



# LIVING HOME STANDARD

Developed by the British public to  
define what everyone needs from a home  
in order to live rather than just get by.

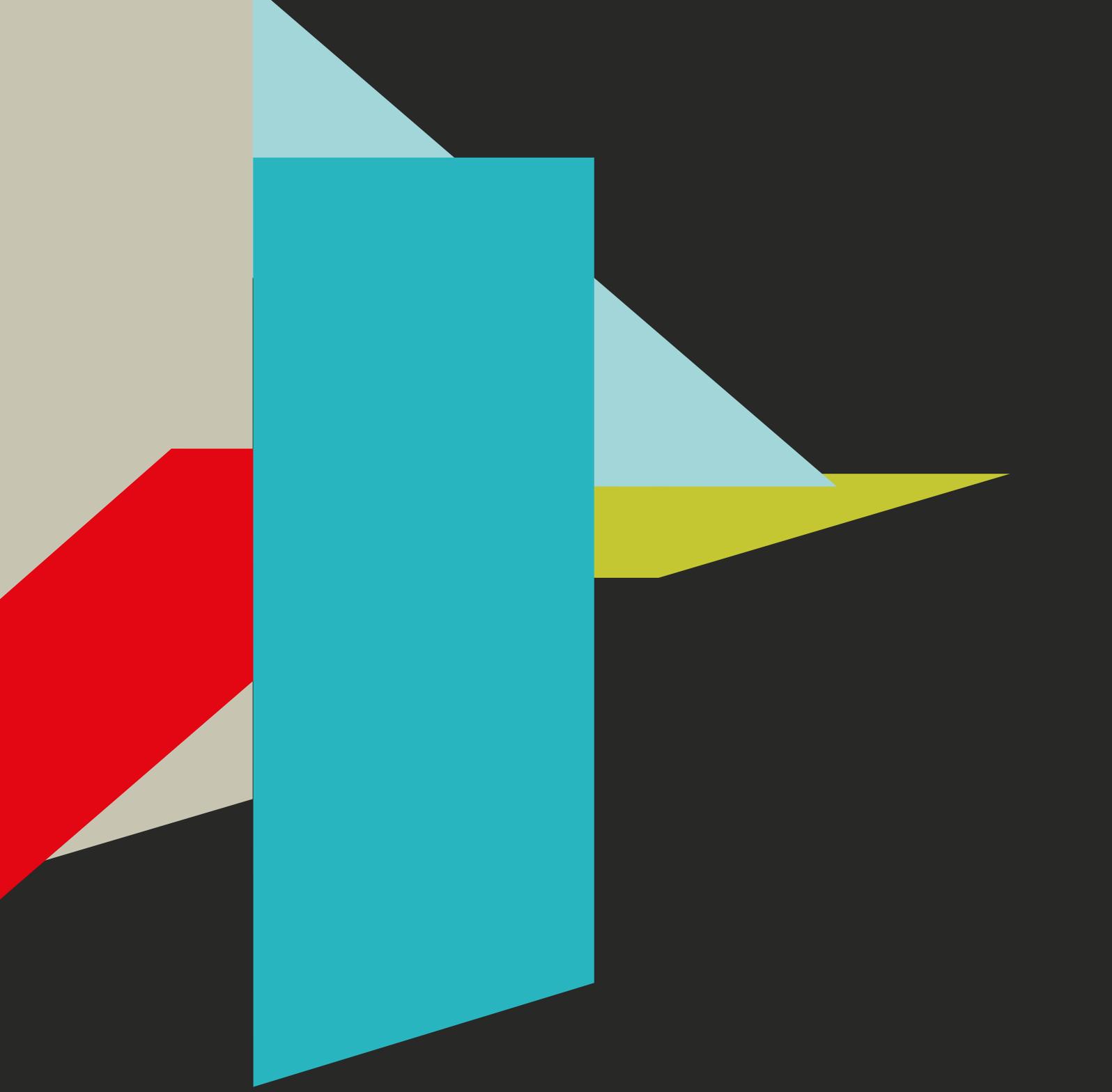
Shelter



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## Campbell Robb, Chief Executive, Shelter

**During 2016 Shelter turned 50, a milestone in any life. It is one we felt that deserved reflection on the past, on successes and failures as well as thoughts on the future and what it might hold. In many ways, however, we wish we weren't here at all; that we had succeeded in our founding ambition – to create a society where a safe, secure, affordable home was available to everyone and that homelessness, as a blight on our country, had been eliminated.**

Sadly, despite our many successes over these years, the housing crisis facing this country is as challenging and as far from fixed as it was in 1966. Fewer houses are being built, there are too many families in temporary accommodation, house prices continue to rise and conditions in parts of the private rented sector are as bad as we have seen in decades. These are just some of the consequences of decades of failures by successive governments to address the root of these problems, to build more truly affordable homes and to provide a comprehensive housing safety net.

That is why we wanted to create this Living Home Standard. To rise to the challenge of setting out what people all over Britain feel is what everyone deserves from their home. We have always believed that everyone should have a decent safe, secure and truly affordable home and this is what the people of Britain think that should look and feel like.

Working in partnership with British Gas, our Great Home Debate enabled us to have thousands of conversations with people across the UK about what makes a place a home. We gained a rich understanding of what home means to people today and underpinned by extensive research by Ipsos MORI were able to collaborate with the public to form the Living Home Standard.



With the Living Wage as our inspiration, we wanted something that would raise the bar for homes in this country. Developed by the public for the public, this ground-breaking piece of work amplifies Shelter's vision of a home for everyone, bringing together for the first time space, affordability, neighbourhood, decent conditions and stability. We've been able to take a holistic look at home, and provide an ambitious but realistic definition of what the British public believe everyone needs from a home in order to live rather than just get by.

It's really important that we've redefined home together, as increasing the number of homes that meet this standard will need a collective effort. Our history shows change is possible, but this work shows we have more to do. We hope that this will enable us to unite the country and rise to the challenge of bringing a home for everyone back in reach - from young people starting out and families settling down to those planning or in retirement.

We have developed the Standard as a shared understanding of what the British public need in a home and will undertake an annual measure to show how many people live in homes that meet it so we can track progress on a national and regional scale. We are also very keen to collaborate with others to scope projects that kick-start its direct application to homes and hope this will also inspire independent initiatives.

We know that together we can create meaningful change for future generations. We're calling on the government to work in partnership with the public, private and non-profit sectors and increase the number of homes that meet the Standard. We believe that a country as great as Britain can and should see everyone living in a place they can truly call home.



## Sarwjit Sambhi

Managing Director,  
UK Home, British Gas

**At British Gas we share a belief with Shelter, that everyone should have a safe, decent and warm place to call home. Working together for four years, we've raised over £1million and helped to improve living standards for thousands of families.**

Our shared focus has been on improving standards in the private rented sector. We're proud of all we have achieved together by pooling our expertise and knowledge.

- We've successfully campaigned to improve electrical and carbon monoxide safety standards in England, Scotland and Wales.
- And we've worked with Shelter in England and Wales to protect renters from retaliatory eviction - when landlords evict tenants for drawing attention to the problems in their property.
- Funding from the British Gas Energy Trust has also enabled training on fuel poverty and energy debt for all Shelter's advisers as well as funding for fifteen Shelter specialists who can provide tailored, free and impartial advice on how to stay out of debt.

Home is central to everything we do, because it's vital to our customers. Our engineers make 9 million visits to their homes every year, whether that is to install insulation, repair boilers or conduct gas and electrical safety checks. They're also working hard to bring homes into the 21st century with smart meters and remote-controlled heating.

