



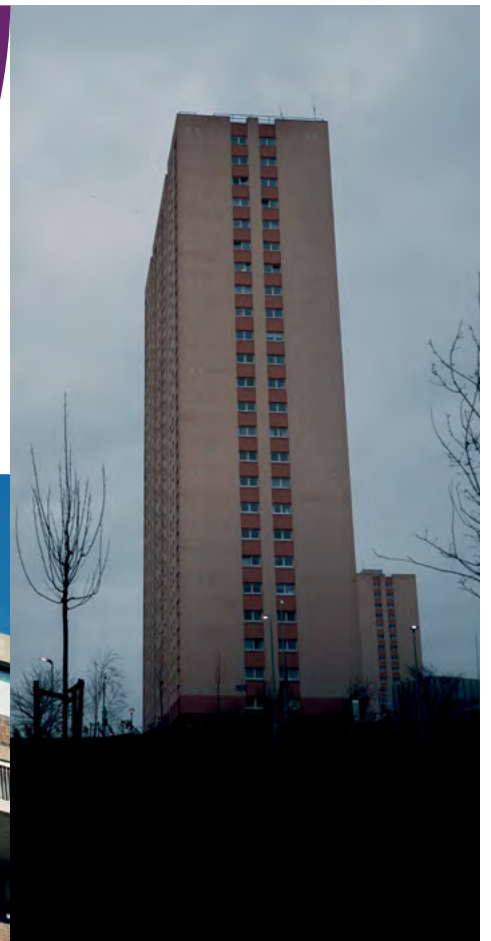
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Stigma and Social Housing in England: Feedback on the consultation responses

Mercy Denedo & Amanze Ejiogu

Ending Social
Housing stigma
together...



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Address for correspondence and consultation responses

Any correspondence about this report and our initial report titled "Stigma and Social Housing in England" should be sent to the authors

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Foreword

The way that tenants are spoken to by their landlord, and the way that they are perceived more generally in society by virtue of their housing tenure, is an issue of concern frequently raised by tenants in the interactions they have with TAROE Trust. This is often an issue of stigma; it has deep-rooted prejudice at its source, and it is endemic across the regulated housing sector¹. The effects of stigma are far-reaching, negatively impacting on people's quality of life, confidence and self-esteem, their mental health, exacerbating feelings of shame, and reducing opportunities and life chances. The fact that this is a consequence flowing from the tenure of a person's home is frankly shocking.

The availability of research however on the causes of stigma in the regulated housing sector has been historically limited. This is why the authors' previous report — *Stigma and Social Housing in England* - made such a valuable contribution to our collective knowledge in this area and why the subsequent debate and further consultation it has generated has been so valuable in enhancing our understanding of what the root causes of stigmatization in this area are and what action needs to be done to address this issue.

It was good to see that the Government acknowledged stigma as an important issue in its November 2020 publication, *The Charter for Social Housing Residents Social Housing. White Paper*, particularly around planning and design, and also as part of its Professionalization Review. However, it is far from sufficient. As the findings of this report highlight, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders within the sector and beyond to play a part in reversing the ingrained stereotypes that exist, and not least the politicians and decision-makers.

TAROE Trust has campaigned long and hard on a range of issues, as re-emphasized in our 2021 *Manifesto for Change*, that ultimately should result in the regulated housing sector becoming a 'sector of choice' rather than one of last resort. Some of the key recommendations that have emerged from the dialogue on stigma contained within this report are mirrored in and therefore adds justification to our calls for greater investment in the supply of genuinely affordable rented homes; tenure neutral housing policies and rhetoric; the establishment of a national platform from which tenants can directly input into national policy decision-making; and increased landlord accountability to tenants backed-up by stronger, proactive consumer regulation.

Whilst it is important that front line interactions treat tenants with respect, addressing this issue is ultimately something that needs strong leadership both within individual landlords and at a national level. We need a culture within landlord organizations and across the sector as a whole that is not prepared to tolerate the prejudice of stigma and showcases the positive benefits that the regulated housing sector represents if we are, in turn, to challenge the wider societal and media stereotypes that persist. This means that tenants need to be part of the decision-making and policy forming processes at a local, regional and national level in a meaningful way. This report and dialogue upon which it has been based, provides a route map of the key changes that we need leaders across the sector to firmly grasp and champion if we are to break free from the shackles that stigma has placed on the sector for far too long.

Darren Hartley
Chief Executive, TAROE Trust

¹ At TAROE Trust, the negative associations that have developed around use of the term 'social housing' has meant that we have switched to make use of the more neutral term 'regulated social housing'.

