leading to the closure of drop-in centres) or ineffective, with few seeing any tangible results from past interactions.

Finally, social tenants felt that they have little say in decisions that are made about social housing either at the regional or national level (e.g. where social housing is built, the design of social housing, the minimum standards social housing should have). For most participants,



these decisions were seen as being made by politicians and elites, with little effort being made to seek the opinion of those who have lived experience of social housing.

*“You feel unimportant if someone’s not listening to a word you’re saying.”*

Workshop participant, Manchester

*“A lot of councillors are so out of touch with what people need... they don’t even try to find out what we want... And we know all politicians lie, we can’t rely on them to put our opinion forward.”*

Workshop participant, Manchester

**However, it is important to note that, while many social tenants felt that it is important for the views of tenants to be represented at various levels of decision making, these tenants also reported having limited interest themselves in getting involved.**

Tenants pointed to two key reasons for not wanting to get involved in these various levels of decision making:

1. **Feeling that any participation is unlikely to have an impact on the final decision:** This scepticism was often borne out of a strongly held perception that those in the position to make decisions about social housing would not care about their point of view.

*“I don’t think my voice would be heard. I’d think I’m small fry, why would they listen to me?”*

Workshop participant, Oxford

2. **Feeling that this is not a priority, particularly when they do not have any personal grievance:** Many social tenants reported feeling broadly happy with their housing and, for the most part, are able to resolve problems when they occur. In this context, few felt that they would be motivated to prioritise investing time in getting involved in decision-making. This was particularly true when it comes to decisions at the regional and national level, where the impacts on tenants themselves are less tangible.

*“I’m busy, I don’t have time to go and waste my time talking about something that won’t even affect me.”*

Workshop participant, London

*“I keep myself to myself. I’m happy, I have no complaints, so why bother.”*

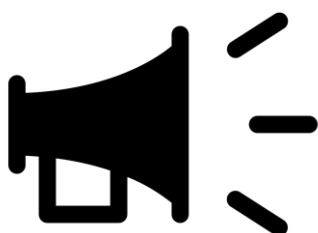
Workshop participant, Manchester

## Responses to the recommendation

Participants were presented with a recommendation for a new government organisation that would represent the views of tenants, presented below:

1. Tenants having their say

### It's not always clear how tenants can make their voice heard



- There is no clear established way for tenants to influence the way social housing is run at the national, regional or local level
- At a local level, cuts to legal aid have significantly reduced the number of advice centres and community law centres that are able to support tenants wishing to hold landlords to account
  - Less than half of social tenants (41%) agree that their landlord thinks about their interests when making decisions
- And it is difficult for tenants to get through to decision makers
  - Only 16% of social tenants feel that politicians care about the future of social housing

BritainThinks | Private and Confidential

3

1. Tenants having their say

### Recommendation

**Introduction of a government funded organisation which is formally recognised and funded by government to represent the views of tenants in social housing to national, regional and local government.**

This could operate the consumer champion organisation 'Which?', or the Government's new 'HealthWatch' for the NHS



The new body would:

- Collect tenants views on issues facing them
- Carry out research into these issues
- Raise issues with government and other bodies on issues affecting tenants and publicise research findings
- Provide tenants with information about services in their area and develop a two-way dialogue with them
- Help to develop and strengthen the representative tenants' movement, e.g. local groups

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4

**The recommendation was mostly well received and thought to be ‘a step in the right direction’ as it could help amplify tenants’ voices.**

For most, any means to amplify tenants’ voices are welcome, especially as this would give tenants more power when challenging their landlords.

Participants liked a number of aspects of the recommendation. The general principle that it could offer tenants a collective voice with more clout than individuals acting by themselves was intuitive. It was credited for its independence from councils and housing associations, meaning that it could genuinely fight on behalf of tenants’ interests. Its presence at all levels (local, regional and national) was seen as a substantial improvement on the current situation.

*“I like all these ideas, it feels like you can have a voice and be heard.”*

Workshop participant, Oxford

*“There’s got to be an independent person running the site – it can’t be run by the council.”*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

**The reasoning behind the recommendation resonated with people. However, they were unsure about how a tenant voice organisation would work in practice. There were concerns about the time it would require and a broader distrust that their voices would be adequately represented.**

As discussed above, many tenants felt that having their say in big decisions is not a major concern – an attitude that equally applies to the new body. Addressing the power imbalance that exists between them and their landlords was the main priority. For some, a regional and national level organisation felt less relevant..

Furthermore, there were some concerns that a new body would need to adequately represent the views of social tenants. A few suspected that it would most likely be staffed by people who had no personal experience of living in social housing, meaning that they would not understand tenants’ needs, or even filter out the concerns expressed by tenants.

Finally, there was some doubt that tenants would actually know about the platform, and it would be ineffective if feedback is limited to a small number of people. To counter this, the platform would need to be heavily publicised – for example, through leaflets in social tenants’ ‘welcome packs’, national advertising campaigns and landlord communications.

*“How are they going to get this information...this all sounds great on paper...?”*

Workshop participant, London

*“If people knew about it then yes, it would work.”*

Workshop participant, London

**Participants further built on the recommendation by making suggested improvements in three key areas.**

### **1. Ensuring tenant representation within the organisation**

To overcome concerns about the organisation being staffed by those who do not understand the views of social tenants, most participants agreed that it is important to have a strong representation of tenants working within the organisation.

These tenants should be involved in both gathering views of other tenants and advocating on their behalf when presenting their findings to those with the power to make decisions.

This was seen by many as essential to ensure the legitimacy of the organisation and counter charges that it is a ‘tick box’ exercise.

### **2. Publicise achievements of the organisation**

In order to build the legitimacy of the organisation further, participants felt it should have a high profile and publicise its achievements.

Many felt this is essential to reassure social tenants that the organisation is effective and engaged in the issues that matter to them. Without this ‘feedback loop’, participants feared that few would see the point of engaging.

*“It needs to have feedback, not just putting your idea out there and it goes into a sea of nothing.”*

Workshop participant, London

### **3. Making it as simple for people to participate as possible**

Finally, participants generated a number of ideas to make engagement as easy as possible. These included many traditional methods, like involving tenant associations and reinstating drop-in centres, but also modern ones such as using online channels to give quick and easy access to participants.

*“There should be extra support for people who can’t use the internet.”*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

## 6.7. Neighbourhood and communities

### *Discussions on building good neighbourhoods and strong communities*

When assessing the factors which make or break a neighbourhood, there was a strong emphasis on community-mindedness, safety and the provision of leisure activities. However, there was a perception that across society there has been a decline in the sense of community.

Participants were asked to write down three things which they think are important in making a good neighbourhood and a strong community – a word cloud presenting the results is below:

Figure 6.7.1



A number of features were mentioned as characteristic of a 'strong' community. First and foremost, there was an emphasis on communication between neighbours. This helps to make an area feel like home and prevents disputes or tensions emerging between residents.

*"If you have good neighbours you can sit down and have a negotiation about how it works, but if you have fiery personalities, it can lead to clashes."*

Workshop participant, London

Accessible leisure facilities were perceived as an important piece of the puzzle. They were seen as facilitating community interaction and offer opportunities for neighbours to socialise. They were also seen to have a preventative function (particularly for young people): giving them something to occupy their time and helping them to stay out of trouble.

*"Where's the outreach for the kids on the corner doing nothing?"*

Workshop participant, Manchester

A sense of safety in the local area was perceived as essential for residents to feel comfortable and 'at home'. An official presence – such as police or a community representative – was seen as an important method for achieving this.

*"Years ago, when there were more bobbies on the beat, you didn't see drug dealers about."*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

However, there was a perception that community-mindedness across society as a whole has declined over the years, with a fraying social fabric – and, to some extent, austerity – assigned most blame. The most prominent symptoms mentioned include a lack of communication between neighbours, crime, anti-social behaviour, addiction problems and communal areas not being looked after.

*"There are people out there who really let the area down, with rubbish in the street."*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

When pressed on reasons for this perceived decline, spontaneous responses by tenants tended towards a widespread social malaise that is not limited to social housing. In part, this is attributed to failures in education and discipline, especially among young people, and the impact of drugs and alcohol.

There was also a feeling that cuts to local activity provision – such as youth centres and community groups – have damaged social cohesion by providing fewer opportunities to socialise and taking away an opportunity for young people to 'stay out of trouble'.

*"It used to be that you went to youth club and met all the people in the community. You went to the football club – they don't have many of those anymore."*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

The issue of immigration was very divisive. For some tenants, immigration was seen as negatively impacting the solidarity and communication between neighbours – which was perceived as resulting in communities that become more fragmented and ghettoised. For others (particularly in London), diversity was seen as an important part of a healthy community through encouraging the sharing of ideas and cultures, and through expanding people's horizons.

*"Immigration plays a big part, especially around here. I think they integrated them wrong, personally."*

Workshop participant, Doncaster

There was consensus that a potential solution to this lies in community activities such as local clubs and leisure groups to facilitate and encourage interactions between different cultures. This was seen as offering an opportunity to break down barriers between neighbours from different cultures and lessen the decline of community spirit.

*"[Diversity is] a benefit because people learn from each other – everybody has something to offer."*

Workshop participant, Manchester

**Other than a dislike of high-rises, housing design was rarely considered a major issue when assessing any kind of neighbourhood. The balance of opinion was that social housing is often poorly integrated with private, though this is not a top-ranking concern.**

Among tenants, housing design did not emerge spontaneously as an important consideration, regardless of the type of housing being discussed. When probed, there was some agreement that it plays a role in shaping neighbourhoods. Well-designed, attractive housing was seen to encourage residents to look after their area and housing which was too cramped and poorly designed (such as flats with thin walls) may damage community cohesion.

There was also a strong negative association with high-rise social housing, both among those who live in it and those who do not. A lack of privacy and unsuitability for families were the most commonly raised concerns, but some also viewed high rises as fostering crime, anti-social behaviour and, to some extent, isolation. There were additional worries about the safety and maintenance of high rises (which were often linked to the Grenfell fire).

Nonetheless, even after discussion and reflection, housing design was still seen as a second-tier issue. Fundamentally, there was a perception that it is people above all who determine what a community is like and their environment can only be so influential in shaping this.

Turning to integration between tenures, this was sometimes mentioned spontaneously, and a lack of integration was broadly seen to worsen life for tenants in two key ways: firstly, by

contributing to labelling and stigma caused by 'standing out'; and, secondly, by concentrating poverty and disadvantage.

*"You think they live in a council house, so they're on low income. If every house looked the same, you wouldn't know who is in it so it can calm the stereotype and build the community by saying everybody is the same."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

Despite these concerns, views varied on integration. Integration was not seen as one of the biggest issues facing social housing or the neighbourhoods in which it is located. Indeed, some tenants felt that social housing does not seem to be particularly segregated from other types (in part due to the impact of Right to Buy). Meanwhile, for others, segregation of social housing from other forms of housing is a good thing, as it contributes to communal solidarity and ensures that people in a community are 'in the same boat'.

**Although access to transport and jobs was considered very important in determining the character of an area, social housing was not currently seen to fail in this respect.**

In principle, connectivity was seen as a key issue for any neighbourhood, ensuring that an area has adequate access to jobs, opportunity and amenities; however, social housing was not seen to suffer systemically from poor transport or from geographical isolation from jobs any more than any other type of housing. An exception to this was in Grimsby, as there is a high number of tenants who live in rural areas with reduced transport links.

*"Ideally social housing should be dotted everywhere. If people need to be near their support network, like family or friends, or near a certain job, I think that shows why it needs to be in lots of different areas."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

### *Assessing the design of social housing*

Workshop participants were shown images of a range of different types of social housing and were asked to assess what they liked and disliked.

**Overall, there was a preference for traditional design and low- or medium-rise architecture, and green spaces and community hubs were considered very important.**

Low-rise, single-family housing was the most widely preferred option (although medium-rise blocks were also seen as acceptable and necessary, especially for cities). Driving this was a perception that houses are more spacious, more aspirational and tend to be located in quieter, more desirable areas. There was also the feeling that houses are more appropriate for families, giving children more space to play outdoors.



By contrast, high density designs (in particular, high rise tower blocks) tended to get a tepid reaction or negative reaction. They were associated with a poor quality of life, in particular, from the noise and lack of privacy from 'packing too many people in'. Concerns about high-density designs lending themselves to crime and poor maintenance (e.g. broken lifts) were also prominent.

Traditional designs tended to be more popular than anything perceived as experimental or unusual. In part, this seems to derive from the sense of reassurance provided by something that is 'tried and tested'. However, some modern elements (such as solar panels on roofs) were welcomed.

Green spaces were also perceived as important for encouraging exercise, health (including good mental health) and overall wellbeing – something that was seen as particularly important for families with children.