We know from our Connected Home business that technology is transforming homes and the way people live. But we also know that in too many parts of Britain people are not happy to call where they live "home". So we need to do more to improve the standard of homes for everyone.

We saw the development of the Living Home Standard as a powerful opportunity to do just this. We've been able to learn more from our customers about what's important to them in a home, and with Shelter have produced something that has the potential to help everyone have a safe, decent and warm place to call home.

# Executive Summary

**The Living Home Standard represents the first definition of what home means that has been defined by the public, for the public. It defines what the public believes an acceptable home should provide, something that we should all expect from our home in order to secure our wellbeing and provide a foundation from which we can build and live our lives.**

The Standard is the result of 9 months of research undertaken by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Shelter and British Gas, and involved a series of discussion groups, workshops and quantitative surveys as well as an online community. These different strands brought together public views on what a home should provide, which was honed into a list of 39 attributes which together define the Living Home Standard – a standard that we should aspire for all homes to meet, irrespective of their tenure, size or age.

**The 39 statements which make up the Living Home Standard are split across five different dimensions:**

- 1  **Affordability**
- 2  **Decent conditions**
- 3  **Space**
- 4  **Stability**
- 5  **Neighbourhood**

Within each dimension some attributes were classed as essentials – conditions that every home must meet in order to meet the Living Home Standard. Other attributes were classed as tradables, features many people believed were important, but they were not universally applicable to or equally desired by everyone.

To measure whether a household meets the Standard it is assessed against all 39 attributes, across the five dimensions. A home must meet all of the essential attributes, and a minimum number of the tradable attributes in each dimension.

Dimension	Essential attributes	Tradable attributes
 <p data-bbox="145 376 161 405">1</p> <p data-bbox="145 439 300 468"><b>Affordability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="379 280 799 456">■ Can meet the rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly having to cut spending on household essentials like food or heating</li> <li data-bbox="379 483 831 584">■ Not worried that rent or mortgage payments could rise to a level that would be difficult to pay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="943 280 1358 421">■ Can meet rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly preventing participation in social activities</li> <li data-bbox="943 448 1362 624">■ Can meet the rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly being prevented from putting enough money aside to cover unexpected costs</li> </ul>
 <p data-bbox="145 786 161 815">2</p> <p data-bbox="145 848 280 913"><b>Decent conditions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="379 689 727 754">■ The home can be heated safely and effectively</li> <li data-bbox="379 781 699 846">■ The home has hot and cold running water</li> <li data-bbox="379 873 871 938">■ The home is free from safety hazards such as faulty wiring or fire risks</li> <li data-bbox="379 965 799 1066">■ The home is structurally sound with no important defects to the roof and/or walls</li> <li data-bbox="379 1093 746 1158">■ The home has a toilet, and a bath and/or shower</li> <li data-bbox="379 1184 823 1285">■ The home feels physically secure (for example with adequate locks on doors and windows)</li> <li data-bbox="379 1312 871 1332">■ The home is free from pest problems</li> <li data-bbox="379 1359 772 1424">■ The home is free from mould or damp problems</li> <li data-bbox="379 1451 855 1552">■ The home is suitable for the current age and/or disability related needs of everyone in the household</li> <li data-bbox="379 1579 756 1680">■ There are electrical sockets in the main living areas, kitchen and bedroom(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="943 689 1350 790">■ The home is free from outside noise that regularly disrupts sleep or daily activities</li> <li data-bbox="943 817 1350 918">■ The home has enough natural light in the main living areas, kitchen and bedroom(s)</li> <li data-bbox="943 945 1337 1046">■ Able to dry laundry in the home without causing mould or damp problems</li> <li data-bbox="943 1072 1378 1173">■ It is possible to access the internet from the home or get an internet connection if needed</li> </ul>
 <p data-bbox="145 1865 161 1895">3</p> <p data-bbox="145 1928 225 1957"><b>Space</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="379 1731 762 1832">■ The number of bedrooms in the home is adequate for all members of the household</li> <li data-bbox="379 1859 799 2000">■ There is enough space to allow all members of the household to have privacy, for example when they wish to be alone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="943 1731 1394 1872">■ There are enough bathroom facilities for everyone living in the household to be able to use them at a time suitable for their needs</li> <li data-bbox="943 1899 1385 2000">■ The home has access to outdoor space, for example a private or shared garden, or balcony</li> <li data-bbox="943 2027 1390 2092">■ There is enough space to have visitors during the day or evening</li> </ul>

Dimension	Essential attributes	Tradable attributes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There is enough space for all members of the household to comfortably spend time together in the same room</li> <li>■ There is adequate space to prepare and cook food</li> <li>■ There is adequate space to store essential items, such as a reasonable amount of clothes, towels and bedding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There is enough space for members of the household to study or do work or homework if they need to</li> <li>■ There is enough space for a guest to stay overnight, for instance on a sofa or sofa bed</li> <li>■ There is enough space to store domestic items like vacuum cleaners and ironing boards to keep them out of the way</li> <li>■ There is enough space to store some personal belongings, such as books or children's toys</li> </ul>
 <p data-bbox="140 943 161 969">4</p> <p data-bbox="140 1003 248 1030"><b>Stability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The household has enough control over how long they can live in the home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ If ever given notice to leave the home, the household feel they would be given enough notice to secure somewhere else suitable to live.</li> <li>■ Able to stay in the home long enough to feel part of the local community if wanted</li> <li>■ Can make changes to the interior of the home such as decorating, if wanted</li> <li>■ Able to keep a pet in the home or garden if wanted</li> </ul>
 <p data-bbox="124 1592 140 1619">5</p> <p data-bbox="124 1653 325 1680"><b>Neighbourhood</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Feel reasonably safe and secure in the local neighbourhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Amenities such as grocery shops, schools and/or a doctor's surgery, are within reasonable reach of the home</li> <li>■ The home is close enough to family, friends or other support networks</li> <li>■ Anyone in the household who works outside the home can usually reach their place of work in an hour or less</li> </ul>

# Introduction – Ipsos MORI

When Shelter first shared with us their ambitions to create the Living Home Standard we quickly understood that this would be a unique and challenging project, but one that we were excited to have the opportunity to be involved in.

Defining a home that provides more than the bare minimum, that allows people to flourish, meant bringing in expertise from right across Ipsos MORI. It involved a sophisticated programme of research combining focus groups, workshops, digital communities and complex quantitative methods. We carefully studied the existing standards, literature and evidence, and consulted with experts in the field. However, first and foremost creating the Living Home Standard was about the public. Our biggest challenge was engaging with hundreds of members of the public on a wide range of topics from storage to stability and from pets to pests. We then brought this diverse set of experiences and opinions together to converge on a standard which has been led by public discussion and debate.

**It has been a fascinating process, one we could not have achieved without the close collaboration of Shelter, but most importantly the hundreds of members of the public who gave up their time to talk about what home meant to them in discussion groups and online forums, and the thousands who participated in the survey research which helped us define and measure the Standard. Without them, this would not have been possible, it is truly their Living Home Standard.**





## Creating the Living Home Standard

**Although there are many ways of defining different aspects of what a home is and how this can be measured, until now there has never been a definition of what the public expects an acceptable home should provide. The Living Home Standard fills this void by bringing to life what the public believe we should all be able to expect our home to provide, in order to secure our wellbeing and provide a foundation from which we can build and live our lives.**

The Living Home Standard is the result of nine months of research undertaken by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Shelter and British Gas which aimed to understand what the public believe a home needs to provide in order to achieve an acceptable standard of living. This was alongside conversations with the public through the Great Home Debate, a nationwide conversation about what home means in Britain today.