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List of Abbreviations

Codes*	Descriptions
ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
ADG-FG	Advocacy Group (Focus Group)
ARCH	Association of Retained Council Housing
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviours
AV4T	A Voice for Tenants
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
DV	Domestic Violence
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
GP	General Practitioners
HAEB-FG	Housing Associations Executive and Board members (Focus Group)
HAs	Housing Associations (Individual Submissions)
HAS-FG	Housing Association Staff - (Focus group)
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
ITs	Individual Tenants' Submissions
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LAs	Local Authorities
LC	Local Council
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government
MP	Member of the Parliament
NATFED	National Housing Federation
NFA	National Federation of ALMOs
NTR -FG	National Tenant Representative (Focus Group)
NTV	National Tenants' Voice
OSSH	Other Stakeholders Survey - Housing Associations
PC -FG	Politicians and Councillors (Focus Group)
PTB	Professional and Trade Bodies
RTB	Right to Buy
SHWP	Social Housing White Paper
SSH	Staff Survey - Housing Association
TRAs	Tenants' Resident Associations
Ts-FG	Tenants (Focus Group)
TSH	Tenant Survey - Housing Association
TV	Television
UN	United Nations

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Table 1: Overview of the respondents' codes

Table 2: Additional feedback from respondents' surveys

Table 3: Additional feedback from respondents' surveys

Table 4 below represent further examples of the responses to question 3.

Table 5 below represent further examples of the responses to question 5.

Executive summary and recommendations

Our report *“Stigma and Social Housing in England”* published in 2021 indicates that stigma is deeply rooted within the social housing sector and the wider society and is much more complex than usually described as it intersects with other stigmas (such as poverty, benefits, unemployment, crime and drugs, mental health and disabilities, race and immigration stigmas). The report noted that challenging stigma needs collective and concerted effort by stakeholders. To facilitate stakeholder and societal dialogue on challenging social housing stigma, we opened our findings up for consultation by proposing a set of seven questions which are as follows:

1. What should the purpose of social housing be?
2. Should access to affordable housing be recognized as a fundamental human right and who should have access to it?
3. How can we encourage politicians to limit/stop their use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing?
4. How can we encourage the media to be more balanced and fairer in their reporting of social housing?
5. How can we create a stronger and more effective tenant voice at the local and national levels?
6. How can we make social housing providers more accountable to tenants?
7. How can we build a sustainable and inclusive social housing system devoid of stigma?

We encouraged all stakeholders in the social housing sector — including but not limited to the government, politicians, the media, housing providers and tenants — to engage in this conversation to tackle and challenge stigma, and to drive the change we honestly hope will emerge from this study. This report presents our analysis of the responses to the consultation, along with the overview of the recommendations (see pages 72-79 for the comprehensive recommendations).

The key findings and recommendations:

1. What should the purpose of social housing be?

a) Findings:

Social housing should provide affordable and decent standard accommodation for all who choose to live in social housing. It should also be there to offer secure tenancies to those on low incomes, seeking work, on benefits, homeless, migrants, unable to afford market rents.

Residualization of social housing, and the shortage of social housing caused by depletion of social housing stock through the Right to Buy, and a lack of investment in building social housing are key drivers of social housing stigma.

b) Recommendations:

The current housing and welfare policy directions of the residualization and depletion of social housing stock needs to be changed to create a social housing system attractive to everyone regardless of their level of income.

2. Should access to affordable housing be recognized as a fundamental human right and who should have access to it?

a) Findings:

Affordable housing should be regarded as a fundamental right and social housing should be available to all households who cannot afford to buy, including all those squeezed into the private rental sectors who cannot afford their rentals or are struggling with the rising cost of living.

The government is focused on 'affordable' home ownership schemes and has paid little or no attention to investing in social housing and affordable rental accommodation. The focus on home ownership portrays renting and social housing as inferior tenures to home ownership and drives social housing stigma.

b) Recommendations:

Embed human rights framing to the provision of social housing.

To tackle stigma, affordability of housing should be at the core of government housing policies to ensure the provision of social homes that attract and meet the needs of a diverse set of people and levels of income that people can afford. This will make social housing tenure of choice — and not tenure of last resort.

3. How can we encourage politicians to limit/stop their use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing?

a) Findings:

Politicians use stigmatizing language in relation to social housing to justify their housing and welfare policies. To stop this, politicians should be encouraged to develop a better understanding of social housing and its purpose. Stakeholders should also collaborate to challenge the use of such stigmatizing language by politicians.

b) Recommendations:

Political will and policy need to be directed towards tackling stigma and policymakers need to be held accountable when found to have directly stigmatized social housing and its occupants. Policymakers need to make significant efforts not to drive and engage in the use of stigmatizing rhetoric.

Policymakers are encouraged to raise awareness of stigma in social housing by setting the right tone to influence the media stigmatizing narratives. As evidenced in this consultation report, conscientious effort to set the right tone to challenge stigma should emerge from the upper echelon of the society.

4. How can we encourage the media to be more balanced and fairer in their reporting of social housing?

a) Findings:

The negative media narrative is mostly driven by the stigmatizing political rhetoric on social housing. If the political rhetoric is addressed, it would be easier to address the media narrative.



Media narrative can be improved by the adoption of guidelines such as the Fair Press for Tenants' Guide produced by the Stop Social Housing Stigma campaign, as well as by enhanced regulatory attention and promoting positive stories of social housing by stakeholders.

b) Recommendations:

The media is encouraged to break the stigma by reporting factual and credible stories, and not be sensational when reporting on social housing and its residents to prevent swaying public opinion.

The media is encouraged to show a balanced reporting of the diverse groups of people (including professionals) living in social housing and not depict social housing as simply the homes for the unemployed, those on benefits, scroungers or with mental health and addiction issues.

Policymakers and regulators – Ofcom – should discourage programmes such as 'Benefits Street' that are deeply stigmatizing.

