

ACCESS TO SHELTER'S SERVICES FOR PEOPLE OF COLOUR

FEBRUARY 2025

We know that some groups of people find it harder to get fair and equal treatment because of their ethnicity. Shelter wanted to know if this was true of the advice and support they offer.

Shelter asked a charity called brap to speak to Black people and People of Colour. People of Colour are people who are not White. The research focused on whether:

- Black people and People of Colour have heard about Shelter (for example, on Facebook or through neighbours/friends)
- they would go to Shelter if they had a housing problem
- they had a good experience if they had already been to Shelter

As part of the research, people took part in surveys, interviews, and focus groups from different parts of England. Over 300 people took part, including Shelter staff and people who have spoken to Shelter in the past. Listed below are some of the things Black people and People of Colour said about Shelter. Shelter will use this feedback to change the way it delivers services.

WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

Awareness of Shelter

The Shelter brand is generally well-known. However, many Black people and People of Colour are unaware of the full range of Shelter's services. Shelter is often perceived as distant, formal, and not tailored for diverse communities. This affects trust and engagement. A lot of people said they would prefer to go to smaller, more local charities for help with their housing.

What People of Colour need help with

People said they contact Shelter for real-time, person-to-person support. Issues like rent arrears, eviction notices, and poor maintenance in temporary housing were raised frequently. Participants emphasised that discussing these issues with someone directly would help them explain the specific challenges they face, especially when dealing with discrimination.

How people first contact Shelter

The experience of using Shelter's digital and phone services was mixed. Some praised tools like the webchat for being helpful and efficient. However, some people can get frustrated with text-heavy online advice pages, especially people who speak English as a second language. They felt that the information was too complex or inaccessible when they needed quick, clear answers to resolve their housing problems.



Dignity and respect

Respect and empathy from staff were common themes. People said they don't always feel respected when Shelter staff:

- Don't get their names right. This might be because the Shelter staff member has mispronounced their name or called them by their first name without asking for permission
- Don't give them the chance to tell their whole story in the way they want
- Don't look like they are listening or look tired or distracted

Some Black people and People of Colour said that public services, like doctors, the police, or JobCentres, can sometimes make them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. This is because these services can give the impression that they don't believe what people say or assume they have done something wrong. These assumptions are often based on stereotypes about Black people and People of Colour. It is important for service providers to show clearly that they do not hold these assumptions, so everyone feels respected and treated fairly. Although service users didn't report this happening at Shelter, Black people and People of Colour said Shelter could do more to show they don't believe these stereotypes.

Speaking up

Some people working at Shelter said their colleagues could sometimes do more to speak up for Black people and People of Colour when they experience poor treatment from a landlord, housing association, or local council.

WHAT COULD SHELTER DO NEXT?

Based on what people said, brap suggested Shelter could:

1. Spend more time building links with local community groups to help communities of colour learn more about Shelter
2. Review the types of services it offers to see if these can better match what Black people and People of Colour need and want
3. Give Shelter staff time to think about how they treat clients and handle cases. This reflection can help them feel confident and refreshed when supporting Black people and People of Colour
4. Review some of its forms to see if people can be asked questions about their emotions and how they feel
5. Provide development to staff so they are aware of some of the assumptions public bodies sometimes have of Black people and People of Colour

Shelter is committed to addressing the issues raised in this research and ensuring everyone can access their help and support. If you would like to hear more about what they are doing, or would like a copy of the full research report, please contact mette_isaksen@shelter.org.uk.