The research began with a detailed literature review and consultation with a number of experts

with experience relating to different aspects of housing, including housing demand, architecture, public health and housing policy. This process uncovered four main themes which were used to structure the subsequent research:

- **Affordability**
- **Decent conditions**
- **Space**
- **Stability and security of tenure**

These themes were the starting point for detailed discussions with a cross-section of the public, over 16 discussion groups which took place across England, Scotland and Wales. In parallel, an online discussion community was established which conducted similar discussions around these themes. The objective of all the discussions was to establish what the participants believed was needed from a home to support an acceptable standard of physical, mental and social wellbeing and provide a foundation on which they could progress their lives. The

aim was to draw people towards a common view on what was important. It wasn't always possible to achieve a complete consensus amongst participants, but the objective was, through discussion, to converge upon an agreed definition which was generally found acceptable.

From these discussions, an initial set of 38 statements were developed that captured the majority of the most important attributes which arose from the discussion groups and online community. These were put into a quantitative survey of nearly 2,000 British adults to establish which of these attributes were considered the most important. This used a technique called MaxDiff analysis – this enabled a robust ranking of the relative importance of all 39 attributes to be produced, despite the fact that individual participants were only asked to choose between a limited set of options. This process helped to tease out preferences among a set of attributes which the public already believed were important – and helped to establish which were absolutely vital components of the Standard and which were perhaps only desirable.

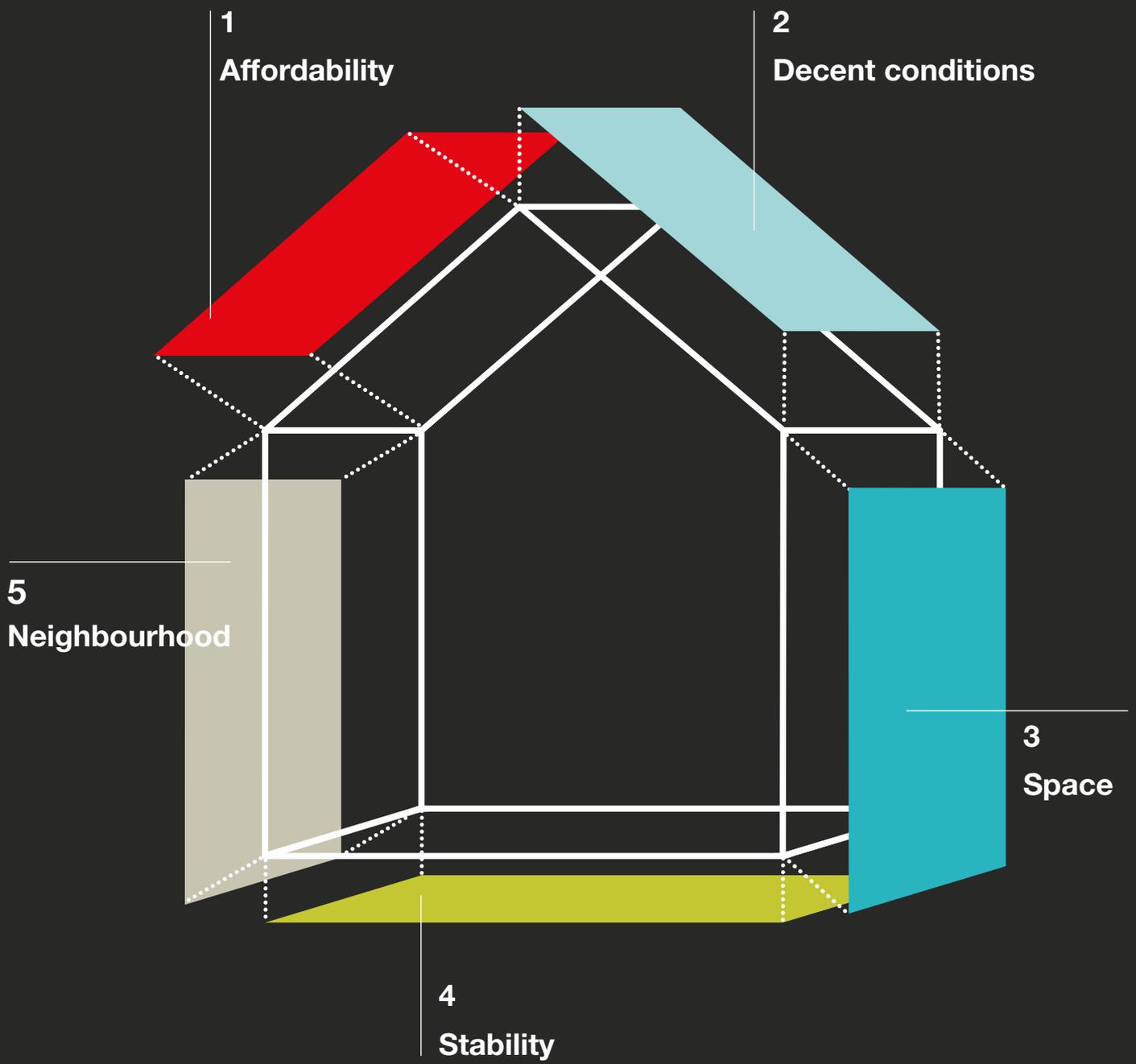
Following this phase of the work an initial draft of the Living Home Standard was produced: a set of attributes derived from the research which the public believed were necessary for an acceptable home to provide. These were clustered around five themes – the four established at the outset of the research, and a fifth theme of neighbourhood. This final theme emerged through the discussions with the public as it became clear that people often satisfied other aspects of their housing needs by compromising on location (or vice versa), and that some aspects of location were extremely important to people. This fifth theme was therefore introduced to reflect the public's belief that neighbourhood should not be separated from their understanding of home.

Within each of the five different dimensions of the draft standard, some statements were classed as essentials – conditions that every home must meet in order to meet the Living Home Standard. Other statements were classed as tradables. This describes features of a home which many people believed were important, but they were not universally applicable to or equally desired by everyone. An example of this is access to outside space – whilst some people believed that having outside space was necessary for wellbeing, others felt a home could be acceptable without it, or that it was only necessary for people in certain circumstances (for example families with children). It was deemed necessary for a home to meet a certain number of the tradable conditions in each dimension of the Standard, but not all, in order for it to achieve the Living Home Standard overall.

The draft Standard was presented back to public via a one-day workshop and to the established online community for further discussion, to determine whether they agreed with the definitions and whether they were easily understood. The draft was further refined following feedback, creating a final list of 39 attributes across the five dimensions.

Whether a household meets the Living Home Standard or not can be measured by determining whether the 39 attributes included in the Standard are stated as true or false.

A more detailed description of the methodology used to develop the Living Home Standard is included in Ipsos MORI's full report which is available via the Shelter website.



# The Definition of the Living Home Standard

The 39 attributes which make up the Living Home Standard are split across five different dimensions:

1		<b>Affordability</b>
2		<b>Decent conditions</b>
3		<b>Space</b>
4		<b>Stability</b>
5		<b>Neighbourhood</b>

In order to meet the Living Home Standard, a household must believe that their home meets all the essential statements within each of the five dimensions, and a minimum number of the tradable statements.

The Standard aims to be applicable to all households, irrespective of their size, their tenure, the age of household occupants or the age of

the building in which they live. By necessity, some statements in the Standard needed to be simplified in order to both adequately encompass a wide range of potential needs and to be easily understood by the general public. The Standard takes into account the diversity of needs associated with different household compositions, the presence of children, age and disability but it is not intended to provide a detailed account of specific needs.