5. How can we create a stronger and more effective tenant voice at the local and national levels?

a) Findings:

The spread and intensity of stigma in social housing was linked to the absence of a strong tenant voice, which implies that political and media narratives are left unchallenged by tenants because of the absence of it.

There is a need for a strong tenants' voice at national, regional and local levels. At the local level, tenants' voice should be embedded in the organizational structure. This can take many forms including representation on the board, tenant panels etc.

Engagement with tenants at the local level needs to be meaningful i.e. they need to be listened to and their opinions acted upon.

Local representation should feed into regional and national tenant voice organizations. At the national level, there is a need for a tenant voice organization which would be similar to the National Housing Federation in terms of scope and remit.

b) Recommendations:

Government should support the establishment of a stronger national tenants' voice to give tenants an independent platform to effectively engage at the national, regional and local levels. This will ensure that tenants are acknowledged as experts and co-regulators of the sector to challenge stigma and engage more meaningfully with policymakers, the regulator, the media and housing providers. In addition, having tenants' voices heard and listened to at the national level would itself be a significant driver in challenging stigma and in ensuring that tenants are listened to by their housing providers at the local levels.

The sector needs to adopt a collective approach (including trade bodies, regulators, housing providers, tenant representative bodies and policymakers) to give tenants a meaningful and impactful voice.



6. How can we make social housing providers more accountable to tenants?

a) Findings:

Embedding tenants' voices in organizational culture would be beneficial for housing providers in understanding the lived experience of their tenants, in challenging the stigma experienced by their tenants emerging from their interactions with their housing providers and in promoting a co-designed culture for service deliveries.

The current regulatory framework is ineffective in facilitating an accountability regime which makes landlords accountable to tenants. As a result of this and other structural issues in the social housing sector, there is a power imbalance between landlords and tenants.

The regulatory system needs to be redesigned to put the interests of tenants at the heart of regulation. Also, there needs to be more transparency from landlords to provide tenants with the information needed to hold landlords to account.

b) Recommendations:

Increased tenant voice should be linked to democratic accountability mechanisms and decision-making powers with more tenant representations on key decision-making bodies, including performance and compensation planning, particularly for senior executives, investment planning and rent level decisions.

The government should consider the introduction of a regulatory metric where housing providers' performance and compensation (including managerial remunerations) are tied to service deliveries. This is envisaged to be necessary to improve the services and enable social landlords to get better at learning from complaints to enhance accountability practices with tenants adequately compensated for any inconveniences experienced because of poor performance.

The Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman should be respectively empowered to proactively enforce standards and sanction housing providers when compliance is below acceptable standard to improve services, tenants' satisfactions and experience.

The Regulator of Social Housing and the National Housing Federation should consider setting up regulatory targets (not tokenistic nor tick-boxing targets) around tenants' engagement and customer's voice to close the accountability gaps in the sector.

7. How can we build a sustainable and inclusive social housing system devoid of stigma?

a) Findings:

Building a sustainable and inclusive social housing system devoid of stigma requires a combination of measures. Most of these have been articulated in answering the previous questions.

Social housing tenants taking pride in their homes to challenge anti-social behaviours and stigma associated with living in social housing.

b) Recommendations:

The acute shortage of social housing needs to be addressed through incremental investment in building high-quality social housing and through the withdrawal of Right to Buy which has resulted in the depletion of social housing stocks.

The housing sector needs, to lobby for increased and sustained funding to build high-quality social housing so that it can be available and affordable to everyone, and not residualized to those in precarious circumstances. Investment in building more high-quality energy-efficient housing along with having a stronger national tenants' voice, democratic accountability and decision making powers for tenants at the local and national levels are paramount to building a sustainable and inclusive housing system to challenge the stigma in social housing.



i. Stigma and Social Housing in England: An Overview



i.a Introduction

Our report “Stigma and Social Housing in England” shows that social housing stigma is much more complex than is usually assumed as it intersects with other forms of social stigma such as poverty stigma, benefits and unemployment stigma, crime stigma, mental health and disabilities stigma, and race and immigration stigma. These societal stigmas repeatedly compound the already problematic social housing stigma linked to housing policy, political rhetoric, negative media portrayals of social housing and its residents, and the strained relationship between the housing providers and their tenants. The report also highlighted the everyday realities of living in social housing by illustrating how tenants experienced stigmatization in their everyday interactions with social housing providers and their contractors, the police, general practitioners (GPs), the council, homeowners, and neighbours as well as at work and in educational settings.

Social housing stigma is too deeply rooted within the social housing sector and the wider society to be tackled sporadically or brushed over. Consequently, addressing social housing stigma will require sincere collaborations by all stakeholders including the media and the government. Following the publication of the report in July 2021, we encouraged debate on the consultation questions proposed on page 59 of the report within organizations, at conferences and events, with government and other stakeholders, indeed in any forum where a debate was possible. The closing date for submissions to the consultation was the 31st October 2021. It was particularly exciting to see the willingness of different stakeholders such as advocacy groups, trade bodies, and housing associations, tenants’ groups and representatives, professional bodies and housing regulators, and policymakers’ to engage and discuss the consultation questions and consider what approach to adopt in tackling and challenging the stigma in social housing. This document summarizes the consultation responses and additional insights provided by our respondents on our findings.