*"It would be nice if it was green... a lot of green areas get built over now.  
Just somewhere where you can go and sit down and relax."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

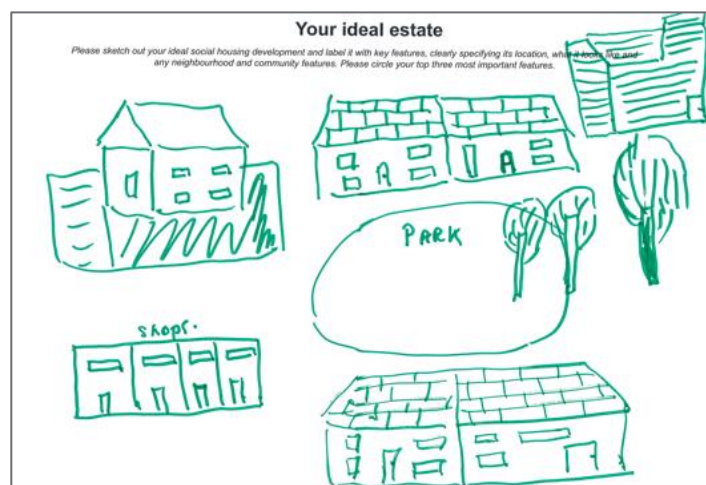
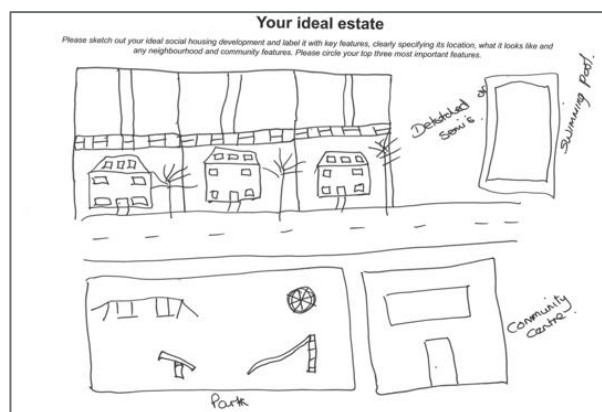
Any kind of space where people can come together to socialise and interact was also seen as vital in building a strong and tight-knit community. Usually, but not exclusively, community centres were representative of this space. Hubs were seen as particularly important for young people as a way to mitigate the risk of crime and misbehaviour; in addition, they were seen as a useful information point for advice and complaints.

*"The community came together, there's now a community centre, they've  
put up hanging baskets. You could go in every day and listen to other  
people in the area."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

In participants' ideal social housing estate designs, green spaces featured prominently, alongside community hubs and a clear preference for a mix of low-rise houses and mid-rise blocks of flats, designed to suit different life situations and circumstances.

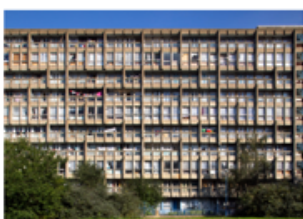
## Participants' drawings of their ideal social housing estate



### *Responses to the recommendation*

Participants were then presented with information about the way social housing has been designed and located in the past, and a recommendation for reform.

## **While many in social housing are happy with their housing and their neighbourhoods, some face difficult challenges**



In the past mistakes have been made in the ways that social housing has been developed that leads to difficulty in building neighbourhoods people want to live in:

- Placing social housing developments in less desirable areas with less access to good amenities, schools, jobs etc.
- Constructed in a way that discourages community cohesion with little provision of communal areas and community spaces
- Size and placement of developments leading to lack of integration with local areas
  - Nearly a fifth of social tenants do not feel part of their local community (18%)

## **Recommendation...**

### **New social housing should**



- Be located in places that will have access to good jobs, schools, public transport and local amenities
- Blend into existing neighbourhoods
  - Avoiding having very large estates all reserved for social housing
- Not stand out as social housing by its design

**The problems identified with the status quo resonated with some tenants, but by no means all.**

Among tenants, there was agreement that social housing is located in less desirable areas. However, this was interpreted in terms of crime and anti-social behaviour, not access to jobs or transport. The lack of communal areas struck a chord for social tenants who have recently seen cuts to community spaces – additionally, there was some agreement upon the lack of integration with local communities.

Despite the above, there was no strong feeling that social housing lacks access to good jobs or schools. The picture of a high-rise block simply did not resonate with tenants whose experiences of social housing are different, particularly in areas with very little high-rise social housing (such as in Doncaster). As detailed above, there was also no universal agreement that social housing is poorly integrated with local areas, or that it is a major concern.

**The recommendation was viewed positively.**

Several points resonated with tenants. Ensuring that social housing has access to good jobs, schools, public transport and local amenities was seen as important, uncontentious and difficult to argue against. In particular, proximity to amenities (often interpreted in terms of leisure activities and community centres) was seen as a priority, with leisure facilities seen as an important way to help build community cohesion.

The general principle that social housing should not stand out by its design was also well received. There was a feeling that this would help to reduce the perceived effects of concentrated disadvantage in social housing and help reduce stigma and 'labelling' of social tenants. However, on the whole, this was not as high a priority as ensuring good access to local amenities.

*"Adding children's centres and community centres, things that would help communities get stronger."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

*"Rather than excluding people – it's better to mix and learn from each other."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

**While participants tended to agree with each of the recommendations in principle, they questioned whether these are realistic aspirations for the future of social housing.**

Cost was the biggest and most frequently raised concern: in particular, the perception that construction of housing in desirable locations is likely to be expensive, and focusing on design will have cost implications. This was particularly true in Oxford and London, where the cost implications of some of these recommendations was seen to be completely unrealistic.

*"They [social landlords] just don't have the money for it."*

Workshop participant, Oxford

The areas with the best access to jobs and amenities are in central areas of cities, which are already seen as overcrowded. This led to questions about where new developments would go, and how to avoid oversized estates.

*"I agree about being near schools and transport. But when it says 'avoid large estates,' I don't think that it's realistic."*

Workshop participant, Oxford

Tension in the community was not seen as a significant concern by most, but for some the objection by existing residents to social tenant neighbours (due to concerns about crime and house prices) was worrisome. Additionally, there was a sentiment that social tenants might themselves provoke tensions. The importance of leisure activities which bring together the whole community was emphasised as a possible consensus solution to these issues.

*"In some areas it's good to mix private and social. But sometimes putting it all on one street – it just makes them think their life is normal."*

Workshop participant, Oxford

**Overall, the recommendation did not fundamentally align with the highest priorities for social housing or the neighbourhoods in which it is located.**

While the recommendation focuses on design, integration, and access to jobs and transport, the biggest issues for tenants were maintenance and repair, community and anti-social behaviour.

*"Everything [amenities, jobs etc.] you wrote on there, we already have in Blackbird Leys!"*

Workshop participant, Oxford

Importantly, there was also some sense that these aspirations, particularly around integration, may end up limiting the amount of social housing that can be built. This, for many, meant that these recommendations should be a secondary concern, with the primary focus being on building more houses.

*"I think it [design] is a moot point – it's cosmetic. You need walls and a roof, and heating."*

Workshop participant, Oxford

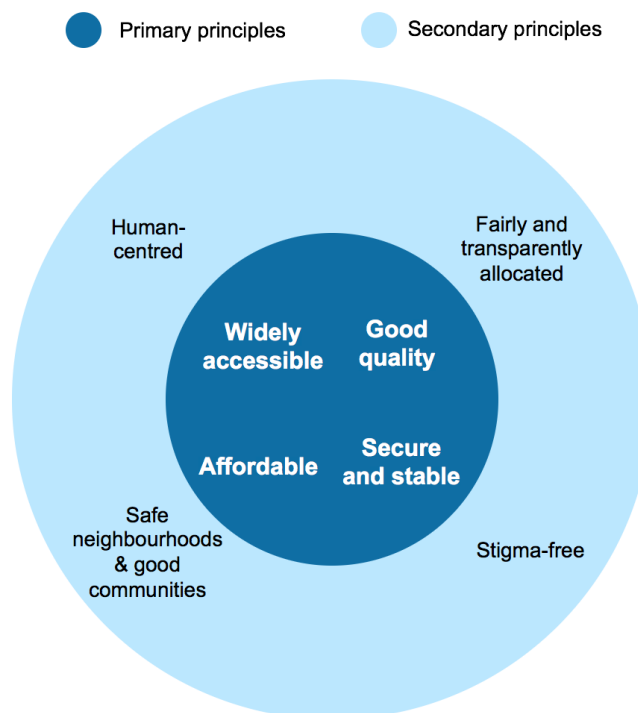
Finally, anti-social behaviour is seen as more pressing than access to jobs and transport, which are not seen as currently being an issue; tenants largely perceived that the recommendation does not address poor and disruptive behaviour.

*"I don't think the location makes a difference. It's the people that live there."*

Workshop participant, Grimsby

## 6.8. Conclusion

Through discussions with social tenants and potential tenants we were able to understand the factors that were seen as most important for social housing.



Furthermore, through comparisons to the experiences explored in section 4, we were able to identify the areas that were seen as most important to address in the future:

- Of the primary principles, social housing was most likely to be seen as failing to be widely accessible. This aligns with the finding that participants were most likely to prioritise increasing the amount of social housing stock
- Moreover, these principles are also reflected in the other key participant led recommendations for the future of social housing, namely:
  - Reform of the allocation systems;
  - Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour; and
  - Improving speed and quality of landlord repairs.

Understanding these key principle can also help to understand participants' responses to the draft recommendations developed by the Social Housing Commission

- The commitment to calling for the building of many more social homes was very welcome

- The most popular of the other recommendations, a new regulator for social housing, was seen as helping to ensure that a large number of these principles are met – for example, ensuring good quality, affordable and human-centred social housing sector.
- Similarly, while less popular, the tenant voice organisation was also seen as being able to help the sector be more human-centred – for example, by making sure that landlords take tenant's point of view into account when making decisions
- Finally, understanding these principles can help identify why a recommendation for integrating social housing more and improving the design was seen as relatively less important. While this policy did aim to improve neighbourhoods and communities, it was not seen to address core concerns around anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, there was a concern that these requirements around design and integration could greatly reduce the amount of homes that are built, and therefore mean that insufficient progress would be made on the most important principle (widely accessible)

## 7. Conclusions

The Grenfell Tower tragedy cast a spotlight both on the systemic problems within the social housing sector in this country, and their impact upon those living within it.

Positively, this research has shown that many social tenants are happy with their housing, and, as a result of long tenancies, feel secure in it and say they can truly make their house their home.

However, we have also heard of social tenants struggling to get complaints resolved or repairs made, leading to a sense of powerlessness and frustration. We have also met social tenants who are living in housing that is in poor repair, or with insufficient space to meet their needs. Many others have expressed concerns about anti-social behaviour in their local areas. These are all significant challenges that need to be addressed.

Whatever the challenges facing social tenants, however, an inescapable conclusion from this research is that the challenges faced by similar groups not in social housing (ie those on low incomes in the private rented sector) are both more widespread and more severe. For this group, a fundamental sense of insecurity lies at the heart of their experience. Unaffordable rents and short-term tenancies mean that they feel powerless relative to their landlords. As a result, many do not feel confident enough to raise complaints even when living in squalid conditions or when their landlords behave in ways that are simply illegal. Examples outlined above include a tenant with mould growing on interior walls of their home who was told that it was impossible to deal with, and that they should simply buy a dehumidifier. Another was a tenant with young children who described how, mid-lease, she was given 24 hours' notice to vacate the property. When she objected, she came home to find her family's belongings in the street, and the locks changed.

For many in this group, their housing and the problems associated with it has an immediate negative impact on their quality of life and, in the worst cases, on their physical and mental health.

The poor experiences described above are not, of course, universal. Just as many social tenants are happy in their homes, some potential social tenants feel satisfied and have a good relationship with their landlord. Indeed, a key lesson to be drawn from this work is that there is an immense diversity of experience, even within relatively small areas.

However, looking at the experiences of social tenants and potential social tenants together, this research points above all to a housing system that is fundamentally broken, failing to meet even the most basic needs of some of the most vulnerable people in society. It has also shown that there is strong support for bold steps to fix this system.

However, this is counteracted by widespread scepticism that such steps will be taken, stemming from an entrenched view that the challenges facing lower-income groups are not a



priority for national decision makers. **There is now an opportunity to prove these sceptics wrong and deliver meaningful change.**

We have heard clear agreement that there is one issue facing this housing system that dwarfs all the others: insufficient social housing stock. The lack of social housing supply means that, instead of being available to all those who need it, social housing is now available only to the most desperate. This leads to long waiting times, and often a profound sense of injustice from those who feel they would benefit from social housing but simply cannot access it.

Moving forward, more social housing must be built to address this supply / demand imbalance. In addition, all groups we have spoken to agree that, whilst social housing is an essential part of the societal safety net, there is a persistent stigma against it and those who live in it, with social tenants characterised as 'benefit scroungers' and the areas where social housing is located perceived as dominated by anti-social behaviour. There is a widespread perception that this is driven by a one-sided, negative portrayal of social housing in the media. Fortunately, for many social tenants, this does not seem to affect how they feel about their housing, nor impact their daily lives. However, it will be important to tackle these negative perceptions if support is to be won for programmes to increase social housing stock.

A first step in tackling this stigma will be to take on the negative media narrative, by making a positive case for social housing as an essential part of the UK's housing makeup. Social tenants' positive experiences could play a valuable part here in demonstrating the desirability of social housing.

A second step will be to look at the construction and design of social housing. This research has shown that, while not a top priority for social tenants, concentrated areas of social housing and high-rise housing can attract particular stigma from those who do not live in social housing. In addition, in some areas the mere design of social housing – for example doors or window frames of a particular colour – mark it out. The design of new social housing should address this by ensuring that social housing is included as part of a mix of other housing types, and that its design blends in with that housing.