The 39 statements are described below, with a brief summary of why they were included within the Standard. More detailed descriptions of each statement are included in Ipsos MORI's full report which is available via the Shelter website.

In order to determine how many households have a home which meets the Standard, these statements were adapted into a quantitative survey which could be unambiguously answered as 'true' or 'false'. In some cases this involved minor adjustments to the wording of the statements - a full list of the questions in the measurement survey can be found in Ipsos MORI's technical report.

# 1 Affordability

A home could meet all the needs of the household – decent conditions, stability, sufficient space and in a suitable neighbourhood. However, if it is not also affordable it cannot meet the Living Home Standard. Affordability was consistently rated as amongst the most important aspects of an acceptable home.



**Through the research we explored two ways to think about affordability:**

- **Housing costs as proportion of income**
- **The burden of paying housing costs, and its impact on wellbeing**

We discussed both of these approaches with the public, which revealed that they found the burden of paying housing costs much more meaningful and easier to engage with than thinking about housing costs as proportion of income. The public identified with the real-life impacts of paying housing costs and the trade-offs that unacceptably high housing costs would force you to make that would affect wellbeing.

This approach was also a better means of measuring the acceptability of housing costs for an individual household. Measures of housing costs as a proportion of income are frequently used in analysis, and are the basis of work on

‘living rents’ and other similar work on affordability. However these tend to use fixed measures of income such as local average earnings. They don’t work as well as means of assessing affordability across a wide range of individual households. For example, the impact of housing costs for people on low incomes who struggle to afford their rent even with help from housing benefit will be very different to people on very high incomes who may choose to put a large proportion of the income into paying for their home without it having a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.

To create a meaningful measure of affordability for the Living Home Standard, we focused on the burden of housing costs. Our discussions with the public revealed that they found this idea more meaningful and easier to engage with than thinking about housing costs as proportion of income. The public identified with the real-life impacts of paying housing costs and the trade-offs that unacceptably high housing costs would force you to make that would affect wellbeing.

## **Essentials**

- **Can meet the rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly having to cut spending on household essentials like food or heating**

Being able to live healthily was seen as fundamental to wellbeing, and it was widely agreed that meeting housing costs should not come at the expense of being able to afford to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Various aspects of health were explored during the research, including the costs of healthcare like dental appointments, opticians and being able to participate in sports or visit a gym. These were however not included in the final statement the public did not think these were universal enough.

The final statement is centred on expenditure which impacts healthy living – specifically heating your home and paying for food, which the public felt were most essential and also reflected real-life “heating or eating” trade-offs which people were familiar with, either through their own experience or anecdotally.

- **Not worried that rent or mortgage payments could rise to a level that would be difficult to pay**

The public voiced concerns that increasing housing costs damaged their ability to plan for the future and that this increased insecurity, preventing them from putting roots down in their neighbourhood, saving up for larger purchases and causing concern about the costs of keeping their children in particular schools.

**“My rent is up 3% this year, I think that’s fine for now but appears it could go up randomly and at different times. This is unpredictable and doesn’t give you stability.”**

**“It’s like anything in life; you buy it based on the affordability at the time... People can’t make decisions on things if there can be constant change.”**

## Tradables

A home must meet 1 of 2 of these statements to meet the Living Home Standard.

- **Can meet rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly preventing participation in social activities**

People felt that having the choice to participate in social activities that enhanced day-to-day lives made a big contribution to physical and mental health and therefore they believed measures of affordability in the Standard should take into account the extent to which housing costs prevent this. This included parents being able to afford a babysitter occasionally, being able to take children on short holidays and being able to afford to take up a hobby.

**“Aside from a home over their head, each person should be in a position to afford modest everyday experiences which add to their mental and physical wellbeing.”**

**“It can’t be just surviving: you have to fully live.”**

- **Can meet the rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly being prevented from putting enough money aside to cover unexpected costs**

The public identified that the inability to afford one-off or unexpected costs could lead to anxiety and stress. They felt it was important to have a ‘contingency plan’ or ‘rainy day’ money, to fix household items if they broke and to maintain the property if they were home owners.

**“I think people should be able to afford to have savings. Even if it’s small, at least it’s something. Everyone should have rainy day money not matter how small.”**

People also discussed being able to save up for things like holidays, however this is in part covered by the statement on being able to participate in social activities, and was felt to be potentially too generous a definition.

**“ It can’t be just surviving: you have to fully live. ”**



## **Lou lives in a one bedroom flat with her two children.**

After my marriage ended, I could only afford to rent a one bedroom flat. My younger daughter stays here part time, but mainly lives with her Dad because we're so cramped.

It was partly for financial reasons that my boyfriend moved in. The financial burden without him was just getting too great. If he wasn't around I'd be seriously close to failing to pay my rent. I'm behind with my electricity bill. Where I live has storage heaters and they're vastly expensive. I've been paying £100 a month for them – and it's still not enough. I couldn't afford to buy my son a birthday present this year because I was quite literally scraping the bottom of the barrel to pay the rent.

I'm working. I work with people with complex care needs, such as brain injuries or MS. I'm largely self-employed, so my hours vary but I normally work between 30 – 45 hours a week. But this makes me feel like a failure.

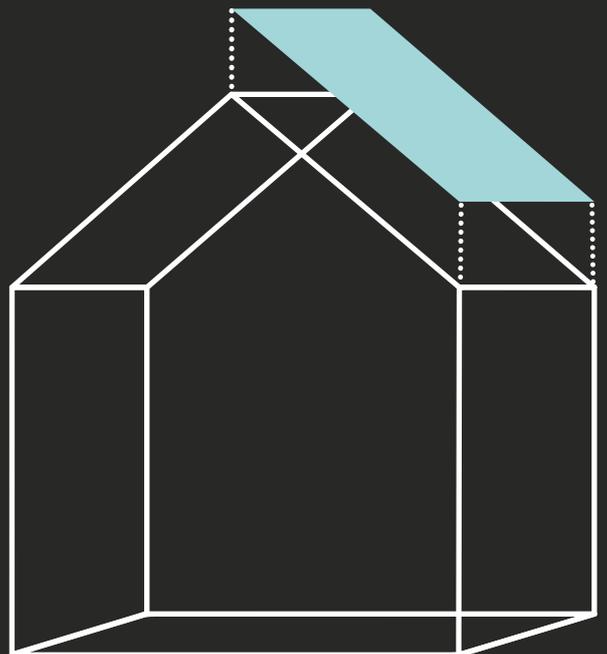
I'd like to go and do some training to better myself and earn more money but how can I do that? I don't see how I can keep myself living at the same time as doing that and working the amount that I need to so that I can keep us afloat.

There's never a cushion. You'd think if you were working you'd be able to save a little bit every month, but it's just not a possibility. I've got to keep a car going, for my work. There's all sort of things to pay for, school costs and so on. I'm so angry about it all, and so disappointed that even when I work so hard I still find it hard just to make ends meet.

## 2 Decent conditions

Words like 'safe', 'warm' and 'secure' are among the first that come to mind we asked the public what makes a home. All aspects of wellbeing can be severely compromised by poor conditions, in the most extreme cases putting lives at risk.

The public were quick to reach a consensus on many aspects of decency, although coming to agreement on the exact definitions of what is and is not acceptable was sometimes the source of intense debate. The final set of attributes which describe decent conditions in the Living Home Standard are outlined overleaf.