“Stigma and Social Housing in England” shows that social housing stigma is much more complex than is usually assumed as it intersects with other forms of social stigma such as poverty stigma, benefits and unemployment stigma, crime stigma, mental health and disabilities stigma, and race and immigration stigma.

Social housing stigma is too deeply rooted within the social housing sector and the wider society to be tackled sporadically or brushed over.

i.b The Consultation Questions

The Consultation Questions on Page 59 of the “Stigma and Social Housing in England” sought answers to the followings:

1. What should the purpose of social housing be?
2. Should access to affordable housing be recognized as a fundamental human right and who should have access to it?
3. How can we encourage politicians to limit/stop their use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing?
4. How can we encourage the media to be more balanced and fairer in their reporting of social housing?
5. How can we create a stronger and more effective tenant voice at the local and national levels?
6. How can we make social housing providers more accountable to tenants?
7. How can we build a sustainable and inclusive social housing system devoid of stigma?

i.c Who responded to the Consultation and how were they considered?

Responses received are from social and council housing tenants/ residents, local council, professional and trade bodies, policymakers, housing associations, staff members, executive and board members, advocacy groups and tenants' representative groups. For reasons of confidentiality and ethics, we cannot provide the details of our respondents or their organizations. This implies that the empirical evidence reflected in this report is not attributed to any specific person(s), group(s) or organization(s). The identities of our respondents were anonymized using the following codes.

Table 1: Overview of the respondents' codes

Respondents' codes*	Descriptions
ADG -FG	Advocacy Group (Focus Group)
NTR -FG	National Tenant Representative (Focus Group)
HAEB -FG	Housing Associations Executive and Board members (Focus Group)
HAs	Housing Associations (Individual Submissions)
HAS -FG	Housing Association Staff – (Focus Group)
ITs	Individual Tenants' Submissions
LC	Local Council
OSSH	Other Stakeholders Survey - Housing Associations
PC -FG	Politicians and Councillors (Focus Group)
PTB	Professional and Trade Bodies
SSH	Staff Survey – Housing Association
Ts -FG	Tenants (Focus Group)
TSH	Tenant Survey – Housing Association

* "OSSH" is evidence collected by Housing Association from their partners and individuals other than their tenants. They include contractors, police, councillors and board members of the local Area Action Partnerships.

The responses took three main forms. First, some organizations organized focus groups to discuss and respond to the consultation questions. Participants in these focus groups included board members/ trustees, politicians and councillors, housing associations' executive directors, housing professionals, advocacy groups, tenants/residents, and tenants' advisory panel members. In total, we recorded 11 focus groups' conversations. Second, four (4) housing associations converted the consultation questions into surveys with feedback provided by their staff members and tenants/residents. For one of the housing associations, feedback was provided by their other stakeholders including contractors, police, councillors, and board members of the local Area Action Partnerships. In total, 149 respondents completed the questionnaire disseminated by the four housing associations, of which 103 are tenants/ residents, 37 are housing professionals and 9 are OSSH. Finally, we

had individual submissions from six (6) housing associations, three (3) professional and trade bodies, six (6) tenants/residents, and one (1) local council personnel. Overall, the quality of the responses was strong, and it was obvious that considerable effort and thoughts went into them and that submissions were from stakeholders with excellent knowledge of the issues highlighted in the report and of the consultation questions.

All the responses were analyzed and categorized based on the similarities and divergence of views. Recommendations were developed after critically considering all the responses. Some of the responses in the submissions and the focus groups covered issues highlighted in and beyond the consultation questions. We decided to incorporate a couple of these issues in this report after considering their relevance to our findings in the initial report and their relevance to policy and practice. These issues are discussed in a section titled *“Other Relevant Issues”*.

The main responses from the consultation are presented in sections 1-7. These sections are structured to address each specific consultation questions. The last empirical section (8) is used to capture other relevant issues from the responses and the focus groups’ conversations. This section is titled *“Other Relevant Issues”*.



1. What should the purpose of social housing be?



The majority of the respondents suggest that the purpose of social housing should be to provide affordable and decent standard accommodations for all, and it should serve a variety of needs and eligibilities such as meeting the needs of people on low incomes, seeking work, on benefits, homeless, people migrating to the UK and those who cannot afford the market rent to privately rent. Tenants highlighted the link between access to social housing and improved life chances, noting that the purpose of social housing should be:

"To set people free from the vagaries of renting or trying to buy a home in the so-called 'housing market' by providing them with a secure home, thereby giving them life chances: the opportunity to get on and succeed with the rest of their lives."

ITs6

"...going back to the purpose of social housing, it should be for all. I went from sort of like a little council flat, and I loved it there, because everybody knew everybody. When I needed help with bringing up my children it was there and then I was lucky enough to have [them] move me into a house, but I needed it all adapted. [...] But with affordability, there's a lot of people around here that buy the houses but they're on low wages, and it does have a knock-on effect."

Ts -FG3

Respondents argued that social housing should be available for people of all diverse characteristics to build equitable and inclusive communities. Also, the purpose of social housing should be to offer secure tenancies which gives protection from unfair treatments particularly from rogue landlords. The majority of the respondents felt strongly that social housing should be a home and a place of comfort for all that need it, regardless of their status.