This report also points towards the need to develop a strengthened regulator of social housing, one that is known by social tenants, which is far from the case today, and that can empower tenants in their relationships with their landlords. In order to convince tenants that this is a body that will have the power to make tangible change, it will be important for this regulator to have the power to inspect social housing, and impose fines on those who are failing to meet expectations.

When thinking about the future of social housing, it is essential to consider a wider group of tenants. They would, of course, benefit from additional social housing stock. However, they also need to be given more security in their existing housing, and ways need to be found to empower them vis-à-vis their landlords. A strengthened regulator with jurisdiction over private rented accommodation, as well as social housing, is one suggestion that made sense to - and proved popular amongst - those who took part in this work.

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## 8.2 Discussion guides for depth interviews

### 8.2.1 Social tenants' depth interview discussion guide

Section and objective	Outline
<p><b>Pre-task: Week-long diary exercise</b></p> <p><i>To introduce participants to the research and acclimatise them to the types of questions they will be asked.</i></p> <p><i>To explore high level perceptions of each of the issues to identify areas for further exploration</i></p> <p><i>To create video content for the research</i></p>	<p><i>Before the interview, all participants to have completed a diary (either online or written) introducing themselves and providing an insight into their life, home and local area. Moderator will have consulted diary in advance of the interview to inform the questions.</i></p> <p><i>If participant is taking part in the tour of the local area, the participant will also be asked to think of a few things in advance that they would like to show us.</i></p>
<p><b>Section 1: Introduction</b></p> <p><i>To introduce participants to the research</i></p>	<p><i>On arrival: Participants to sign consent form.</i></p> <p><i>Moderator to introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the interview:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We're looking to understand how different people and groups of people feel about their housing and their local area. We're doing interviews like this all over the country in people's homes.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Moderator to reassure on confidentiality and secure permission to record session and take photos</i></p> <p><i>Participant to introduce themselves and tell the moderator a bit about them e.g. how they spend their time, who they live with, how long they spend at home in an average week. Moderator to provide a very brief summary of their housing history (e.g. where they lived, what kind of accommodation it was, how long they lived there for).</i></p>
<p><b>Section 2: Overall experiences of housing</b></p>	<p><i>I'd now like to hear about your home.</i></p> <p><i>Participant to complete a 'my home' worksheet.</i></p>

<p><i>To get a high-level overview of how participants feel about their housing, capturing top of mind priorities and concerns.</i></p> <p><i>These will inform both the home tour and the detailed probes in section 4.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What three words or phrases would you use to describe your housing?</i></li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe each in detail (e.g. What do you mean by that? Can you give me a little more detail about how that affects your life / makes you feel? To what extent has this always been the case, or have you noticed changes over the past few years?)</i></li> </ul> <p>How do you feel about your home at the moment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it feel like a home? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What makes it feel like a home?</li> <li>○ And what takes away from this feeling?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What's the best thing about it?</li> <li>• And what, if anything, don't you like about it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How, if at all, do these aspects affect your day-to-day life? (where applicable, probe: social life, work, family life, finances, health and wellbeing)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does it compare to housing you've lived in in the past? Was it better? Worse? Why?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 3: Home tour</b></p> <p><i>To put the interview into context, allowing the interviewer to see first-hand the issues raised in the interview. This tour will also allow for further probing on issues that may not come up spontaneously but are prompted by the tour,</i></p>	<p>Could you show me around your home and go into a bit more detail about some of the things we've been discussing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Participant to show moderator around their home, highlighting aspects that meet their needs, and where the gaps are. Moderator to pick up on any elements mentioned in the initial discussion (e.g. repair, space, comfort, safety)</i></li> <li>• <i>Potential probes to include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What can you tell me about this room? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What do you like about it?</li> <li>▪ And what don't you like?</li> <li>▪ In what ways does it meet yours and your family's needs?</li> <li>▪ What changes would you like to make?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>With participants' permission, moderator to photograph key aspects of their home</i></p>
<p><b>Section 4: Detailed experiences of housing</b></p> <p><i>To understand the participants' priorities and needs for their housing and the extent to which their current housing meets these criteria</i></p>	<p>Exercise: Imagine you are looking for a new home for you [and your family]. What would be the most important things that you would be looking for? <i>Moderator to allow for a free association in the first instance and probe on the following factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Affordability</i></li> <li>• <i>Location</i></li> <li>• <i>Space</i></li> <li>• <i>Security</i></li> <li>• <i>Condition</i></li> </ul> <p>Why do you say that? Why would you prioritise these aspects over others?</p> <p>How close does your current home come to living up to this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways does it live up to this?</li> <li>• And in what ways does it not?</li> </ul>

<p><i>To understand attitudes towards specific areas identified in the inception report – including affordability, security, space, and condition of housing</i></p> <p><i>To understand how their housing situation has changed and the experience of these changes (e.g. relationships with the landlord, input into changes, adaptability of housing to meet changing needs)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this compare to places you have lived in the past?</li> </ul> <p>[If not covered in the above conversation moderator to probe on the following areas]</p> <p><b><u>Security</u></b></p> <p>How secure do you feel in your housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe whether this is about security of tenure or feeling physically safe</i></li> <li>• <b>Do you know how long your tenure is?</b></li> <li>• What, if anything, would make you feel more secure?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Affordability</u></b></p> <p>How would you describe the affordability of your housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [If participants struggle with this question] On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is very unaffordable and 10 is very affordable, how affordable would you say your housing is?</li> <li>• Why do you say that?</li> <li>• Roughly, how much of your income do you spend on your housing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Moderator to understand income meaning earnings and benefits combined</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• What does this mean for the rest of your life? <i>Moderator to probe on work, family and social life.</i></li> </ul> <p><b><u>Space</u></b></p> <p>To what extent do you feel you have enough space for you and your family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [If not enough space] What areas would you like to have more space?</li> <li>• In what ways does not having enough space impact your life?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Conditions</u></b></p> <p>How would you describe the look and feel of your house when you first moved in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How if at all have things changed since then?</li> <li>• In what ways, if at all, would you still like to see changes to the look and feel of your home?</li> <li>• Are you able to heat your home to comfortable temperature in the Winter?</li> </ul> <p>Are there any communal areas that you share with your neighbours (e.g. lifts, reception, hallways)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe their condition?</li> <li>• What changes, if any, would you like to make to these spaces?</li> <li>• Are you able to heat your home to comfortable temperature in the Winter?</li> </ul> <p><b>Relationship with landlord</b></p> <p>Thinking about your relationship with your landlord, what have your interactions with your landlord been like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is good about your landlord? What is less good?</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do you interact with your landlord? Would you like to hear from them more than you do?</li> <li>• What kind of issues do you hear from your landlord about? <i>Moderator to prompt on maintenance issues, governance, changes to housing, community and local area.</i></li> <li>• How responsive are they when something goes wrong or needs to be repaired?</li> <li>• In an ideal world, how would you like to interact with your landlord? <i>Moderator to probe on different forms of communication, e.g. face-to-face, online, telephone, community engagement.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How, if at all, does this differ for different types of issue? <i>Moderator to probe on a range of issues, e.g. maintenance problems, management of their housing</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• How far, if at all, do you feel that your landlord listens to you and your concerns? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ And what about the concerns of your neighbours and the wider community?</li> <li>○ How, if at all, could the community's relationship with your landlord be improved? <i>If unmentioned, moderator to probe on tenant management boards</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does your landlord compare to landlords you've had in the past?</li> <li>• What, if anything, would you like to change about your relationship with your landlord?</li> </ul> <p>To what extent, if at all, do you feel you have control over the look and feel of your home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you personally made any changes or tried to make any changes to your housing? What was your experience of this like? What made it easy / difficult?</li> <li>• How would you describe your landlords approach to you making changes to your home?</li> <li>• To what extent, if at all, are you involved in decisions your landlord makes about your home? Can you give me an example?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Change to housing needs</u></b></p> <p>Since you have been living in your home, how has your life changed, for example changes to work or family life etc.?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How, if at all, has your home adapted to meet these needs?</li> </ul> <p>Thinking about the longer term, would you like to stay in your current housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What advantages, if any, does your type of housing have over other types? What are the disadvantages?</li> <li>• <i>If mentioned probe on affordability, tenure, space</i></li> </ul> <p>What one thing, if anything, would you change about your housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why have you prioritised this above the other elements that we have discussed?</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Section 5: Experience of the local area</b></p> <p><i>To understand participants' priorities and needs for their area and the extent to which their current local area meets these criteria</i></p> <p><i>Understand perceptions of community relationships</i></p> <p><i>Understand how, if at all their area has changed in the past, and what they would like to see change in the future.</i></p>	<p><i>Participant to complete a 'my local area' worksheet.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What three words or phrases would you use to describe your local area?</i></li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe each in turn.</i></li> </ul> <p>How would you describe your local area to someone who's never been here before?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What do you like about the area? What do you dislike?</i></li> <li>• <i>What, if anything, are you proud of? Is there anything that you are less proud of?</i></li> </ul> <p>Do you think people from outside of the area would have heard of the area - How do you think people outside of your area would describe it? <i>Moderator to probe on whether they know this to be the case, or whether they imagine this is what people would say.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What words or phrases would they use?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is this an area other people would like to live in? Why / why not?</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Can you tell me about how you interact with the local area?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Where do you travel to in a typical day? (e.g. school, work, friends houses). Moderator to probe if they are near far.</i></li> <li>• <i>How much, if at all, do you interact with the local area? Moderator to probe on any use of community assets or communal activities How much time do you spend in this area in a typical day?</i></li> <li>• <i>How would you describe your relationship with your neighbours?</i></li> <li>• <i>Looking back over the last 5 years, to what extent has your relationship with your neighbours changed?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>If relevant, moderator to probe on difference between current and past home</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>How would you describe community relations in your area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>To what extent do you think there is a strong community?</i></li> <li>• <i>How has it changed over time?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are there any groups (e.g. different ages or backgrounds) who feel more or less part of the community?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do you think others would describe the community in this area?</i></li> </ul> <p>Exercise: Again, imagine you are looking for a new home for you [and your family]. What would be the most important things that you would want out of your new area?</p> <p><i>Moderator to allow for a free association in the first instance and then probe on the following factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Neighbourhood feel</i></li> <li>• <i>Proximity to work</i></li> <li>• <i>Proximity to local amenities</i></li> <li>• <i>Proximity to friends and family</i></li> <li>• <i>Safety</i></li> </ul> <p>How important, if at all, would each of the following be? Why do you say that?</p> <p>Why would you prioritise these aspects over others?</p> <p>Now thinking about your current area, how well does it live up to this?</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways does it live up to this?</li> <li>• And in what ways does it not?</li> </ul> <p>Thinking back over the last five years, to what extent do you think the area has changed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you think it has changed in this way?</li> <li>• How do you feel about those changes?</li> </ul> <p>What one thing, if anything, would you change about your local community?</p>
<p><b>Section 6: Attitudes to social housing</b></p> <p><i>Understand attitudes towards social housing as a whole and perceptions of what it means for society</i></p> <p><i>Explore awareness and perceptions of changes in social housing</i></p> <p><i>Understand how participants feel social housing is viewed by other parts of society – probing specifically on stigma</i></p>	<p>I'd like to move on to think about social housing as a whole and what it means for England.</p> <p>What three words or phrases come to mind when you think about social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think the term 'social housing' means?</li> <li>• <i>Moderator to explain, if applicable, 'social housing includes council housing as well as other housing owned and managed by Housing Associations for groups whose needs aren't served in the private sector.'</i></li> </ul> <p>Thinking about social housing and what it means for society as a whole. What is good about it? What is bad about it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe on factors discussed in section 2, in particular, any references to neighbourhood, decent conditions, affordability, space and stability.</i></li> <li>• In what way does this match your experience? Do you think you have a typical experience of social housing?</li> </ul> <p>Imagine that there was no social housing in England.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think this would mean for society today?</li> <li>• How would England be different?</li> </ul> <p>What kind of people is social housing for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any particular groups of people it is particularly good for? Any it's particularly bad for?</li> <li>• In what way does this match your experience?</li> </ul> <p>What kind of people <i>should</i> social housing people be for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who, if anyone, should be the priority for social housing?</li> <li>• Who, if at all, do you think should be prioritised less than they are at the moment for social housing?</li> <li>• How fair do you think the current system of allocating social housing is?</li> </ul> <p>There are different ways in which the system of allocating housing could work. One approach is to allocate it according to who needs it most. Another approach is to allocate it in part according to who needs it most, and in part according to other factors (e.g. how long someone has been in social housing, whether they have ever been in arrears, whether they are in work).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel about these different approaches? Why?</li> <li>• How, if at all, would you change the current system of allocating social housing?</li> </ul> <p>How, if at all, does social housing impact people's ability to get work?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it make it easier to get work? Harder? Why?</li> <li>• What changes, if any, could be made to social housing to make it easier for social tenants to get work?</li> </ul> <p>Some people on low incomes receive Housing Benefit from the government to help pay their rent, both in the private sector and in social housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel about this as a system of helping people who struggle to pay their housing costs?</li> <li>• What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?</li> <li>• How does it compare to social housing as a system of helping people with their housing?</li> <li>• How would you feel about leaving social housing, if you were to receive Housing Benefit in the private sector instead?</li> </ul> <p>Who, if anyone, do you hear talking about social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they say?</li> </ul> <p><i>Interviewer to present a worksheet with the following groups:</i></p> <p>In one sentence, how would summarise their view on social housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People who live in social housing</li> <li>• Members of the public who don't live in social housing</li> <li>• Government</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Charities (e.g. Shelter, Citizens Advice)</li> </ul> <p><i>Moderator to probe on each.</i></p> <p>To what extent, if at all, do you think social tenants face stigma?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what way?</li> <li>• What is the impact of this?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 7: Past and future changes to social housing</b></p> <p><i>Understand priorities for social housing</i></p>	<p>What changes to social housing, if any, have you noticed over time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [If participant struggles, interviewer to probe on the following issues – quality of social housing, amount of social housing, where social housing is located, who lives in social housing, neighbourhood]</li> <li>• What do you think is behind those changes? <i>Moderator to probe Government policy / changes to local area</i></li> <li>• How do you feel about the way it's changed?</li> </ul> <p>And what are your thoughts on the policy <i>right to buy</i>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Moderator to provide a definition of right to buy</i></li> <li>• Do you think it is a good or bad thing? For you personally? For social housing as a whole?</li> </ul> <p>[If unmentioned] One recent change to the social housing system is that councils and housing associations can now give people tenancies that last for a fixed term, usually 5 years, rather than lifetime tenancies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What, if anything, have you heard about this?</li> <li>• How do you feel about it?</li> <li>• What are the advantages? What are the drawbacks?</li> </ul> <p>Thinking about the future, how do you think social housing will change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think the system will improve or get worse? Why? <i>Interviewer to probe perceptions of specific issues, including</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The proportion of social housing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Access and eligibility for social housing</li> <li>○ The quality of social housing</li> </ul> <p>Imagine you were in charge of the social housing system for a day. What are the top 3 issues that you would prioritise dealing with?</p> <p><i>Participant to fill in worksheet: top 3 issues for the social housing system.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why have you chosen these?</li> <li>• How would you go about dealing with them?</li> </ul> <p>How likely, or unlikely, do you think that these issues will be addressed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent, if at all, do you feel that the people who make decisions about social housing understand these issues?</li> <li>• And to what extent do you think they involve or listen to people who live in social housing?</li> <li>• How would you know the issues have been addressed? What would be the changes you would look for to know things have improved?</li> </ul> <p>We're doing these interviews on behalf of Shelter, the housing charity. They want to understand what different groups of people (both people who live in social housing and those who don't) think about it. They've founded a commission to give some recommendations about how social housing could be made better.</p> <p>When you look to the future, what are your hopes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your current housing fit into this?</li> </ul> <p>What would be your one key piece of advice for this commission?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Participant to fill in postcard worksheet: One piece of advice for the social housing commission.</i></li> </ul> <p>What is the one key point you'd like me to take away from our conversation today?</p> <p><i>Moderator to thank participant, distribute incentive, answer any final questions, provide permission to re-contact form and close.</i></p>
<p><b>Section 8: Tour of the local area</b></p>	<p>Could you show me around your local community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Can you point any elements that you particularly like about your local area?</i></li> <li>• <i>And any that you don't like?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Participant to show moderator around the area immediately around their home (i.e. a social housing estate, housing development, or surrounding streets).</i></p> <p><i>With participants' permission, moderator to photograph key aspects of their local area</i></p>