## Essentials

### ■ **The home can be heated safely and effectively**

The public discussed the wide range of ways in which being able to keep their home warm impacted them – from their physical health, through to emotional wellbeing. It impacted a wide range of activities, such as children having a comfortable environment to do homework. Our quantitative research revealed heating the home was the most important aspect of decency that we tested.

**“You wouldn’t be able to function right if you’re in a cold place.”**

### ■ **The home has hot and cold running water**

The public spontaneously raised access to hot and cold running water as one of the primary needs that a home should fulfil. It was consistently agreed this was an essential part of what makes a home habitable.

### ■ **The home is free from safety hazards such as faulty wiring or fire risks**

The public felt strongly that a home must be safe to live in, and that homes with significant hazards could not be judged to be meeting the Living Home Standard. This was amongst the most basic requirements a home should meet.

### ■ **The home is structurally sound with no important defects to the roof and/or walls**

One of the most fundamental functional aspects of home is that it provides safe shelter. The ‘roof over your head’ providing protection from the elements and a solid structure providing physical security were considered essential.

### ■ **The home has a toilet, and a bath and/or shower**

Basic bathroom facilities were believed to be an essential part of an acceptable home. There was some discussion about whether it was adequate to have a shower, or whether a bath was also necessary. Some people, particularly those with children or certain health issues,

felt that having a bath in the property was important, but others argued that this wasn’t an essential requirement for all. The final conclusion was that whilst one or other was essential, it wasn’t necessary to have both.

### ■ **The home feels physically secure (for example with adequate locks on doors and windows)**

When people talked about what home meant to them, there was a strong sentiment that it should be somewhere you can shut out the outside world and relax. Confidence in the physical security of the home was an important part of what allowed people to feel safe. Some people talked about fear of intruders or the experience of being burgled, and how this undermined their feeling of security.

### ■ **The home is free from pest problems**

Whilst there was widespread agreement amongst the public that major infestations of vermin or other pests were a serious problem and unacceptable, there was much debate over the point at which issues with pests become unacceptable. Was it reasonable to expect a home to have no pests at all, or were occasional mice or ants acceptable? The final decision was that whilst no pests at all in the home was an unreasonably high expectation, it was not sufficient simply to be free of ‘infestations’ – an acceptable standard was a home free from ‘pest problems’.

### ■ **The home is free from mould or damp problems**

During the research people explained how living with damp and mould in their homes had affected them, including having an impact on their physical health. Some believed that any amount of mould or damp was unacceptable, whilst others believed that some degree of mould or damp was common and could be easily dealt with.

**“It’s an embarrassment. I can’t see the mould but the smell of it is so strong that I know this is what’s affecting [my] children’s health.”**

Recognising that some people felt that minor amounts of mould or damp were acceptable, the final definition asks people to consider whether their home has mould or damp problems.

- **The home is suitable for the current age and/or disability related needs of everyone in the household**

The public recognised that some people have different needs that impact what they require from a home. They noted young children and older people may have age-related needs, and that some people with disabilities may have additional needs: it was essential for a home to be suitable for these needs in order to meet the Living Home Standard.

There was some discussion that ideally a home should be able to be adapted to meet future needs, for example so a home could remain suitable as people get older. However, it was agreed that it wasn’t realistic for all homes to be able to be adapted to meet all possible future needs, and it was decided that it was sufficient that a home should meet current needs related to age or disability.

- **There are electrical sockets in the main living areas, kitchen and bedroom(s)**

The public discussed the importance of having access to enough electrical sockets, particularly given the growth in use of a large number of electrical devices in home in recent years. It was considered inconvenient to not have sockets where they are needed, and unsafe if they end up being overloaded.

## Tradables

**A home must meet 2 of 4 of these statements to meet the Living Home Standard.**

- **The home is free from outside noise that regularly disrupts sleep or daily activities**

The issue of disruption caused by noise outside the home was the source of some debate. Whilst it was recognised that severe noise nuisance could be very detrimental to wellbeing, there was also acceptance amongst some that a certain amount of disruption from noise had to be tolerated as part of the reality of living close to others. The extent to which noise was tolerable depended on the volume, frequency and time of day it occurred.

- **The home has enough natural light in the main living areas, kitchen and bedroom(s)**

The public felt that it was important for wellbeing to have sufficient natural light within the home. There was some debate about whether it was essential in all rooms in the house, with agreement that it was somewhat dependent on individual circumstances. For some people who only used their bedrooms for sleeping, natural light in these rooms was less important, but this was not the case for people who also used their bedrooms as a living space.

**“My daughter rents a room in a house. It’s the only room without natural light. Her mood has gone right down. We’re thinking about people who’ve got houses where they can go to somewhere else – but some people are living in one room.”**

This variation in the way people used space and required natural light meant that this attribute was considered to be tradable.

- **Able to dry laundry in the home without causing mould or damp problems**

For people who needed to regularly dry laundry within their home, it was important to have adequate ventilation so that this didn’t cause or contribute to mould or condensation problems.

- **It is possible to access the internet from the home or get an internet connection if needed**

For many people, being able to access the internet at home is extremely important, but for some it is less important or not relevant at all. Including this attribute as a tradable condition of the Living Home Standard took this variation in importance into account.

## Hayley is a single mum and full time police officer.

I struggled to find somewhere for us to live as lots of agents don't like that I'm a single mum. So when I found this property I jumped at it. Even though it was clear that some repair work needed doing. My estate agents assured me that the work would be completed.

On the day I moved in I found a mouldy sofa in the living room. The front door had a glass panel missing and every curtain in the house was covered in mould. I reported all of these issues along with the fact that the guttering needed replacing. Sadly I could not afford to be fussy and set to work cleaning the house.

I tried official channels to get things moving. My landlord made some basic improvements and now says that's enough. Three years on, the guttering has not been fixed. There's still mould in every room and my living room carpet is quite often wet to the touch.

I pay £650 a month for the pleasure of living in a house that is not fit for purpose. I am struggling so much as a result of all the extra costs this house is causing but I just don't have the finance available to move.

**“ On the day I moved in I found a mouldy sofa in the living room. The front door had a glass panel missing and every curtain in the house was covered in mould. ”**

# 3 Space

Adequate space was felt to be crucial for wellbeing, especially mental and social wellbeing. Not having enough space was thought to have a negative impact on relationships and cause stress.

Space within the home can be thought of in terms of specific dimensions or room layouts, in terms of functional requirements (such as space for storage, cooking or washing) or in terms of social requirements (such as space to be with others). The research revealed that people primarily thought about their space needs in terms of functional and social requirements.

**“ Space for time together and time apart. ”**



**Key priorities included basic functionality – space for cooking, eating, sleeping, washing, and depending on the household, space for children to play and for children or adults to study or work.**

**“Everyone needs somewhere to sleep, to have family time and somewhere to cook.”**

When we forced people to make trade-offs against other dimensions of the Standard, people were often willing to sacrifice space in favour of things like affordability. Nevertheless, although people are willing to compromise in some areas, there are many aspects of space which were felt to be essential requirements in the Standard.

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## Essentials

- **The number of bedrooms in the home is adequate for all members of the household**

Having somewhere to sleep was seen as one of the most basic aspects of a home. The ability to have a good night’s sleep was widely understood to be essential for physical and mental wellbeing.

Amongst households with children, the extent to which siblings should be required to share bedrooms was much debated. By and large, some degree of sharing was felt to be acceptable but circumstances such as the genders and ages of the children had to be considered. They also discussed other factors such as differing personalities and additional needs such as behavioural issues that meant it was difficult to develop a ‘one size fits all’ consensus.