"To provide affordable housing to people on low incomes within society who would struggle to afford to buy their own home, or to rent in the private sector. Social housing should offer secure tenancies which in turn gives people protection from eviction so that they can create a home, safe in the knowledge that it is their home for as long as they want to live there. Homes should be affordable, good quality and well linked to facilities so that people can enjoy a good quality of life. Neighbourhood and community is important too."

HAs2

"Renting a home should be renting a home. It shouldn't be social/private housing.... There is a vast swathe of people who, if they had a decent home to rent, they would not need to mortgage their soul to buy a rabbit hutch... flats or houses should be seen as homes not CAPITALS!... not everyone wants to move up the 'food chain' and take on a mortgage."

Ts -FG1

Renting a home should be renting a home. It shouldn't be social/private housing.... There is a vast swathe of people who, if they had a decent home to rent, they would not need to mortgage their soul to buy a rabbit hutch... flats or houses should be seen as homes not CAPITALS!... not everyone wants to move up the 'food chain' and take on a mortgage.

However, social housing is currently a rationed resource but until we invest in social housing to get the level of supply to equate demand, we will always end up with a situation where there are limited housing stocks to meet the needs of everyone or those that would deliberately choose social housing as a tenure. Respondents linked stigma to the lack of adequate investment in social housing which is driven by housing policies that are geared towards encouraging home ownership through the introduction of diverse housing schemes such as shared ownership, help-to-buy, stamp duty holiday, affordable housing and so on. They argued that stigma emerged because social housing is residualized and that this is reflected in the language, as well as housing and welfare policies of government where social housing is presented as an ambulance service and tenure of last resort used in accommodating vulnerable people or those in dire need.

"Social housing should be the same as schools and hospitals, it's there for all. Not everybody will necessarily use it, but there should be the opportunity. Now having said that, that's pie in the sky, isn't it? Because really, it's about availability. One of the reasons... it has a bad image... is because there is such a low availability. It's only people with the greatest need and that is to say the people that {named a newspaper outlet} is disparaging every day, that's how they sell their newspapers, about scroungers and that type of thing. It's only those people at the very lowest end that get into the social housing. So, isn't that awful? That shouldn't be the way it is. Social housing should be available for anybody that needs it, and it isn't at the moment."

Ts -FG3

Whilst highlighting what the purpose of social housing should be and why government need to invest more in the provision of social housing, the majority of our respondents highlighted that although housing providers have been providing homes to meet the needs of their tenants, they still have a significant roles to play in providing quality and decent standard accommodations, service, and experience for their residents. The majority proposed that such service should be at par with services provided to leaseholders. For instance:

"Social Housing should aim to provide the best quality housing, service and experience to its customers. Social Housing providers should ensure they listen to all customers to gain a broad view of what they expect and want. I feel strongly that people living in Social Housing should receive the same level of housing quality that can be received by someone purchasing their own home. [...] We can, as Housing providers, challenge this head on by creating a brand and a product that people across all socioeconomic backgrounds aspire to live in. ... Social Housing is not just about providing homes, as we now provide a wide range of services that contribute to people's all-round wellbeing. As we move forward, we should look to continually monitor the changing needs and aspirations of our customers and then look to exceed them."

SSH2

Social housing should be the same as schools and hospitals, it's there for all. Not everybody will necessarily use it, but there should be the opportunity. Now having said that, that's pie in the sky, isn't it? Because really, it's about availability. One of the reasons... it has a bad image... is because there is such a low availability. It's only people with the greatest need and that is to say the people that {named a newspaper outlet} is disparaging every day, that's how they sell their newspapers, about scroungers and that type of thing. It's only those people at the very lowest end that get into the social housing. So, isn't that awful? That shouldn't be the way it is. Social housing should be available for anybody that needs it, and it isn't at the moment.



Overall, what is clear from all the responses is that social housing plays a significant role in society. It provides a home for at least 17% of the population (17% current estimates from Office of National Statistics, 2019), which was estimated to be about 3.9 million households (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2020). It provides safe and secure homes that offer families security and enables individuals to contribute towards the development of their communities, and the wider society. The consensus is that everyone should have access to social homes, and this is consistent with previous studies' findings (see the Chartered Institute of Housing, 2018) and people who choose to live in social housing should not be seen as failures or second- class citizens. Table 2 below represents further examples of the responses to question 1.

The consensus is that everyone should have access to social homes, and this is consistent with previous studies' findings (see the Chartered Institute of Housing, 2018) and people who choose to live in social housing should not be seen as failures or second- class citizens.