## 8.2.2 Potential social tenants depth interview discussion guide

Section and objective	Outline
<p><b>Pre-task: Week-long diary exercise</b></p> <p><i>To introduce participants to the research and acclimatise them to the types of questions they will be asked.</i></p> <p><i>To explore high level perceptions of each of the issues to identify areas for further exploration</i></p> <p><i>To create video content for the research</i></p>	<p><i>Before the interview, all participants to have completed a diary (either online or written) introducing themselves and providing an insight into their life, home and local area. Moderator will have consulted diary in advance of the interview to inform the questions.</i></p> <p><i>If participant is taking part in the tour of the local area, the participant will also be asked to think of a few things in advance that they would like to show us.</i></p>
<p><b>Section 1: Introduction</b></p> <p><i>To introduce participants to the research</i></p>	<p><i>On arrival: Participants to sign consent form.</i></p> <p><i>Moderator to introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the interview:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>We're looking to understand how different people and groups of people feel about their housing and their local area. We're doing interviews like this all over the country in people's homes.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Moderator to reassure on confidentiality and secure permission to record session and take photos</i></p> <p><i>Participant to introduce themselves and tell the moderator a bit about them e.g. how they spend their time, who they live with, how long they spend at home in an average week. Moderator to provide a very brief summary of their housing history (e.g. where they lived, what kind of accommodation it was, how long they lived there for).</i></p>
<p><b>Section 2: Overall experiences of housing</b></p> <p><i>To get a high-level overview of how participants feel</i></p>	<p><i>I'd now like to hear about your home.</i></p> <p><i>Participant to complete a 'my home' worksheet.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>What three words or phrases would you use to describe your housing?</i></li> <li><i>Moderator to probe each in detail (e.g. What do you mean by that? Can you give me a little more detail about how that affects your life /</i></li> </ul>

<p><i>about their housing, capturing top of mind priorities and concerns.</i></p> <p><i>These will inform both the home tour and the detailed probes in section 4.</i></p>	<p><i>makes you feel? To what extent has this always been the case, or have you noticed changes over the past few years?)</i></p> <p>How do you feel about your home at the moment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it feel like a home? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What makes it feel like a home?</li> <li>○ And what takes away from this feeling?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What's the best thing about it?</li> <li>• And what, if anything, don't you like about it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How, if at all, do these aspects affect your day-to-day life? (where applicable, probe: social life, work, family life, finances, health and wellbeing)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does it compare to housing you've lived in in the past? Was it better? Worse? Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Moderator to probe, if applicable, how long participant has lived in the private rented sector, how many times they have moved and how they found the last move.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 3: Home tour</b></p> <p><i>To put the interview into context, allowing the interviewer to see first-hand the issues raised in the interview. This tour will also allow for further probing on issues that may not come up spontaneously but are prompted by the tour,</i></p>	<p>Could you show me around your home and go into a bit more detail about some of the things we've been discussing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Participant to show moderator around their home, highlighting aspects that meet their needs, and where the gaps are. Moderator to pick up on any elements mentioned in the initial discussion (e.g. repair, space, comfort, safety)</i></li> <li>• <i>Potential probes to include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What can you tell me about this room? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What do you like about it?</li> <li>▪ And what don't you like?</li> <li>▪ In what ways does it meet yours and your family's needs?</li> <li>▪ What changes would you like to make?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>With participants' permission, moderator to photograph key aspects of their home</i></p>
<p><b>Section 4: Detailed experiences of housing</b></p> <p><i>To understand the participants' priorities and needs for their housing and the extent to which their current housing meets these criteria</i></p>	<p>Exercise: Imagine you are looking for a new home for you [and your family]. What would be the most important things that you would be looking for? <i>Moderator to allow for a free association in the first instance and probe on the following factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Location</i></li> <li>• <i>Affordability</i></li> <li>• <i>Space</i></li> <li>• <i>Security</i></li> <li>• <i>Condition</i></li> </ul> <p>Why do you say that? Why would you prioritise these aspects over others? How close does your current home come to living up to this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways does it live up to this?</li> <li>• And in what ways does it not?</li> </ul>

<p><i>To understand attitudes towards specific areas identified in the inception report – including affordability, security, space, and condition of housing</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this compare to places you have lived in the past? [If not covered in the above conversation moderator to probe on the following areas]</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Security</u></b> How secure do you feel in your housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe whether this is about security of tenure or feeling physically safe</i></li> <li>• Do you know how long your tenure is?</li> <li>• What impact, if any, does the length of your tenure have on your life? Planning for the future?</li> <li>• What, if anything, would make you feel more secure?</li> <li>• What is the impact of this tenancy on your plan for the future ?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Affordability</u></b> How would you describe the affordability of your housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [If participants struggle with this question] On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is very unaffordable and 10 is very affordable, how affordable would you say your housing is?</li> <li>• Why do you say that?</li> <li>• Roughly, how much of your income do you spend on your housing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Moderator to understand income meaning earnings and benefits combined</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• What does this mean for the rest of your life? <i>Moderator to probe on work, family and social life.</i></li> </ul> <p>Do you receive Housing Benefit to help pay your rent? <i>Moderator to probe whether benefit is paid to tenant or their landlord.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the experience of receiving Housing Benefit?</li> <li>• How, if at all could it be improved?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Space</u></b> To what extent do you feel you have enough space for you and your family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [If not enough space] What areas would you like to have more space?</li> <li>• In what ways does not having enough space impact your life?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Conditions</u></b> How would you describe the look and feel of your house when you first moved in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How if at all have things changed since then?</li> <li>• In what ways, if at all, would you still like to see changes to the look and feel of your home?</li> </ul> <p><b>(if applicable) Relationship with landlord</b> Thinking about your relationship with your landlord, what have your interactions with your landlord been like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is good about your landlord? What is less good?</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do you interact with your landlord? Would you like to hear from them more than you do?</li> <li>• What kind of issues do you hear from your landlord about? <i>Moderator to prompt on maintenance issues, changes to housing, community and local area.</i></li> <li>• How responsive are they when something goes wrong or needs to be repaired?</li> <li>• In an ideal world, how would you like to interact with your landlord? <i>Moderator to probe on different forms of communication, e.g. face-to-face, online, telephone, community engagement.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How, if at all, does this differ for different types of issue? <i>Moderator to probe on a range of issues, e.g. maintenance problems, management of their housing</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• How far, if at all, do you feel that your landlord listens to you and your concerns?</li> <li>• What, if anything, would you like to change about your relationship with your landlord?</li> </ul> <p>To what extent, if at all, do you feel you have control over the look and feel of your home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent, if at all, are you involved in decisions your landlord makes about your home? Can you give me an example?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Change to housing needs</u></b></p> <p>Since you have been living in your home, how has your life changed, for example changes to work or family life etc.?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How, if at all, has your home adapted to meet these needs?</li> </ul> <p>Thinking about the longer term, would you like to stay in your current housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What advantages, if any, does your type of housing have over other types? What are the disadvantages?</li> <li>• <i>[If a desire for social housing is mentioned, moderator to probe on initial perceptions and then return to this later in the interview]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why would you like to move into social housing?</li> <li>○ How, if at all, do you think it would impact your life? What would be good about it? And what would be less good?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>What one thing, if anything, would you change about your housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why have you prioritised this above the other elements that we have discussed?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 5:</b> <b>Experience of the local area</b></p> <p><i>To understand participants' priorities and needs for their area and the extent</i></p>	<p><i>Participant to complete a 'my local area' worksheet.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What three words or phrases would you use to describe your local area?</i></li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe each in turn.</i></li> </ul> <p>How would you describe your local area to someone who's never been here before?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you like about the area? What do you dislike? Why and when did you move here?</li> </ul>



<p><i>to which their current local area meets these criteria</i></p> <p><i>Understand perceptions of community relationships</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What, if anything, are you proud of? Is there anything that you are less proud of?</li> </ul> <p><b>Can you tell me about the kind of activities you do in your local area?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you travel to in a typical day? (e.g. school, work, friends' houses). Moderator to probe if they are near far.</li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe on any use of community assets or communal activities</i> How much time do you spend in this area in a typical day?</li> <li>• How would you describe your relationship with your neighbours?</li> </ul> <p>Exercise: Again, imagine you are looking for a new home for you [and your family]. What would be the most important things that you would want out of your new area?</p> <p><i>Moderator to allow for a free association in the first instance and then probe on the following factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Neighbourhood feel</i></li> <li>• <i>Proximity to work</i></li> <li>• <i>Proximity to local amenities</i></li> <li>• <i>Proximity to friends and family</i></li> <li>• <i>Safety</i></li> </ul> <p>How important, if at all, would each of the following be? Why do you say that?</p> <p>Why would you prioritise these aspects over others?</p> <p>Now thinking about your current area, how well does it live up to this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways does it live up to this?</li> <li>• And in what ways does it not?</li> </ul> <p>What one thing, if anything, would you change about your local community?</p>
<p><b>Section 6: Attitudes towards social housing for participants personally</b></p> <p><i>Understand attitudes and experiences of social housing (including perceived benefits and disadvantages of living in social housing)</i></p> <p><i>Explore the ways in which they feel living in social housing</i></p>	<p>I'd like to move on to think about social housing.</p> <p>What three words or phrases come to mind when you think about social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think the term 'social housing' means?</li> <li>• <i>Moderator to explain, if applicable, "For the purpose of this conversation: Social housing are homes that are owned by councils or housing associations and rented to people at a rate that is designed to be more affordable."</i></li> </ul> <p>Can you describe what experiences, if any, you have had with social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When, if at all, have you come into contact with social housing?</li> <li>• In what contexts have you come into contact with social housing?</li> </ul> <p>What kind of people is social housing for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any particular groups of people it is particularly good for? Any it's particularly bad for?</li> <li>• Is social housing for someone like you?</li> </ul> <p>Overall, to what extent, if at all, would you personally like to live in social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why / why not?</li> </ul>