**“What I do think is important is that living space can be differentiated from sleeping space.”**

**“I’d say if you were forced to sleep in your living space, that’s unacceptable.”**

- **There is enough space to allow all members of the household to have privacy, for example when they wish to be alone**

The importance of privacy and having space to yourself was closely related to people’s beliefs about what ‘home’ means: a place of sanctuary and peace, and where you can be yourself.

**“Personal space where you can have me-time, not under each other’s feet.”**

**“[Home means] peace of mind, away from everything, on my own, away from problems of noise, away from work and confusions.”**

- **There is enough space for all members of the household to comfortably spend time together in the same room**

Home was defined by many in terms of a place where you can be with other people:

**“For us it’s just a place where you can be together.”**

People valued being able to relax with the other members of their household on a day-to-day basis, doing things such as socialising, eating together or watching television.

- **There is adequate space to prepare and cook food**

Having space to prepare and cook food was one of the most important functional uses of space. It was noted that not everybody chooses to cook and prepare food all of the time, but nevertheless it was felt that being able to do so was an essential feature of a home that supports physical wellbeing.

- **There is adequate space to store essential items, such as a reasonable amount of clothes, towels and bedding**

Storage space was an important consideration. Not having adequate storage was felt to cause stress as well as practical difficulties.

**“Storage so you can put everything away so it’s not cluttered and then you can relax.”**

The public discussed what an acceptable amount of storage would be. This was broken down into storage for the most essential day-to-day items, as well as storage for ‘nice to have’ personal items which was deemed to be somewhat less important.

## Tradables

**A home must meet 3 of 7 of these statements to meet the Living Home Standard**

- **There are enough bathroom facilities for everyone living in the household to be able to use them at a time suitable for their needs**

Participants were agreed that a home needed to have enough bathroom facilities to meet the needs of all of those living there. However, there were different views about what this might look like. Some participants thought that families with two or three children would need two bathrooms, while others felt that this was more of a desirable than an essential.

**“Families need at least two bathrooms. I can hear my children in the morning shouting at each other. One thinks he’s the only one that needs to get ready in the morning.”**

It was generally acknowledged that some level of compromise between household members was to be expected when it came to using bathroom facilities. Compared to other space requirements, additional bathrooms were felt to be less important.

- **The home has access to outdoor space, for example a private or shared garden, or balcony**

Access to outdoor space was a topic that came up frequently in discussions, however, there was considerable variation in the level of importance that people attached to this.

Some felt quite strongly that access to outdoor space such as a garden was essential and important for wellbeing.

**“If I didn’t have a garden I’d be depressed.”**

Outdoor space was more likely to be considered essential for families with children, as participants highlighted the importance of children being able to play outside and get fresh air – both for mental and physical wellbeing. Some felt that the need for a garden could be partly dependent on whether there were local parks where children could play instead.

On the other hand, some participants felt quite strongly that outside space was too much to expect from the Standard. The combination of strong views means that it was felt most appropriate that this was a tradable part of the Standard.

- **There is enough space to have visitors during the day or evening**

When people discussed what home meant to them, many spoke about the social function of a home, including spending time with visiting family or friends.

Yet, when asked to consider whether space to accommodate visitors was an essential part of a home that met the definition of the Standard, views were mixed. Many thought that at least some space for visitors was essential, because spending time with friends and family is important for social wellbeing. However views differed considerably in terms of what space for visitors might look like.

**“Certainly we all ought to be able to entertain a couple for dinner and find room for any children to have a friend over for tea”**

By contrast, some dismissed space for visitors as an essential part of the Standard, because they felt that there were other opportunities to socialise outside the home. Therefore this is a tradable part of the Standard.

- **There is enough space for members of the household to study or do work or homework if they need to**

The public highlighted how important it was for school-age children to have space to be able to complete their homework. This was felt to be fundamental as a part of education, and therefore contributed to overall wellbeing and life opportunities of children. Discussion also drew attention to the fact that some adults need similar space for studying or for working at home.

Although this attribute was felt to be essential for those with school age children and those who have jobs that require them to work from home, it has been included in the Standard as tradable. This is in recognition of the fact that it was not considered relevant for people who do not have these needs.

- **There is enough space for a guest to stay overnight, for instance on a sofa or sofa bed**

Though it was acknowledged that this isn't important for all, many felt it was important to have enough space for friends or family to be able to stay overnight from time to time. There was however broad agreement that it wasn't essential to have a 'spare room' and that it was sufficient to have somewhere for people to sleep including a sofa or sofa bed.

**“Having enough space for family to stay overnight ... might be essential for some but unnecessary for others.”**

- **There is enough space to store domestic items like vacuum cleaners and ironing boards to keep them out of the way**

- **There is enough space to store some personal belongings, such as books or children's toys**

Storage space was felt to be an important consideration but people were often willing to sacrifice the amount of storage for other more important considerations.

Storage of the most important household items is an essential attribute in the Standard, however recognising that storage is also needed for other purposes, including bulky items and personal belongings, two additional attributes were included amongst the list of tradable elements of the space dimension of the Standard.

## **April lives in a two bedroom maisonette with her fiancé and their three children.**

We share a bedroom with the two younger children so we have a cot and a single bed as well as our double bed. My son sleeps in the small bedroom, but even bunk beds don't fit because the roof slopes. We had to cut the bed down to fit along the wall.

It would make a huge difference to us to get a bigger place. The children are on top of each other all the time. Their play area is in the one room, where we all live, they don't have a garden where they can run around and let off

steam. They get under each other's feet. They argue a lot and I think being so crowded together is the main cause.

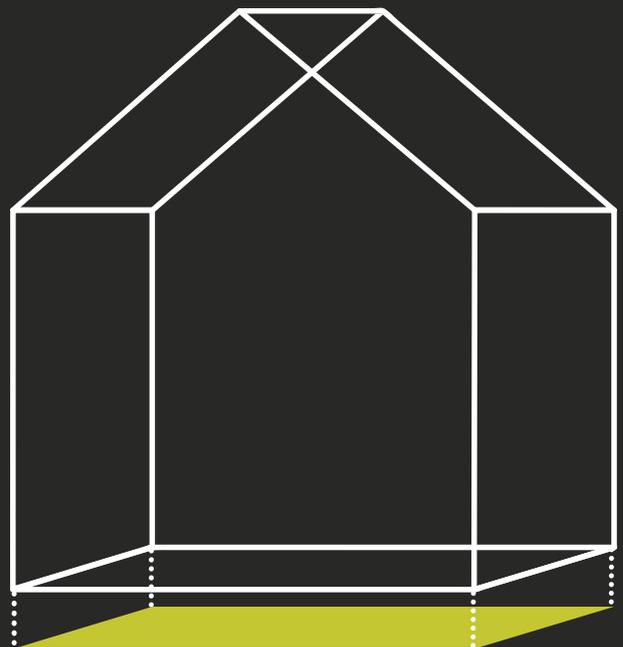
My partner works as a landscape gardener and earns the minimum wage. It's not great here at all, and we're paying £850 a month for it. My children, my family deserve better than what we have. Even if we could find somewhere that would accept part Housing Benefit, we can't save the money we would need to move, because we would need a month's rent upfront as well as the deposit and letting agents admin fees.

I'm doing everything I can but it's still not good enough. It's horrible, I've cried myself to sleep sometimes, just thinking I can't give my children what they need.