Table 2: Additional feedback from respondents' surveys

Respondents' codes*	Additional feedback from respondents' surveys
SSH1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support customers in finding accommodation at a time when they are in need. For that accommodation to be safe and secure. For the services we provide to be fair and for customers to be treated with respect. To house people who are most in need of affordable housing and who cannot access that in the private housing market. To support and create communities where people can thrive.
SSH2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It currently provides a home for people who cannot otherwise access one, something which in the midst of the housing crisis and COVID pandemic is as important as ever. With a focus to build communities and give people support which helps them to live healthy, happy lives and a social purpose the challenge has been intensified. We need to change the relationship with customers to one with citizens, reducing need and dependency and encouraging self-reliance. Social housing allows residents the opportunity to have security, warmth and shelter at affordable cost. It should always be lower than private renting. It gives residents the opportunity to run a home, offer family security and an opportunity to be part of a community. To provide affordable homes to the people that need them, whether they work or rely on benefits, no discrimination.
OSSH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide safe and secure and affordable accommodation which has been fairly allocated to tenants based on need on a long term (for life) basis. Accommodation should be maintained to a high standard by the social landlord, providing all relevant utilities. Social housing landlords should have a plan and resources in place to deal with any disruption. Responsibilities extend to any surrounding lands owned by the social housing provider.
TSH4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support the community that are unable to access housing otherwise, whether due to affordability, locale, disability or other reason. To provide a good standard of housing for those people excluded from the housing market. Low wages and a deliberate policy to keep house prices high for political purposes. To support people who are unable to access or afford other forms of housing. All housing should be accessible to all whatever their circumstances.

2. Should access to affordable housing be recognized as fundamental human rights and who should have access to it?

"Housing as a fundamental human right: without a secure home where one can settle down, feelings of tension, insecurity, depression, resentment, transitoriness, deracination, foreboding, and even suicide can set in. I personally experienced this for many years as a private renting tenant, until I was lucky to get a council flat. Everyone has a deep psychological need for a secure roof over their head. We need much more psychological research into this. We must get across the message that having a place to call "home" is not merely a human right but a fundamental human need."

ITs6

The responses to this question indicated overwhelmingly that affordable housing should be regarded as a fundamental right and that social housing should be available to all households who cannot afford to buy, including all those squeezed into the private rental sectors who cannot afford their rentals or are struggling with the rising cost of living. Our respondents note:

"Yes absolutely. The United Nations says that adequate housing is a human right², everyone should be entitled to a place to call home, a roof over their heads, somewhere to feel safe and secure. People are more likely to thrive when this basic need is met. So, yes access to affordable housing should also be recognized as a human right."

HAs2

"Not sure, that's going to be possible realistically, though that would be the dream. But calling it that it transcends continents and simply not in the power of a single government, saying is one thing, doing is another. But to an extent it's already covered in article 8 and protocol 1 re Human Rights.³"

HAs3

The responses highlight a conundrum relating to who or what should determine affordability? Affordability is a subjective and a relative concept and the measure or the determinant of affordability needs a critical debate if affordable housing is a fundamental human right, then suitable housing needs to be available to everyone and the planning reforms need to be used to increase the provision of high quality decent social homes for everyone regardless of their status. UN CESCR (1991, p.3) established that "Affordability" should reflect that "personal or household financial costs associated with housing should be at such a level that the attainment and satisfaction of other basic needs are not threatened or compromised" and that "tenants should be protected by appropriate means against unreasonable rent levels or rent increases."

Yes absolutely. The United Nations says that adequate housing is a human right², everyone should be entitled to a place to call home, a roof over their heads, somewhere to feel safe and secure. People are more likely to thrive when this basic need is met. So, yes access to affordable housing should also be recognized as a human right.

² The United Nations recommended that adequate housing should be a fundamental human right, but it is not clear whether access to affordable housing should be construed as a fundamental human right, but previous research has linked "affordability" as being one of the conditions of the right to adequate housing (see Young, 2021; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) 1991). Access to adequate housing is a social good that enables individuals and families to live in secure, safe and peaceful adequate homes. The attainment of the provision of adequate housing is a fundamental human right and failing to recognize, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing is a violation of the International Conventions such as the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1976 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019; Young, 2021). For instance, the UN CESCR in its General Comments No. 4 (1991) suggest that "the human right to adequate housing, which is thus derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, is of central importance for the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights." The United Kingdom is a signatory to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to protect people's human rights to an adequate standard of living and this includes access to adequate housing (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019).

³ We presumed the respondent referred to the Human Rights Act 1998, Article 8, section 1. Article 8 protects individual's right to a private life, enjoy family relationships, respect of a home and correspondence without any government interference except such as in the interest of public safety, prevention of disorder or crime (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021). However, the right to respect for a home does not mean the right to housing (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021). See <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights-act/article-8-respect-your-private-and-family-life>

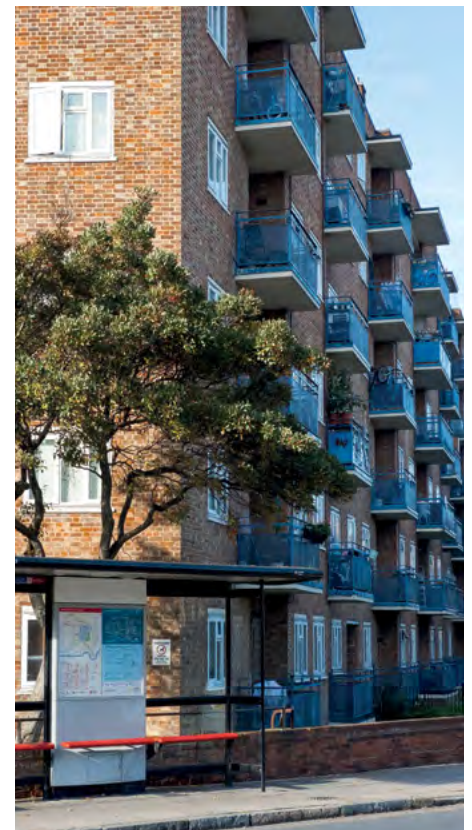
The provision of Affordable Housing in the Social Housing White Paper (SHWP) published in 2020 enables the government to invest £11.5 billion to build up to 180,000 affordable homes. What is obvious is the popular support for subsidized housing through grants, but previous studies highlighted that the introduction of several housing policies have led to less investment in the provision of more quality social housing needed to address the housing crisis (Leckie et al., 2021; Shelter 2018). For instance, extract from the SHWP (2020, p.8) claimed that:

“From the 1980s, social housing became not only a crucial safety net for those in need, but also, for many, a vital step on the ladder towards home ownership. The introduction of the Right to Buy and shared ownership enabled millions of social tenants to buy a home of their own. We want to support even more social housing residents to own a home. This is why we are introducing a simpler and fairer shared ownership offer, allowing people to get on the first rung by buying only 10% of their home – and why we have introduced the Right to Shared Ownership, which will enable people living in rental homes built under the new Affordable Homes Programme to purchase their own home through shared ownership.”

From our initial findings, the Right to Buy scheme contributed to the depletion of social housing because the government — through its housing policies — has been encouraging home ownership and not replacing council housing stock once it has been sold with another. Research has shown that the government often claim that they are building more homes, but the homes built does not translate into more social housing rather they are built to encourage owner-occupiers (Shelter, 2021; Trew et al., 2022). Many respondents argued that the lack of political will to re-invest the capital receipts from Right to Buy, implies that there is no sustained effort to (re) invest in the provision of social homes to offset the depletion of social housing stocks through this housing policy alongside other housing policies, and with negative impacts on people who cannot afford to fund and own their homes. Our respondents persistently argued that there is an urgent need to rethink the Right to Buy housing policy in England, if we are to address the housing crisis facing those in need of decent and affordable homes who are still on the waiting list and who cannot afford to buy their homes. The questions put forward to us during the initial data gathering and at the various focus groups’ conversations for the consultation are:

“will everyone in need of adequate and affordable housing be able to afford to buy a home through the various government ownership schemes such as First Homes scheme, Shared Ownership Scheme etc.?” and “how much of the revenue from the Right to Buy has been re- invested to create more social housing?”.

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One respondent noted:

"I think that probably one of the issues with the whole Right-to-Buy scheme was not so much the Right-to-Buy scheme itself, but the fact that the revenues that the councils were getting couldn't be applied into replacing it with more social housing, is to me where the problem came, rather than the actual ability of people to buy. For those that wanted to buy I think that's a good thing and being able to aspire and move into a property that they own without moving their home... it gives more ownership into a community.. But the fact that the revenue stream then didn't facilitate more social housing I think was a flop."

PC -FG

Despite the various housing policies, feedback from tenants and advocacy groups shows that it appears the government is no longer interested in investing in the provision of social housing which people can afford and can sustain. The current Affordable Homes Programme does not reflect exactly that because priority is not on funding the provision of affordable social homes. For instance:

"Approximately 50% of the homes delivered through the new Affordable Homes Programme will be for affordable home ownership, supporting aspiring homeowners to take their first step on to the housing ladder..."

Social Housing White Paper, 2020, p.68

Our respondents critiqued the current government housing policies of "Affordable Housing" as being perpetually unaffordable and out of reach for many social housing tenants or prospective social housing tenants currently in precarious situations without a conducive and habitable place to call home. For instance, one respondent argued

"The real big problem that we've got is in actual fact the attitude of government towards social housing. We shouldn't let go of that question. It's a political question which is difficult to overcome at the best of times on that side of things. But the present government has in actual fact continued, irrespective of the pressures for social housing requirements... has continued to process houses for sale into the private sector rather than into the social sector. That's where I think we must all start and get that changed and then I think we can start addressing many of these other problems."

HAEB -FG

Respondents highlighted that the successive way in which the government has incentivized ownership through the planning system – such as gentrifications, mixed tenure, demand-side stimuli (e.g. Help to Buy, Shared Ownership) and Equity Share — shows that home ownership might have a limit and often this makes it out of reach for so many people, who cannot afford to buy and who needs to be socially housed. For instance

"I think it's not a question of not being aware of the problem to my mind [referring to the government]. It's a question of not really caring that that problem is there. I mean, if we think about say other European countries where social housing or public housing is the tenure of choice, most people rent as opposed to buying their own home, so they do not have these kind of problems.... Well, here, you

"The real big problem that we've got is in actual fact the attitude of government towards social housing. We shouldn't let go of that question. It's a political question which is difficult to overcome at the best of times on that side of things. But the present government has in actual fact continued, irrespective of the pressures for social housing requirements... has continued to process houses for sale into the private sector rather than into the social sector. That's where I think we must all start and get that changed and then I think we can start addressing many of these other problems."

know, it's that push towards home ownership and the decimation of social housing. I mean, if we go back to the days where we had public housing and half the population lived in rented accommodation, this project [referring to our Stigma and Social Housing project] would disappear. I mean, if you look at the way the politicians talk and you look at housing policy, the direction in which it's going yes, they say we are aware of this problem, but they are not taking any points in measures to address the underlying issues."