<p><i>could impact their life</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think social housing would compare to your housing at the moment?</li> <li>• [If participant does not express an interest in social housing] Could you put your finger on why?</li> <li>• [If participant does not express an interest in social housing] What, if anything, would need to change about social housing to change your mind?</li> </ul> <p>Exercise: Returning to the priorities you came up with when you imagined you were looking for a new home, how do you think social housing would perform against each of these?</p> <p><i>Moderator to probe on each of the categories that participants came up with in exercise 4, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Affordability</i></li> <li>• <i>Location</i></li> <li>• <i>Space</i></li> <li>• <i>Security</i></li> <li>• <i>Condition / comfort</i></li> </ul> <p>To what extent, if at all, would your life be different if you lived in social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would be the benefits?</li> <li>• What would be the disadvantages?</li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe on some of the following factors as applicable: social life, work, family life, finances, health and wellbeing, and refer back to any unmet needs discussed earlier and probe on these.</i></li> </ul> <p>Have you ever applied to live in social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why / why not?</li> </ul> <p><b>[If yes]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you find the experience of applying? What was good about it? What was bad about it?</li> <li>• [If tenant is still on a waiting list] How long have you been on the waiting list for? What impact, if any, has this had on your life? <i>Moderator to probe for any things participant has or hasn't done as a result of being on the list (e.g. thinking about moving but didn't, moving in with partner but didn't etc)</i></li> <li>• How confident or unconfident did you feel about your chances of getting onto social housing when you applied?</li> <li>• Overall, what would you change about the experience of applying for social housing?</li> </ul> <p><b>[If no]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you put your finger on why you haven't so far? <i>Moderator to probe on some of the following factors: allocation system, time, never thought about it, stigma, waiting lists etc.</i></li> <li>• [If no] Would you ever consider applying to live in social housing in the future?</li> </ul> <p>Who, if anyone, do you hear talking about social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they say?</li> </ul>
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	<p>To what extent, if at all, do you think social tenants face stigma?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what way?</li> <li>• What is the impact of this?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 7:</b> <b>Attitudes towards social housing for society more broadly</b></p> <p><i>Explore perceptions of the impact of social housing more broadly</i></p> <p><i>Understand priorities, if any, for social housing in England</i></p>	<p>Thinking about social housing and what it means for society as a whole. What is good about it? What is bad about it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe on factors discussed in section 2, in particular, any references to neighbourhood, decent conditions, affordability, space and stability.</i></li> </ul> <p>Imagine that there was no social housing in England.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think this would mean for society today?</li> <li>• How would England be different?</li> </ul> <p>What kind of people should social housing people be for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who, if anyone, should be the priority for social housing?</li> <li>• How does this compare to the way social housing is prioritised at the moment?</li> <li>• Who, if at all, do you think should be prioritised less than they are at the moment for social housing?</li> </ul> <p>What, if anything, do you know about how social housing is allocated in England?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much, if at all, have you thought about it before?</li> <li>• How fair do you think it is?</li> </ul> <p>There are different ways in which the system of allocating housing could work. One approach is to allocate it according to who needs it most. Another approach is to allocate it in part according to who needs it most, and in part according to other factors (e.g. how long someone has been in social housing, whether they have ever been in arrears, whether they are in work).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel about these different approaches? Why?</li> <li>• How, if at all, would you change the current system of allocating social housing?</li> </ul> <p>How, if at all, does social housing impact people's ability to get work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it make it easier to get work? Harder? Why?</li> <li>• What changes, if any, could be made to social housing to make it easier for social tenants to get work?</li> </ul> <p>Some people on low incomes receive Housing Benefit from the government to help pay their rent, both in the private sector and in social housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you feel about this as a system of helping people who struggle to pay their housing costs?</li> <li>• What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?</li> <li>• How does it compare to social housing as a system of helping people with their housing?</li> <li>• [If participant receives Housing Benefit] How would you feel about being in social housing rather than being in the private sector and receiving Housing Benefit?</li> <li>• What would be the impact on your life?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Section 7: Past and future changes to social housing</b></p> <p><i>Understand priorities for social housing</i></p>	<p>What changes to social housing, if any, have you noticed over time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [If participant struggles, interviewer to probe on the following issues – quality of social housing, amount of social housing, where social housing is located, who lives in it, neighbourhood]</li> <li>• What do you think is behind those changes? <i>Moderator to probe Government policy / changes to local area</i></li> <li>• How do you feel about the way it's changed?</li> </ul> <p>[If unmentioned] One recent change to the social housing system is that councils and housing associations can now give people tenancies that last for a fixed term, usually 5 years, rather than lifetime tenancies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What, if anything, have you heard about this?</li> <li>• How do you feel about it?</li> <li>• What are the advantages? What are the drawbacks?</li> </ul> <p>Thinking about the future, how do you think social housing will change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think the system will improve or get worse? Why? <i>Interviewer to probe perceptions of specific issues, including</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The proportion of social housing</li> <li>○ Access and eligibility for social housing</li> <li>○ The quality of social housing</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Imagine you were in charge of the social housing system for a day. What are the top 3 issues that you would prioritise dealing with?</p> <p><i>Participant to fill in worksheet: top 3 issues for the social housing system.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why have you chosen these?</li> <li>• How would you go about dealing with them?</li> </ul> <p>How likely, or unlikely, do you think that these issues will be addressed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent, if at all, do you feel that the people who make decisions about social housing understand these issues?</li> <li>• And to what extent do you think they involve or listen to people who live in social housing?</li> <li>• How would you know the issues have been addressed? What would be the changes you would look for to know things have improved?</li> </ul> <p>We're doing these interviews on behalf of Shelter, the housing charity. They want to understand what different groups of people (both people who live in social housing and those who don't) think about it. They've founded a commission to give some recommendations about how social housing could be made better.</p> <p>When you look to the future, what are your hopes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your current housing fit into this?</li> </ul> <p>What would be your one key piece of advice for this commission?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Participant to fill in postcard worksheet: One piece of advice for the social housing commission.</i></li> </ul> <p>What is the one key point you'd like me to take away from our conversation today?</p> <p><i>Moderator to thank participant, distribute incentive, answer any final questions, provide permission to re-contact form and close.</i></p>
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<b>Section 8: Tour of the local area</b>	<p>Could you show me around your local community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Can you point any elements that you particularly like about your local area?</i></li> <li>• <i>And any that you don't like?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Participant to show moderator around the area immediately around their home (i.e. a social housing estate, housing development, or surrounding streets).</i></p> <p><i>With participants' permission, moderator to photograph key aspects of their local area</i></p>

### 8.2.3. Close proximity to social housing depth interview discussion guide

Section and objective	Outline
<p><b>Pre-task: Week-long diary exercise</b></p> <p><i>To introduce participants to the research and acclimatise them to the types of questions they will be asked.</i></p> <p><i>To explore high level perceptions of each of the issues to identify areas for further exploration</i></p> <p><i>To create video content for the research</i></p>	<p><i>Before the interview, all participants to have completed a diary (either online or written) introducing themselves and providing an insight into their life, home and local area. Moderator will have consulted diary in advance of the interview to inform the questions.</i></p>
<p><b>Section 1: Introduction</b></p> <p><i>To introduce participants to the research</i></p>	<p><i>On arrival: Participants to sign consent form.</i></p> <p><i>Moderator to introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the interview:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We're looking to understand how different people and groups of people feel about their housing and their local area. We're doing interviews like this all over the country in people's homes.</li> </ul> <p><i>Moderator to reassure on confidentiality and secure permission to record session and take photos</i></p> <p><i>Participant to introduce themselves and tell the moderator a bit about them e.g. how they spend their time, who they live with, how long they spend at home in an average week. Moderator to provide a very brief summary of their housing history (e.g. where they lived, what kind of accommodation it was, how long they lived there for).</i></p>
<p><b>Section 2: Overall experiences of housing</b></p> <p><i>To get a high-level overview of how participants feel about their housing, capturing top of mind priorities and concerns.</i></p>	<p><i>I'd now like to hear about your home.</i></p> <p><i>Participant to complete a 'my home' worksheet.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What three words or phrases would you use to describe your housing?</i></li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe each in detail (e.g. What do you mean by that? Can you give me a little more detail about how that affects your life / makes you feel? To what extent has this always been the case, or have you noticed changes over the past few years?)</i></li> </ul>

	<p>How do you feel about your home at the moment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it feel like a home? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What makes it feel like a home?</li> <li>○ And what takes away from this feeling?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What's the best thing about it?</li> <li>• And what, if anything, don't you like about it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How, if at all, do these aspects affect your day-to-day life? (where applicable, probe: social life, work, family life, finances, health and wellbeing)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does it compare to housing you've lived in in the past? Was it better? Worse? Why?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 3: Experience of the local area</b></p> <p><i>To understand participants' perceptions of their local area</i></p> <p><i>Understand perceptions of community relationships</i></p>	<p><i>Participant to complete a 'my local area' worksheet.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What three words or phrases would you use to describe your local area?</i></li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe each in turn.</i></li> </ul> <p>How would you describe your local area to someone who's never been here before?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you like about the area? What do you dislike? Why and when did you move here?</li> <li>• What, if anything, are you proud of? Is there anything that you are less proud of?</li> </ul> <p><b>Can you tell me about the kind of activities you do in your local area?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you travel to in a typical day? (e.g. school, work, friends' houses). Moderator to probe if they are near far.</li> <li>• <i>Moderator to probe on any use of community assets or communal activities</i> How much time do you spend in this area in a typical day?</li> <li>• How would you describe your relationship with your neighbours?</li> <li>• Looking back over the last 5 years, to what extent has your relationship with your neighbours changed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>If relevant, moderator to probe on difference between current and past home</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>How would you describe community relations in your area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do you think there is a strong community?</li> <li>• What does this mean for you? Would you prefer the community relations were different? Would you like the community to be 'stronger' than it is?</li> <li>• How has it changed over time?</li> <li>• Are there any groups (e.g. different ages or backgrounds) who feel more or less part of the community?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think others would describe the community in this area?</li> <li>• To what extent, if at all, do you think people who don't live here think about your local area - is this somewhere people would want to live?</li> </ul> <p>What one thing, if anything, would you change about your local community?</p>
<p><b>Section 4: Attitudes towards social housing for participants personally</b></p> <p><i>Understand attitudes and experiences of social housing (including perceived benefits and disadvantages of living in social housing)</i></p> <p><i>Explore the ways in which they feel living in social housing could impact their life</i></p>	<p>I'd like to move on to think about social housing.</p> <p>What three words or phrases come to mind when you think about social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think the term 'social housing' means?</li> <li>• <i>Moderator to explain, if applicable, 'For the purpose of this conversation: Social housing are homes that are owned by councils or housing associations and rented to people at a rate that is designed to be more affordable..'</i></li> </ul> <p>What kind of people is social housing for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any particular groups of people it is particularly good for? Any it's particularly bad for?</li> <li>• In what way does this match your experience?</li> </ul> <p>Can you describe what experiences, if any, you have had with social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When, if at all, have you come into contact with social housing?</li> <li>• In what contexts have you come into contact with social housing?</li> </ul> <p>How would you describe the social housing in your area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's good about it?</li> <li>• And what is less good?</li> <li>• If you had the power to do so, what would you change about the social housing in your local area?</li> </ul> <p>Who, if anyone, do you hear talking about social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they say?</li> </ul> <p>To what extent, if at all, do you think social tenants face stigma?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what way?</li> <li>• What is the impact of this?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Section 5: Attitudes towards social housing for society more broadly</b></p>	<p>Thinking about social housing and what it means for society as a whole. What is good about it? What is bad about it?</p> <p>Imagine that there was no social housing in England.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think this would mean for society today?</li> <li>• How would England be different?</li> </ul> <p>What kind of people should social housing people be for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who, if anyone, should be the priority for social housing?</li> </ul>



<p><i>Explore perceptions of the impact of social housing more broadly</i></p> <p><i>Understand priorities, if any, for social housing in England</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does this compare to the way social housing is prioritised at the moment?</li> <li>• Who, if at all, do you think should be prioritised less than they are at the moment for social housing?</li> </ul> <p>How, if at all, does social housing impact people's ability to get work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it make it easier to get work? Harder? Why?</li> <li>• What changes, if any, could be made to social housing to make it easier for social tenants to get work?</li> </ul> <p>What changes to social housing, if any, have you noticed over time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [If participant struggles, interviewer to probe on the following issues – quality of social housing, amount of social housing, where social housing is located]</li> <li>• What do you think is behind those changes? <i>Moderator to probe Government policy / changes to local area</i></li> <li>• How do you feel about the way it's changed?</li> </ul> <p>Thinking about the future, how do you think social housing will change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think the system will improve or get worse? Why? <i>Interviewer to probe perceptions of specific issues, including</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The proportion of social housing</li> <li>○ Access and eligibility for social housing</li> <li>○ The quality of social housing</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Imagine you were in charge of the social housing system for a day. What are the top 3 issues that you would prioritise dealing with?</p> <p><i>Participant to fill in worksheet: top 3 issues for the social housing system.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why have you chosen these?</li> <li>• How would you go about dealing with them?</li> </ul> <p>How likely, or unlikely, do you think that these issues will be addressed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent, if at all, do you feel that the people who make decisions about social housing understand these issues?</li> <li>• How would you know the issues have been addressed? What would be the changes you would look for to know things have improved?</li> </ul> <p>We're doing these interviews on behalf of Shelter, the housing charity. They want to understand what different groups of people (both people who live in social housing and those who don't) think about it. They've founded a commission to give some recommendations about how social housing could be made better.</p>
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	<p>When you look to the future, what are your hopes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does your current housing fit into this?</li></ul> <p>What would be your one key piece of advice for this commission?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Participant to fill in postcard worksheet: One piece of advice for the social housing commission.</i></li></ul> <p>What is the one key point you'd like me to take away from our conversation today?</p> <p><i>Moderator to thank participant, distribute incentive, answer any final questions, provide permission to re-contact form and close.</i></p>
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## 8.3. Quantitative questionnaires