# 4 Stability

Defining stability within the Living Home Standard was particularly challenging. The stability that home owners have is often taken for granted, and stability was seen as something which primarily affected people living in the private rented sector and to an extent people in the social rented sector. Whilst people who had experienced instability often spoke powerfully about it's impact, for those who had never encountered this kind of insecurity, the effects were harder to imagine.



**Inevitably much of the discussion around stability returned to a discussion of renting. In general, the public was very balanced in their view of the relationship between tenants and landlords: an even-handed sense of fairness prevailed, with considerations of the issues faced by landlords as well of those as tenants. This is reflected in the definitions included within the Standard, which are defined with consideration of what is reasonable for both tenants and landlords.**

Because some of the issues underpinning stability are more pertinent to renters it was challenging

to develop a common standard that applies equally to everyone, irrespective of the tenure they live in and their life stage. However, the final attributes within the Living Home Standard attempt to reconcile this as far as possible.

Discussions around stability often referenced the extent to which people felt able to make the place they lived a 'home.' Issues related to the ability to feel at home, such as being able to make reasonable changes to decoration, were also considered to be part of this dimension of the Standard.

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## Essentials

- **The household has enough control over how long they can live in the home**

**"I don't feel safe because at some point someone can turn round and take that away."**

Discussions around the length of time that people ought to be able to expect to stay in their home revealed that there was no consensus on an amount of time which adequately served everyone. Whilst long-term stability was of limited importance for some, others spoke about the importance of families being able to settle down and have the security that children will be able to stay in a local school and build friendship groups. Attempting to reconcile these differences, it became apparent that it wasn't the length of time itself that was most important, it was that the amount of security available was suitable for each household's needs. Having to move unexpectedly could be a significant upheaval, and even if never required to move, uncertainty in itself could compromise people's ability to 'put down roots.'

- **If ever given notice to leave the home, the household feel they would be given enough notice to secure somewhere else suitable to live.**

The public felt that in addition to control over the duration of tenure, it was also important that if they were required to move, that they would have adequate notice. As with other elements of stability, what might constitute adequate notice varied depending on the circumstances of the household affected. For example, a family might need longer to plan a move than a young single professional. Distilling this into what was fundamentally about notice periods, the public felt that the most important thing was to have enough time to find another suitable home.

In general, people felt that an acceptable amount of time would have to be sufficiently long to not only find a home in a suitable location, but to have choice between a number of options. Some pointed out that having time to consider a number of properties was especially important in finding somewhere affordable.

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## Tradables

**A home must meet 1 of 3 of these statements to meet the Living Home Standard.**

- **Able to stay in the home long enough to feel part of the local community if wanted**

For some people home was about being part of a wider community. It was recognised that lack of stability could compromise people's ability to make friends, join in social activities or undertake voluntary work. This was often particularly important for families who wanted the security of knowing that children would be able to stay in local schools and make friends in the local area.

- **Can make changes to the interior of the home such as decorating, if wanted**

Being able to create 'a place that feels like home' was important to people developing a feeling of stability and rootedness. This was particularly challenging in the private rented sector where tenants often felt their opportunities to make basic changes such as hanging pictures or painting a room were very constrained.

**"If you want your own place and it to feel homey then you should be able to do something that makes it feel like your own home."**

- **Able to keep a pet in the home or garden if wanted**

As a 'nation of animal lovers' being able to keep a pet was for some people an important part of what makes a house a home, as well as being something that could contribute significantly to wellbeing. It could be particularly important for people living alone as a form of companionship. However it was recognised that both private renters and leaseholders often have constraints on their ability to keep a pet.

**"If you want your own place and it to feel homey then you should be able to do something that makes it feel like your own home."**

**“ If you want your own place and it to feel homey then you should be able to do something that makes it feel like your own home. ”**

## Amanda, Bournemouth

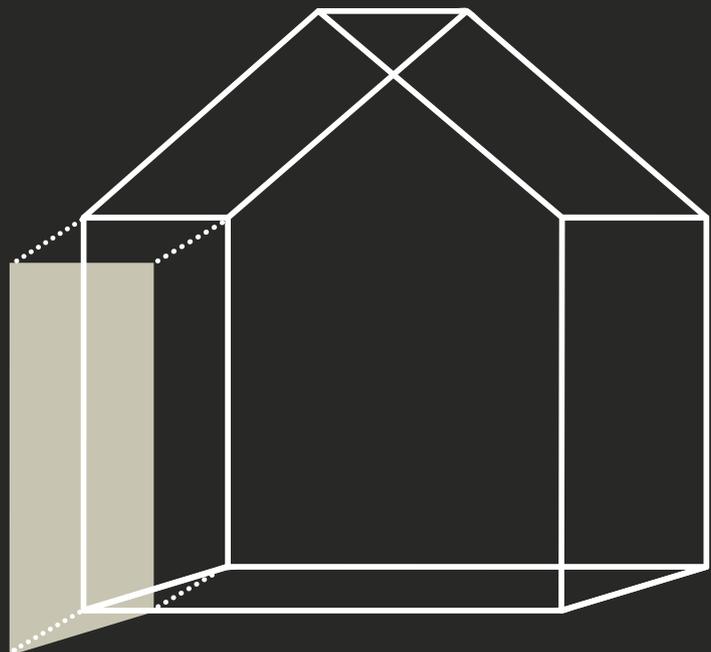
We've rented for nearly nine years and moved five times. The first time the landlady decided to move back in. The second flat we had the landlord put our rent up to £800 which we couldn't afford, and the third property was absolutely covered in so much damp our wardrobe fell apart. We found a new place but after three years of living there, I came home to find a sold board in the front garden. The landlord had sold to a developer and they hadn't even told us.

That was last year, so by putting as much as we could on credit cards and borrowing money from family, we finally moved into our little flat. The landlord has already told us he's going to put the rent up. I can't sleep at night worrying about the debt accrued each time, with moving and letting agent fees.



# 5 Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood dimension of the Living Home Standard was introduced because the public believed that was important to their understanding of home. Issues around location were originally discussed as part of affordability, as the area that people live in is often constrained by housing costs. However it became clear during the discussions with the public that neighbourhood deserved to be considered separately, as it contained elements that people considered extremely important.



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## Essentials

- **Feel reasonably safe and secure in the local neighbourhood**

Feeling safe was a very important part of what home meant to the public. When we discussed what this meant, it referred to both feeling secure within the home and in the neighbourhood in which they lived. Both of these attributes were rated as particularly important in the quantitative research, something that people were rarely willing to compromise on.

**“A good neighbourhood for me is one where I feel safe. In practice this means having neighbours who you get along with, having a sense that people look out for one another, respect one another’s property and where there is a sense of shared values about what is and isn’t acceptable.”**

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## Tradables

**A home must meet 1 of 3 of these statements to meet the Living Home Standard.**

- **Amenities such as grocery shops, schools and/or a doctor’s surgery, are within reasonable reach of the home**

What might be considered a reasonable distance to reach local amenities depended on whether people lived in an urban or rural location, and their access to transport. Nevertheless, it was considered important that people had the choice of being able to live close to basic facilities that are regularly needed such as schools, shops and healthcare.

- **The home is close enough to family, friends or other support networks**

Whilst not everyone wanted to live near their families, having that option was important to many people. As well as the social and emotional benefit, there were often practical advantages such as being able to contribute to childcare or provide support for older relatives. Other support networks could also serve similar social and practical functions.

**“When I first had my house with my kids, it was near my parents. I deliberately wanted them near so they could help, but now I’m older and they are older so I don’t need to rely on them.”**

- **Anyone in the household who works outside the home can usually reach their place of work in an hour or less**

Being unable to afford to live in reasonable proximity to a place of work could make it challenging to sustain employment without an expensive commute or sacrificing family or leisure time. However, it was recognised that some people choose to live longer distances from a workplace, for example for the benefits of living in an area which is more affordable or more desirable to their personal preferences e.g. somewhere rural. For this reason, meeting this condition was not an essential requirement of the Living Home Standard.

## Rowena rents with her three children

I lived in the same house throughout my entire childhood. I had no idea how lucky I was purely because my parents had been able to afford to buy their own house.

Currently my children and I are living in our 5th private rental house. The first one, we thought would be secure was sold after 5 years with only 3 months' notice. The only thing we could afford was another private rental which was 10 miles away. I was desperate to keep the kids at the same school knowing it was unlikely this house would be permanent either. The 40 mile round trip to school every day was expensive and exhausting.

After a while I managed to find us another rental back closer to the kids school. The house is pretty clapped out but moving schools played havoc with the older kids' education and I want to give them some stability. It'll have to do for now.

I've been to view other houses but often find that whilst a house is listed for rent with one agent, it's actually for sale with another. I'm also now a single parent. I work but rely on help from the local council with my rent. Our future is very uncertain and I feel we have no idea where we might end up. All I want to do is provide a secure roof over my kids heads so they can concentrate on what should be a stress free childhood, spent building a solid foundation for a successful adult life.



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Shelter

# great<sup>h</sup>omedebate

in partnership with  British Gas

**In early 2016 Shelter partnered with British Gas to launch the Great Home Debate, a nationwide conversation about what home means in Britain today.**

Through our services and campaigns we've led the way to ensuring more people can have a place to call home. In order to have a modern vision of what it is we're striving for, we wanted to speak to as many people as possible, to join together and help shape new standards for homes in the 21st Century.

Through thousands of conversations, we explored what makes a place feel like a home, what people prioritise when it comes to practical considerations or location and which home comforts are important to them.

The Great Home Debate kicked off at the Ideal Home Show in London, offering visitors the chance to experience a virtual home. Through 360 degree footage, they were able to step into real people's homes and hear what home means to them. One family featured is living in temporary accommodation while they wait for their own place to call home

We also took the virtual reality experience to the Tramlines festival in Sheffield, where hundreds of children also shared what home means to them through their own pictures.

Throughout the debate, we also encouraged people to share their views online about what home means to them. Through an interactive survey, we were able to gather the views of the British public.

The results of the Great Home Debate helped inform the development of the research that underpins the Living Home Standard. We looked at how themes coming out of the debate compared to themes in the discussions facilitated by Ipsos MORI, and participants in the online community used the results from the Great Home Debate as a prompt for some of their discussions.

## People prioritise:

- Safety
- Affordability
- Warmth
- Good conditions

## When it comes to home comforts, they want:

- Storage space
- Spare room for family and friends
- Space for a dining room table

## They want to be near:

- Good transport links
- Family and friends
- Shops, places to eat, bars and social activities



**“ Home is the centre around which I build my life and my family. Home allows me to make choices, to protect and nurture those I love. My home gives me stability and hope for a future.**

## Home in One Word

British Gas got out and about talking to people about the Great Home Debate and asking them to describe home using just one word. The aim of limiting it to one word was to define the essential values that people place on their homes.

In May at Meadowhall shopping centre in Sheffield, a pop up home was set up featuring a blank living room with two open sides. At the start of the day everything in the room was white – a blank canvas of walls, floor, rug, sofas, tables and chairs.

During the day passers-by were invited to write one word that encapsulates home for them on a colourful post it note. The post-its were then placed on objects in the rooms, and the walls. The shape of the room and the furniture within it were slowly revealed.

People in effect created the room with their own words. The most popular words were around ‘safety’, ‘security’ and ‘comfort.’



# What does home mean to you?

By Renee Stephenson,  
18, London

**For sixteen frightening months, my family were homeless. My single mother taught us kids that our 'home' was in our love for each other, not the sordid temporary accommodation we had found ourselves in.**

**'Safe':** Many people in the Great Home Debate have described home as 'safe'. That ended for me in 2012 when my parents' divorce resulted in mum being issued with an eviction notice. My siblings were 3, 6 and 8. At 13, I was the only one who understood. Mum and I went into shock. We couldn't pack: putting everything in boxes felt too real, like admitting it wasn't all just a cruel joke.

When the day came, the council could find us nowhere to stay. Mum's friend put us up for the night. We stayed for a year. She had her own family, so fitting us in left everyone extremely cramped.

**'Relax':** Another word people have chosen is 'relax'. We couldn't do that. The little ones couldn't be kids anymore. They couldn't laugh, play or run without someone telling them: "shhh". Finally, the council finally found us temporary accommodation in a bed and breakfast. It had one bedroom for us all to share and mould on the walls, but we felt so grateful anyway. When I look back now, it breaks my heart.

**'Security':** Soon, a family moved in to share our kitchen and bathroom. The kitchen grew filthy. There was faeces on the bathroom wall. Their adult sons moved their mattresses into our communal space. For a single mum, three girls and a little boy with special needs it was very intimidating.

**'Security':** is a word that emerges repeatedly in Shelter's debate. Instead, we felt so threatened that it affected the little ones' health. In fact, children living in unfit and overcrowded accommodation are significantly more likely to suffer respiratory problems, anxiety and depression.

**'Escape':** Another popular word in the Debate is 'escape'. I had none. To study for my GCSEs I went to the library at the crack of dawn and again after school. Unsurprisingly, when Shelter surveyed families in emergency accommodation, two thirds said their children had problems at school.

We were supposed to be in the B&B for six weeks. Four months went by before a friend put us in touch with Shelter, Mum was at breaking point. She couldn't carry on convincing us that things would get better for much longer. Shelter, however, were campaigning about families who had been in temporary accommodation for too long. Mum recorded an interview for them and within two weeks we were offered a three-bedroom house.

**'Stability':** We decorated immediately. It was a sign that we had finally won the stability we had fought for, and which is another of the key themes to come through. I got my GCSEs in the end - five As, one A\* and three Bs. People say it's a miracle but I tell them: "No, it's mum." How she stayed strong, I will never know. But she made sure we had what I think is the most important word to emerge from the Great Home Debate: 'love'.

# Contributors

Hilary Burkitt, Head of Research at Shelter, was responsible for the delivery of the research and development of the Living Home Standard. Prior to joining Shelter in 2013 she worked for a large housing association and has an established career in social and market research.

Isabella Pereira (Associate Director) led the overall research study for Ipsos MORI. She is a founder member of Ipsos MORI's dedicated Qualitative Social Research Unit.

Stephen Finlay (Research Director), Elizabeth Copp (Senior Researcher) and Tom Weekes (Researcher) were responsible for the survey research elements of the study. All are specialist researchers in Ipsos MORI's Housing, Planning and Development team.

Kimberley Rennick (Senior Researcher) Dominic Oliver (Senior Researcher), Olivia Ryan (Researcher) and Kelly Maguire (Researcher) developed and delivered the qualitative research elements of the study. All are researchers in Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute.

Matt Padley, Research Fellow at the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughbrough University, provided valuable advice on research methodology throughout the study. He is currently responsible for the management and analysis of the Minimum Income Standard data.

Karen Croucher, Research Fellow at the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, was an advisor at the research study's inception. Her main research interests are housing and later life, and the links between health, housing and neighbourhood.

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Spike Witney

**“Home is where  
the heart is, a  
place to feel safe  
and comfortable.  
Every human  
being deserves a  
chance to make a  
comfortable home  
for themselves.”**



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