### 8.3.1. Social tenants questionnaire

#### Demographic questions

**D1. Please can you tell me your age [OPEN RESPONSE]**

**D2. Please can you tell me your gender [OPEN RESPONSE]**

- REFUSE
- PREFER NOT TO SAY

**D3. Which of the following best describes where you live? [SINGLE CODE]**

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire & Humberside
- West Midlands
- East Midlands
- Eastern
- London
- South East
- South West

**D4. Is the house or flat in which you live...? [SINGLE CODE]**

- Owned outright - without mortgage [CLOSE]
- Owned with a mortgage or loan [CLOSE]
- Rented from the council
- Rented from a housing association
- Rented from someone else [CLOSE]
- Rent free [CLOSE]
- Prefer not to answer [CLOSE]

**D5. Are you the parent or guardian of children of any of the following ages? [MULTI CODE]**

- Younger than 18 years old
- 18 years old or older
- Not applicable – I do not have any children

**D6. Which of the following best describes your household? Please select all that apply. [MULTI CODE]**

- I live alone
- I live with a partner
- I live with other adults (not including a partner)
- I live with my / my partners children under the age of 18
- I live with my / my partners children over the age of 18

## Questionnaire

**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following? [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- i. Very satisfied
  - ii. Fairly satisfied
  - iii. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
  - iv. Fairly dissatisfied
  - v. Very dissatisfied
  - vi. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
- 
- a. Your home as a whole [Fix option at the top]
  - b. The amount of rent I pay for the home I live in (please think about the value for money of your rent i.e. the cost of rent given the size and quality of your home)
  - c. The condition of your home (including it meeting basic safety standards, being free from mould and damp, being free from pests and having access to hot and cold running water etc.)
  - d. The neighbourhood you live in
  - e. Your ability to get issues with your housing resolved by your landlord (e.g. your council/housing association)

**INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT:** We would now like to talk about the difference between social housing and homes that are rented from a private landlord. Social housing are homes for rent that are owned by councils or housing associations.

**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately? When thinking about whether or not you would be better off renting privately, please imagine that you are renting based on your current needs and household income. [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- i. Better off in social housing
  - ii. Better off in a home that is rented privately
  - iii. About the same
  - iv. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
  - v. Prefer not to say [Do not read out]
- 
- a. On the whole [Fix the option at the top]
  - b. The amount of rent I would pay for the home I live in (please think about the value for money of the rent i.e. the cost of rent given the size and quality of the home)
  - c. The condition of your home (including it meeting basic safety standards, being free from mould and damp, being free from pests and having access to hot and cold running water etc.)
  - d. your ability to live in a decent neighbourhood
  - e. Your ability to live close to work
  - f. Your ability to get issues with your housing resolved by your landlord
  - g. Your risk of losing your home to eviction
  - h. How other people perceive you

**Q3. Thinking about your time living in social housing and the impact it has had on your life, for each of the following please say whether you think living in social housing has had a positive, negative or no impact? [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- i. Very positive impact
  - ii. Fairly positive impact
  - iii. No impact
  - iv. Fairly negative impact
  - v. Very negative impact
  - vi. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
  - vii. Not applicable
  - viii. Prefer not to say [Do not read out]
- 
- a. Your physical health
  - b. Your mental health
  - c. Your ability to plan for the future
  - d. Your ability to find employment
  - e. **[ASK IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN AT D5]** Your children's health and wellbeing
  - f. **[ASK IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN AT D5]** Your children's chances to get on in life

**Q4. What do you think is the greatest issue facing social housing? [OPEN CODE, CODE TO LIST OF OPTIONS]**

- Affordability of social rents / The cost of rent
- Not enough social housing / Availability of social housing / Not enough homes being built
- Length of waiting lists
- Fairness of waiting lists / Deciding who gets social housing
- Too much social housing
- Poor condition of social homes / Mould / Damp / Poor state of repair
- Safety of social homes
- Fires in social housing / More incidences like Grenfell Tower
- Poor build quality of social housing
- Difficulty in dealing with landlords to get repairs done
- Lack of tenant control over decisions to do with their home
- Limits on how long tenants can stay in their home
- Maintenance of surrounding areas
- Anti-social behaviour by residents / social tenants
- Location of social housing / Safety of areas around social housing
- Negative perception of social housing tenants
- Negative portrayal of social housing tenants
- Privatisation of social housing / Social housing driven by profits
- Other, please specify

**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [SINGLE CODE, FLIP SCALE, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- i. Strongly agree
- ii. Agree
- iii. Neither agree nor disagree
- iv. Disagree

- v. Strongly disagree
  - vi. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
- 
- a. People look down on me because I am a social tenant
  - b. People look down on me because of where I live
  - c. People in my neighbourhood work hard to improve the local area
  - d. Me and my neighbours look out for each other
  - e. I feel a part of my local community
  - f. I feel that my house is my home
  - g. I feel that I can live in my home for as long as I wish to
  - h. I feel fortunate to live in social housing
  - i. I feel embarrassed to tell people that I live in social housing
  - j. I feel proud to live in social housing
  - k. I feel that people in social housing are portrayed unfairly
  - l. I feel that politicians care about the future of social housing
  - m. My landlord listens to my concerns
  - n. My landlord resolves issues with my home in a timely way
  - o. I feel that my landlord cares about me when making decisions

**Q6. Thinking about the future of social housing, do you think that each of the following will get better, worse or stay about the same. [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- i. Much better
  - ii. A bit better
  - iii. Stay about the same
  - iv. A bit worse
  - v. Much worse
  - vi. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
- 
- a. The amount of social housing available
  - b. The amount of time people will have to wait to access social housing
  - c. **[ASK IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN AT D5]** My children's chances of getting social housing
  - d. The quality of social housing (i.e. the state of repair of social housing)
  - e. Social tenants' ability to buy their home

### Further questions for cross break analysis

**D7. Which of the following best describes where you live? [SINGLE CODE]**

- a. Urban – Population over 10,000
- b. Town and Fringe
- c. Village
- d. Hamlet & Isolated Dwelling

**D8. For each of the following pairs of statements, please say which best describes your housing? [FORCED PAIR, SINGLE CODE FOR EACH CHOICE]**

	Statement A	Statement B
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Choice 1	I live in a high-rise building (for example a tower block with 5 floors or more)	I live in a building that has fewer than 5 floors – e.g. a house, smaller block of flats etc. <b>[Code to low density]</b>
Choice 2	I live in an area where [council housing/housing association homes] are mixed in with an equal or greater number of private home owners or renters	I live in a development of homes or flats that are mostly or entirely rented by [the council /housing association].

**D9. Which of the following best describes the type of home you live in? [SINGLE CODE]**

- a. House – with no other household living above or below
- b. Maisonette – two storeys with another household living above or below
- c. Flat – one storey with another household living above or below

**D10. To the best of your knowledge, how many years have you lived in social housing? [OPEN CODE]**

**D11. Which of the following best describes your current working status?**

- a. Working full time - working 30 hours per week or more
- b. Working part time - working between 8 and 29 hours per week
- c. Not working but seeking work or temporarily unemployed
- d. Not working and not seeking work/ disabled
- e. Not working and not seeking work/ Student
- f. Retired on a state pension only
- g. Retired with a private pension
- h. House person, housewife, house husband, etc.

**D12. What is the combined annual income of your household, prior to tax being deducted? [SINGLE CODE]**

Up to £10,000  
 £10,001 to £15,000  
 £15,001 to 20,000  
 £20,001 to 25,000  
 £25,001 to £30,000  
 £30,001 to £35,000",  
 £35,001 to £40,000",  
 £40,001 to £45,000",  
 £45,001 to £50,000",  
 £50,001 to £55,000",  
 £55,001 to £60,000",  
 £60,001 to £65,000",

£65,001 to £70,000",  
£70,001 to £75,000  
£75,001 to £80,001  
£80,001 or more",  
Prefer not to answer

**D13. What is the total amount your household pays each calendar month in rental payments for the property you live in. If you are unable to give a precise amount please give an estimate.**

**If you receive Housing Benefit, please record the full rental cost, regardless of the amount you receive in Housing Benefit.**

**If you live in shared accommodation please only state the rent paid by yourself and anyone else whose income you share. [OPEN CODE]**

- [RECORD]
- Prefer not to answer

**D14. Are you or your partner in receipt of housing benefit? [OPEN CODE]**

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

**D15. Some people can easily afford to pay their rent, others find it more difficult to pay. Thinking about your situation, which of the following statements best describe how you feel about paying your rent? [SINGLE CODE]**

- [I/ we] are keeping up without any difficulty
- [I/ we] are keeping up, but struggle from time to time
- [I/ we] are keeping up, but it is a constant struggle
- [I/ we] are falling behind with payments
- Don't know [Do not read out]
- Prefer not to say [Do not read out]



### 8.3.2. General public questionnaire

#### Demographic questions

**D1. Please can you tell me your age [OPEN RESPONSE]**

**D2. Please can you tell me your gender [OPEN RESPONSE]**

- REFUSE
- PREFER NOT TO SAY

**D3. Which of the following best describes where you live? [SINGLE CODE]**

- j. North East
- k. North West
- l. Yorkshire & Humberside
- m. West Midlands
- n. East Midlands
- o. Eastern
- p. London
- q. South East
- r. South West

**D4. Is the house or flat in which you live...? [SINGLE CODE]**

- h. Owned outright - without mortgage
- i. Owned with a mortgage or loan
- j. Rented from the council
- k. Rented from a housing association
- l. Rented from someone else
- m. Rent free
- n. Prefer not to answer [CLOSE]

**D5. Are you the parent or guardian of children of any of the following ages? [MULTI CODE]**

- d. Younger than 18 years old
- e. 18 years old or older
- f. Not applicable – I do not have any children

**D6. Which of the following best describes your household? Please select all that apply. [MULTI CODE]**

- f. I live alone
- g. I live with a partner
- h. I live with other adults (not including a partner)
- i. I live with my / my partners children under the age of 18
- j. I live with my / my partners children over the age of 18

#### Questionnaire

**Q1. Thinking about your housing, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following? [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- vii. Very satisfied
  - viii. Fairly satisfied
  - ix. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
  - x. Fairly dissatisfied
  - xi. Very dissatisfied
  - xii. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
- 
- f. Your home as a whole [Fix option at the top]
  - g. [ASK IF D4=C/D/E]: The amount of rent I pay for the home I live in (please think about the value for money of your rent i.e. the cost of rent given the size and quality of your home)
  - h. The condition of your home (including it meeting basic safety standards, being free from mould and damp, being free from pests and having access to hot and cold running water etc.)
  - i. The neighbourhood you live in
  - j. [ASK IF D4=C/D/E]: Your ability to get issues with your housing resolved by your landlord [ADD CLARIFICATION IF D4=C/D] (e.g. your council/housing association)

**INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT:** We would now like to talk about the difference between social housing and homes that are rented from a private landlord. Social housing are homes for rent that are owned by councils or housing associations.

[ASK IF D4=C/D/E]

**Q2. For each of the following areas please say whether you think you would be better off in social housing or renting privately? When thinking about whether or not you would be better off renting [privately/a social home], please imagine that you are renting based on your current needs and household income. [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- vi. Better off in social housing
  - vii. Better off in a home that is rented privately
  - viii. About the same
  - ix. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
  - x. Prefer not to say [Do not read out]
- 
- i. On the whole [Fix the option at the top]
  - j. The amount of rent I would pay for the home I live in (please think about the value for money of the rent i.e. the cost of rent given the size and quality of the home)
  - k. The condition of your home (including it meeting basic safety standards, being free from mould and damp, being free from pests and having access to hot and cold running water etc.)
  - l. your ability to live in a decent neighbourhood
  - m. Your ability to live close to work
  - n. Your ability to get issues with your housing resolved by your landlord
  - o. Your risk of losing your home to eviction
  - p. How other people perceive you

[ASK IF D4=A/B/C/D/E]

**Q3. Thinking about your time living in [a home you own / private rental accommodation/social housing] and the impact it has had on your life, for each of the following please say whether you think living in social housing has had a positive, negative or no impact? [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- ix. Very positive impact
  - x. Fairly positive impact
  - xi. No impact
  - xii. Fairly negative impact
  - xiii. Very negative impact
  - xiv. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
  - xv. Not applicable
  - xvi. Prefer not to say [Do not read out]
- 
- g. Your physical health
  - h. Your mental health
  - i. Your ability to plan for the future
  - j. Your ability to find employment
  - k. [ASK IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN AT D5] Your children's health and wellbeing
  - l. [ASK IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN AT D5] Your children's chances to get on in life

**Q4. What do you think is the greatest issue facing social housing? [OPEN CODE, CODE TO LIST OF OPTIONS]**

- Affordability of social rents / The cost of rent
- Not enough social housing / Availability of social housing / Not enough homes being built
- Length of waiting lists
- Fairness of waiting lists / Deciding who gets social housing
- Too much social housing
- Poor condition of social homes / Mould / Damp / Poor state of repair
- Safety of social homes
- Fires in social housing / More incidents like Grenfell Tower
- Poor build quality of social housing
- Difficulty in dealing with landlords to get repairs done
- Lack of tenant control over decisions to do with their home
- Limits on how long tenants can stay in their home
- Maintenance of surrounding areas
- Anti-social behaviour by residents / social tenants
- Location of social housing / Safety of areas around social housing
- Negative perception of social housing tenants
- Negative portrayal of social housing tenants
- Privatisation of social housing / Social housing driven by profits
- Other, please specify

**Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [SINGLE CODE, FLIP SCALE, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- vii. Strongly agree
- viii. Agree

- ix. Neither agree nor disagree
  - x. Disagree
  - xi. Strongly disagree
  - xii. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
- 
- p. [ASK IF D4=C/D]: People look down on me because I am a social tenant
  - q. [ASK IF D4=E]: People look down on me because I am a private renter
  - r. [ASK IF D4=A/B]: People look down on me because I own my own home
  - s. People look down on me because of where I live
  - t. People in my neighbourhood work hard to improve the local area
  - u. Me and my neighbours look out for each other
  - v. I feel a part of my local community
  - w. I feel that my house is my home
  - x. I feel that I can live in my home for as long as I wish to
  - y. [ASK IF D4=C/D]: I feel fortunate to live in social housing
  - z. [ASK IF D4=E]: I feel fortunate to live in a privately rented home
  - aa. [ASK IF D4=A/B]: I feel fortunate to live in a home I own
  - bb. [ASK IF D4=C/D]: I feel embarrassed to tell people that I live in social housing
  - cc. [ASK IF D4=E]: I feel embarrassed to tell people that I live in a privately rented home
  - dd. [ASK IF D4=A/B]: I feel embarrassed to tell people that I live in a home I own
  - ee. [ASK IF D4=C/D]: I feel proud to live in social housing
  - ff. [ASK IF D4=E]: I feel proud to live in a privately rented home
  - gg. [ASK IF D4=A/B]: I feel proud to live in a home I own
  - hh. I feel that people in social housing are portrayed unfairly
  - ii. I feel that politicians care about the future of social housing
  - jj. [ASK IF D4=C/D/E]: My landlord listens to my concerns
  - kk. [ASK IF D4=C/D/E]: My landlord resolves issues with my home in a timely way
  - ll. [ASK IF D4=C/D/E]: I feel that my landlord thinks about my interests when making decisions

**Q6. Thinking about the future of social housing, do you think that each of the following will get better, worse or stay about the same. [SINGLE CODE PER OPTION, RANDOMISE OPTIONS]**

- vii. Much better
  - viii. A bit better
  - ix. Stay about the same
  - x. A bit worse
  - xi. Much worse
  - xii. Don't know / No opinion [Do not read out]
- 
- f. The amount of social housing available
  - g. The amount of time people will have to wait to access social housing
  - h. **[ASK IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN AT D5]** My children's chances of getting social housing
  - i. The quality of social housing (i.e. the state of repair of social housing)
  - j. Social tenants' ability to buy their home

**Further questions for cross break analysis**

**D7. Which of the following best describes where you live? [SINGLE CODE]**

- e. Urban – Population over 10,000
- f. Town and Fringe
- g. Village
- h. Hamlet & Isolated Dwelling

**D8. For each of the following pairs of statements, please say which best describes your housing? [FORCED PAIR, SINGLE CODE FOR EACH CHOICE]**

	Statement A	Statement B
Choice 1	I live in a high-rise building (for example a tower block with 5 floors or more)	I live in a building that has fewer than 5 floors – e.g. a house, smaller block of flats etc. <b>[Code to low density]</b>
Choice 2	I live in an area where [council housing/housing association homes] are mixed in with an equal or greater number of private home owners or renters	I live in a development of homes or flats that are mostly or entirely rented by [the council /housing association].

**D9. Which of the following best describes the type of home you live in? [SINGLE CODE]**

- d. House – with no other household living above or below
- e. Maisonette – two storeys with another household living above or below
- f. Flat – one storey with another household living above or below

[ASK IF D4=C/D]: **D10. To the best of your knowledge, how many years have you lived in social housing? [OPEN CODE]**

**D11. Which of the following best describes your current working status?**

- i. Working full time - working 30 hours per week or more
- j. Working part time - working between 8 and 29 hours per week
- k. Not working but seeking work or temporarily unemployed
- l. Not working and not seeking work/ disabled
- m. Not working and not seeking work/ Student
- n. Retired on a state pension only
- o. Retired with a private pension
- p. House person, housewife, house husband, etc.

**D12. What is the combined annual income of your household, prior to tax being deducted? [SINGLE CODE]**

- Up to £10,000
- £10,001 to £15,000
- £15,001 to 20,000

£20,001 to 25,000  
£25,001 to £30,000  
£30,001 to £35,000",  
£35,001 to £40,000",  
£40,001 to £45,000",  
£45,001 to £50,000",  
£50,001 to £55,000",  
£55,001 to £60,000",  
£60,001 to £65,000",  
£65,001 to £70,000",  
£70,001 to £75,000  
£75,001 to £80,001  
£80,001 or more",  
Prefer not to answer

[ASK IF D4=B/C/D/E]:

**D13. What is the total amount your household pays each calendar month in [mortgage/rental] payments for the property you live in. If you are unable to give a precise amount please give an estimate.**

**If you receive Housing Benefit, please record the full rental cost, regardless of the amount you receive in Housing Benefit.**

**If you live in shared accommodation please only state the rent paid by yourself and anyone else whose income you share. [OPEN CODE]**

- [RECORD]
- Prefer not to answer

[ASK IF D4=C/D/E]:

**D14. Are you or your partner in receipt of housing benefit? [OPEN CODE]**

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

[ASK IF D4=B/C/D/E]:

**D15. Some people can easily afford to pay their [mortgage/rent], others find it more difficult to pay. Thinking about your situation, which of the following statements best describe how you feel about paying your rent? [SINGLE CODE]**

- [IF D6=B: We are; IF D6=A/C/D/E: I am] keeping up without any difficulty
- [IF D6=B: We are; IF D6=A/C/D/E: I am] keeping up, but struggle from time to time
- [IF D6=B: We are; IF D6=A/C/D/E: I am] keeping up, but it is a constant struggle
- [IF D6=B: We are; IF D6=A/C/D/E: I am] falling behind with payments
- Don't know [Do not read out]
- Prefer not to say [Do not read out]

## 8.4. Workshop discussion guide

Session	Content
<b>Session 0: Registration and pre-task</b>  <i>Welcome participants and assign them to their tables</i>  <i>Gain initial insight into spontaneous thoughts about housing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants to arrive, collect name badges and are allocated their table number</li> <li>Teas and coffee available</li> <li>As participants wait for the workshop to start, they are to fill in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consent forms</li> <li>Worksheet 1-'3 biggest issues facing housing today'</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Session 1: Welcome, introductions and warm-up</b>  <i>Participants to understand the purpose of the day and what is expected of them</i>  <i>Understand top-of-mind associations regarding housing</i>  <i>Understand spontaneous thoughts on social housing and where it currently fits (and should fit) in the broader context of housing</i>	<p><i>Plenary session (10 minutes)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead moderator to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome customers and explain the purpose of the day</li> <li>Inform participants that they have been recruited because of their housing experience and expertise. Throughout the day we may be discussing issues that you may not have had direct experience with but nonetheless we are still interested in your opinions and what you think</li> <li>Introduce the BT staff and, where relevant, Shelter</li> <li>Run through the outline agenda and any ground rules</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Table discussion (15 mins)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants introduce themselves at tables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Their first name and something about themselves</li> </ul> </li> <li>Participants to share their response to worksheet 1 ('3 biggest issues facing housing today') <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Moderator to flipchart responses</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>What are the most important issues facing housing in England? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you think are behind these issues?</li> <li>How, if at all has the situation changed over the past five years?</li> <li>Is this situation getting better or getting worse? Why?</li> <li><i>Moderator to flipchart responses</i></li> </ul> </li> <li><i>Moderator to explain:</i> I'd now like to understand where social housing fits within housing more generally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What role does social housing play in the make-up of housing overall in England?</li> <li>How, if at all, has this changed?</li> <li>What are the most important issues facing social housing?</li> <li>What should the role should social housing play in the future?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Plenary discussion (10 mins)</i></p> <p>Table moderators to feedback where they have got to in their discussion so far</p>
<b>Session 2: Introduction to social housing and the research</b>	<p><i>Pub quiz (15 minutes)</i></p> <p>Lead moderator to lead pub quiz, sharing information on social housing</p> <p><i>Plenary session (10 minutes)</i></p>

<p><i>To build knowledge of social housing ensuring all participants are on the same page</i></p> <p><i>To set the 'exam question' for the rest of the workshop</i></p>	<p>Lead moderator to present an overview of research findings with an opportunity for Q&amp;A</p> <p>Lead moderator to outline the purpose for the rest of the workshop:</p> <p><i>The commission have already recognised a need for more social housing / a bigger social housing sector. So today, we are going to focus on how social housing can be improved so it works better for those already living in social housing but also so it works for those who may benefit from social housing if it became a larger and more mainstream option in the housing market.</i></p> <p><i>Table session (5 minutes)</i></p> <p>Moderator to ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you think of what you heard?</li> <li>• What surprised you, if anything, about what you heard?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 3: The future of social housing – developing general principles of what social housing should aim to achieve</b></p> <p><i>Explore what the future of social housing should try and achieve</i></p> <p><i>Create principles that should inform how recommendations are evaluated</i></p>	<p><i>Table session (20 minutes)</i></p> <p>Each table to work to pull together a set of key principles for social housing answering, 'What should social housing aim to achieve?' and moderator to flipchart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the current role of social housing?</li> <li>• What should be the aim of social housing?</li> </ul> <p>In pairs, come up with ideas of things that should be kept in mind when thinking about how to improve social housing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you all put down?</li> </ul> <p><i>Table moderator to bring together key principles for social housing.</i></p> <p><i>Plenary session (15 minutes)</i></p> <p>Each table to pick a participant to feed main principles back to the room</p> <p>Each participant to be given two stickers which they can use to vote for the most important principles.</p> <p>Lead facilitator to probe the reasons behind the most popular principles.</p>
<p><b>Session 5: Neighbourhoods and Communities</b></p> <p><i>Understand participants' experiences</i></p> <p><i>Explore some initial ideas on how to overcome some of the challenges faced in this area</i></p> <p><i>To explore and develop recommendations</i></p>	<p>Moderator to explain we are now going to talk about neighbourhoods and communities</p> <p><b><u>Experience</u></b></p> <p><i>Table discussion (15 minutes)</i></p> <p><i>Each participant to complete Worksheet 4 - 'What 3 things are most important in making a good neighbourhood and community?' and 4a - 'What 3 things make a bad neighbourhood and community?'</i></p> <p><i>Table moderator to bring all groups together to discuss:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you write down for your most important factors for a good community and neighbourhood? Why?</li> <li>• [If unmentioned] How important, or unimportant, is a sense of community in building a good neighbourhood?</li> <li>• How would you describe the sense of community in your neighbourhood? What things, if any, do you take part in in your area?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you write down for what makes a bad community and neighbourhood? Why?</li> <li>• What do you think are the underlying causes of these?</li> <li>• How do you think the aspects of a bad community or neighbourhood we have discussed can be overcome to create a good neighbourhood and strong community? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Moderator to flipchart responses</li> <li>○ Moderator to listen out for and probe any mentions of the recommendations (where SH is built, the design of SH, integration of SH with other housing)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Out of these, which do you think would be most important in building a good neighbourhood? Why do you say that?</li> <li>• What challenges, if any, do you think there would be in making this work in practice? How could these be overcome?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Recommendations</u></b></p> <p><i>Table discussion (20 mins)</i></p> <p>We are going to present you with a few ideas of how this situation can be improved. We want to know your honest opinion to this idea and whether or not you think it will make a difference. Importantly you are the experts, and the most likely to know what would work well or be helpful in the real world, and what won't.</p> <p><i>Location</i></p> <p>New social housing should be located in places that will have access to good jobs, schools, public transport and local amenities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this the case where you live? What impact, does it have? What, if any, do you think it would have for you and your neighbours?</li> <li>• To what extent would it be effective in the real world? Why?</li> <li>• What would work well?</li> <li>• What are the challenges?</li> <li>• How do you think it compares to some of the ideas that you came up with?</li> </ul> <p><i>Design</i></p> <p>Moderator to present participants with images of design/different estates and probe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you like/dislike? Why?</li> </ul> <p>Another recommendation is that new social housing should not stand out as social housing by its design.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking at the pictures, can you point out any that stand out as social housing? Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe fully on answers and preferences for different designs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What do you think it would be like to live there? Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If it worked well, what impact, if any, do you think it would have on the lives of those in social housing?</li> <li>○ To what extent would it be effective in the real world? Why?</li> <li>○ What would work well?</li> <li>○ What are the challenges?</li> <li>○ How do you think it compares to some of the ideas that you came up with?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Integration</i></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A final recommendation is that new social housing should blend into existing neighbourhoods and avoid having very large estates all reserved for social housing. If it worked well, what impact, if any, do you think it would have on the lives of those in social housing?</li> <li>• To what extent would it be effective in the real world? Why?</li> <li>• What would work well?</li> <li>• What are the challenges?</li> <li>• How do you think it compares to some of the ideas that you came up with?</li> </ul> <p><i>Table discussion (15 mins)</i></p> <p>With that in mind, if you were in charge of designing a new social housing estate, what would be the most important factors you would think about to make it a good community and neighbourhood?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Moderator to remind participants of the ideas that they came up with in discussing how to create a good community</i></li> <li>• <i>Flipchart responses</i></li> <li>• Which of these aspects would you prioritise over others?</li> </ul> <p>What are the real-world implications and consequences of your ideal features of a social housing development? How would it work in reality? Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the implications/consequences of prioritising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Space?</li> <li>○ Location?</li> <li>○ Design?</li> <li>○ Integration?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Some people have said that prioritising the integration of social housing into mixed housing areas might result in a decrease in community spirit? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What do you think of this? Why?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>What do you think could be done to improve the community and neighbourhood in your own housing estate or development?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would that work in reality?</li> </ul> <p><i>Plenary session (10 minutes)</i></p> <p>Each table to pick a participant to feedback initial thoughts on factors that contribute to good neighbourhoods and communities, thoughts on their ideal estate as well as reflections on the recommendation</p> <p>Lead moderator to probe and ask the wider group whether they agree or disagree with points raised</p>
<p><b>Session 4: Having your say</b></p> <p>Understand participants' experiences</p> <p>Explore some initial ideas on how to overcome some of the challenges faced in this area</p> <p>To explore and develop recommendations</p>	<p>Moderator to explain we are now going to talk about having your say and the ability to influence decisions (i.e. the extent to which you feel listened to or have control over decision about your housing)</p> <p><b><u>Experience</u></b></p> <p><i>Table discussion (20 mins)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of decisions are made about social housing... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Regarding your own home? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Probe with example if needed: your kitchen being renovated</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Regarding your local estate or development? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Probe with example if needed: installing dog litter bins, community centres, communal spaces etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Regarding social housing regionally?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Probe with example if needed: the type of housing to be built in a new development (i.e. flats or houses), what services there are for social tenants and where these are located</li> <li>○ Regarding social housing nationally? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Probe with example if needed: a national scheme to make better use of community centres (i.e. providing funding, what kinds of activities should be encouraged), what parts of the country social housing is built, what the national standards for social housing should be, what rights should social housing tenants have</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who makes these decisions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: own home, own estate, regionally, nationally</li> </ul> </li> <li>• To what extent do you have a say in these decisions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: own home, own estate, regionally, nationally</li> <li>○ In what ways can you currently have your say in these decisions? I.e. tenant association, resident association, neighbourhood group</li> <li>○ Probe on personal experiences of these</li> <li>○ [Where appropriate] What impact did having this influence have on your housing?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How important is it for social tenants to have their say in these decisions?</li> <li>• In what ways can you currently have your say in these decisions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe: own home, own estate, regionally, nationally</li> <li>○ Probe for personal experiences</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What impact does this have on social housing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What works? What doesn't work?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• To what extent do you feel you that those who make the decisions listen to what you have to say? Why?</li> <li>• How can the situation be improved so that your voice can be heard along with other social tenants? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What would this look like in reality?</li> <li>○ How would you know it was making a difference?</li> <li>○ What are the challenges in achieving this?</li> <li>○ What barriers are there to social tenants having their say? (time, other priorities)</li> <li>○ How can you involve different type of tenants</li> </ul> </li> <li>• To what extent do you <i>want</i> to be involved in these decisions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How interested are you in decisions being made?</li> <li>○ What sort of decisions are particularly important for you to have your say in?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b><u>Current situation</u></b>  <i>Table discussion (5 mins)</i>  Table moderator to present slides on current situation</p> <p>Moderator to gather initial thoughts and flipchart:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think of this?</li> <li>• How do you think this situation could be improved?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Recommendation</u></b>  <i>Table discussion (25 mins)</i>  We are going to present you with an idea of how this situation can be improved. We want to know your honest opinion to this idea and whether or not you think</p>
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	<p>it will make a difference. Importantly you are the experts, and the most likely to know what would work well or be helpful in the real world, and what won't. We want to now want to work together to talk through these issues and try and improve this recommendation so it can actually make a difference.</p> <p>Table moderator to present the recommendation.</p> <p>Extra information on Healthwatch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthwatch works at both the national and local level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ That means each local authority has its own Healthwatch to gather people's views at a local level</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Users of health and social care services can have their say in their local area by submitting comments through the website of their local Healthwatch, calling them, or contacting them through social media (twitter, facebook)</li> <li>• Healthwatch staff also attend local events and community groups and disseminate information and news to the local community</li> <li>• Healthwatch feed users' views back to the health and social care providers to show them what is working well and what is working less well to shape and improve services in the future</li> <li>• Healthwatch is run by a combination of experts and volunteers, along with a strategic advisory board</li> </ul> <p>Extra information on Which?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which? exists to make individuals as powerful as the organisations they deal with in their daily lives.</li> <li>• They want to make things better for consumers, and to raise standards across the board.</li> <li>• They test goods and services and publish the results, e.g. testing household products, like washing machines and digital cameras. This helps consumers make informed decisions about the goods and services they use.</li> <li>• Consumers can have their say and discuss the key issues facing consumers through Which?'s discussion site, as well as commenting on the products they test</li> <li>• They campaign too, encouraging companies to change their practices where they are not meeting consumer</li> </ul> <p>Participants to each complete worksheet 2a – 'Initial thoughts on the recommendation'</p> <p>Moderator to probe and fill out Worksheet 3 – 'Recommendation feedback':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think of this idea? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If it worked well, what impact, if any, do you think it would have on your life/ your life if you lived in social housing?</li> <li>○ To what extent would it be effective in the real world? Why?</li> <li>○ To what extent is this something you could get involved with? Why/Why not?</li> <li>○ What would work well?</li> <li>○ What are the challenges? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How do you think it could overcome the issue that social tenants don't feel politicians care about the future of social housing?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ How can it be improved?/ What would work better?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Plenary session (10 minutes)</i></p>
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	<p>Each table to pick a participant to feedback initial thoughts on how the problem could be tackled, as well thoughts on the recommendation.</p> <p>Lead moderator to probe and ask the wider group whether they agree or disagree with points raised</p>
<p><b>Session 5: Regulations and what rights / standards tenants should be able to expect</b></p> <p><i>Understand participants' experiences</i></p> <p><i>Explore some initial ideas on how to overcome some of the challenges faced in this area</i></p> <p><i>To explore and develop recommendations</i></p>	<p>Moderator to explain we are now going to talk about keeping standards high, fixing things when they go wrong and holding landlords accountable, ensuring they are doing their job.</p> <p><b><u>Experience</u></b></p> <p><i>Table discussion (15 mins)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leaving housing to one side for a moment, what do you think of when I say 'regulation'? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does a regulator do?</li> <li>What is the point of having a regulator?</li> <li>Can anyone think of any examples of regulators?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Moderator to present slide on regulators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why is it important to have regulators? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the impact of having regulators?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Coming back to social housing, what rights, if any, do you think social tenants have?</li> <li>Who is responsible for keeping standards up in social housing?</li> <li>What regulated standards, if any, do you think there are when it comes to social housing?</li> <li>What areas of social housing do you think there might be regulated standards for? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probe around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Small maintenance issues: e.g. leaking tap</i></li> <li><i>Neighbourhood issue: ASB by neighbours</i></li> <li><i>Large safety issue: e.g. fire hazard, doors that won't open, bad electrical wiring</i></li> <li><i>Existential issue: e.g. home knocked down and rebuilt as part of regeneration/ eviction</i></li> <li><i>Timeliness / response from landlords</i></li> <li><i>Communal areas</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>And what do you think those standards should be? Think about: what do you feel you should be entitled to in all of the following situations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probe around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Small maintenance issues: e.g. leaking tap</i></li> <li><i>Neighbourhood issue: ASB by neighbours</i></li> <li><i>Large safety issue: e.g. fire hazard, doors that won't open, bad electrical wiring</i></li> <li><i>Existential issue: e.g. home knocked down and rebuilt as part of regeneration/ eviction</i></li> <li><i>Timeliness / response from landlords</i></li> <li><i>Communal areas</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>How important is it for these standards to be regulated?</li> <li>In an ideal world, how would social housing be regulated? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What would this look like in everyday life?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b><u>Current situation</u></b></p> <p><i>Table discussion (10 mins)</i></p> <p>Table moderator to present slides on current situation</p>

	<p>NB, when presenting slide on The Regulator of Social Housing, moderators to add: at the 'economic / consumer standards': <i>E.g. are their accounts in order? 'consumer standards' e.g. management of tenancies, maintenance. The regulator does proactively police the economic standards. However, their regulation of consumer standards is different.</i></p> <p>Moderator to gather initial thoughts and flipchart:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think of this?</li> <li>• Have you heard of the regulator?</li> <li>• To what extent do you think this is sufficient?</li> <li>• How do you think this situation could be improved?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Recommendation</u></b></p> <p><i>Table discussion (25 mins)</i></p> <p>We are going to present you with an idea of how this situation can be improved. We want to know your honest opinion to this idea and whether or not you think it will make a difference. Importantly you are the experts, and the most likely to know what would work well or be helpful in the real world, and what won't. We want to now want to work together to talk through these issues and try and improve this recommendation so it can actually make a difference.</p> <p>Table moderator to present the recommendation.</p> <p>Participants to each complete worksheet 2b – 'Initial thoughts on the recommendation'</p> <p>Moderator to probe and fill out Worksheet 3 – 'Recommendation feedback':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think of this idea? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If it worked well, what impact, if any, do you think it would have on your life/your life if you lived in social housing?</li> <li>○ To what extent would it change the way you felt about living in social housing?</li> <li>○ To what extent would it be effective in the real world? Why?</li> <li>○ How do you imagine 'regular inspections of landlords' would work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What would be their purpose? Why?</li> <li>▪ Probe on how they would work in practice: complaints-based, random spot-checks, coming into the home or on the doorstep</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ To what extent is this something you could get involved with? Why/Why not?</li> <li>○ What would work well?</li> <li>○ What are the challenges? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If inspections/spot checks discussed: How would you feel about having the regulator turn up and inspect your home?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ How can it be improved?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Plenary session (10 minutes)</i></p> <p>Each table to pick a participant to feedback initial thoughts on how the problem could be tackled, as well thoughts on the recommendation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead moderator to probe and ask the wider group whether they agree or disagree with points raised</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Session 8: Wrap-up, thanks and close</b></p> <p><i>To understand final reflections</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrap up: lead facilitator to ask everyone which recommendation they would prioritise                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participants to vote – count votes</li> <li>○ Discuss reasons for winning recommendation</li> <li>○ Invitation to contribute any further recommendations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participants to fill out                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Worksheet 5 – ‘Final thoughts’ including:                                 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What one thing should be done to improve social housing and why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Permission to recontact forms</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Lead facilitator to thank and close</li> <li>• Shelter representative to add any final thoughts</li> </ul>
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## 8.5. Workshop recommendation slides

### 8.5.1. Tenants voice

## Recommendation

**Introduction of a government funded organisation which is formally recognised and funded by government to represent the views of tenants in social housing to national, regional and local government.**

This could operate the consumer champion organisation 'Which?', or the Government's new 'HealthWatch' for the NHS



The new body would:

- Collect tenants views on issues facing them
- Carry out research into these issues
- Raise issues with government and other bodies on issues affecting tenants and publicise research findings
- Provide tenants with information about services in their area and develop a two-way dialogue with them
- Help to develop and strengthen the representative tenants' movement, e.g. local groups

### 8.5.2. Regulation of housing providers

## Recommendation...

**A new regulator working like Ofsted to identify good as well as inadequate practice.**  
Key features of this regulator include the following:

1. **Regular inspections of social landlords.** This would result in a rating which could lead to intervention by the Government if they were found to be failing
2. **Raising awareness of the regulator** so that tenants know how they can raise concerns about their home or community
3. **Investigating tenant complaints** and enforcement action for social landlords that are found to be in breach of standards
4. **Lowering the conditions** at which the regulator can intervene themselves from what it is currently "*in the event of serious detriment*" to a lower standard like "*if there is a risk to the wellbeing of residents*". Or removing the requirement completely.
5. **Complete transparency** about how they work, the conclusions of their investigations and the reasons behind these conclusion



### 8.5.3. Building neighbourhoods and community

## Recommendation...

### New social housing should



- Be located in places that will have access to good jobs, schools, public transport and local amenities
- Blend into existing neighbourhoods
  - Avoiding having very large estates all reserved for social housing
- Not stand out as social housing by its design