AD-FG3

What is evident from most of the responses on this question is that there is an agreement that affordable housing should be recognized as a fundamental human right because everyone deserves a roof over their head that they can afford. Social Housing is one route to provide that decent home. This will enable everyone to have a place to call a home that is safe and secure with a sense of belonging and community but, to tackle stigma, social housing needs to be considered as a tenure of choice, and not something that is considered as 'cheap' or as a tenure of last resort due to it residualization.

"... There should be an emphasis on those who need it most – i.e. have an income cap? However, to remove stigma, it needs to be an appealing option and not a last resort when you're down on your luck. It needs to be an option that makes good financial sense, that offers security and a quality home for many people."

HAs1

"... the more people who live in social housing, who have family and friends in social housing, who live near high quality social housing, the more we will develop an army of supporters who are less likely to stigmatize and more likely to be intolerant to stigma."

PTB2

Until we build more high quality decent social homes that people can afford to pay for and maintain, people will be stuck in poor housing, and this would further entrench poverty and inequalities, and disproportionately affects certain groups, including people from the BAME communities, single parents, care leavers and people with disabilities. This will also continue to impact on the huge numbers of children and families who are living in harmful, inappropriate and temporary accommodation.

For instance:

"...At the same time as entrenching poverty, a lack of affordable housing often forces victims of domestic abuse to stay with perpetrators. ... poor quality housing costs the NHS at least £2 billion a year and is directly impacting on the healthy life expectancy of those who are forced to live in it. Much of the narrative around social housing has been that it needs to be rationed, and therefore only those in the greatest need should have access to it. This narrative completely fails to take into consideration that social housing is both good for public health and good for the public purse. Genuinely affordable housing should be accessible to all."

PTB2

Until we build more high quality decent social homes that people can afford to pay for and maintain, people will be stuck in poor housing, and this would further entrench poverty and inequalities, and disproportionately affects certain groups, including people from the BAME communities, single parents, care leavers and people with disabilities. This will also continue to impact on the huge numbers of children and families who are living in harmful, inappropriate and temporary accommodation.

According to Shelter (2018), in order for social housing to work for everyone, “we need nothing less than a visionary, transformational change to create a bigger and better social housing sector and strong communities we can all be proud of” (p.5). There is a need for more investment in it but the lack of investment in the provisions of social housing even when more houses are built, makes social housing inaccessible, residualized, and then stigmatized (see Shelter, 2021; Trew et al., 2022).

Yeah, there's a couple of things. I mean my area is doing a lot of regeneration and building a lot of houses... But when I was reading through the facts and figures, a lot of it is just like they built - say they built about 30 houses, but only a percentage of them was for the social housing. So therefore, they're building the houses but they're not actually building enough for the social housing, for the people on the tenant register and that shared ownership... even though it's getting people on the property ladder, it's still not getting the numbers down from people who need to social home, and I think that's the big problem...”

Ts -FG3

Build homes not just ugly high-rise flats with no green space. Adopt an approach similar to Scandinavian countries... Abolish Right to Buy schemes... ensure the properties and communities thrive and are attractive.”

LC1

Overall, what is clear from all the responses is that affordable housing should be seen as a fundamental human right and the government must invest in it and not diminish its impact by projecting social housing as a safety net or springboard for home ownership. Where affordable housing is envisaged as a fundamental human right, everyone — regardless of their income levels, employment status, religion, sexual orientation, and background — should be able to access it. Table 3 below represents further examples of the responses to question 2:

According to Shelter (2018), in order for social housing to work for everyone, “we need nothing less than a visionary, transformational change to create a bigger and better social housing sector and strong communities we can all be proud of”



Table 3: Additional feedback from respondents' surveys

Respondents' codes*	Additional feedback from respondents' surveys
OSSH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If affordable means cheap, then no. Land, materials, access roads and labour are all costs a developer has to pay, if they cannot realize a profit then no houses will be built. • Yes, affordable housing should be recognized as a fundamental human right. Not only affordable but also appropriately maintained. However, this should not be at the expense of other social housing tenants, it should be a two-way contact, meaning that breaking of a tenancy agreement affecting the property or impacting on others in the area can result in eviction. If it is decreed to be a fundamental human right, then by definition everyone should have access to it. One of the key issues is applicants being 'bumped down the list' when others with higher priority needs are allocated, thereby extending waiting time.
SSH2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, housing should be an enforceable human right and there should be a push for measures to tackle homelessness for example, which was only temporarily addressed only as an emergency measure during the coronavirus pandemic. Housing associations can be part of the recovery work and ensuring a sustainable end to homelessness, provided that adequate funding is available from the government and positive partnerships to success are viable. • Yes, everyone should be given the opportunity to have affordable housing, subject to the upkeep of rental payments, respect and treatment of their property and the community they live in.
TSH4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, access to affordable housing should be recognized as a fundamental human right. Access to affordable housing should be granted to all medium or low income and should not be granted to anyone who can let the properties out for private renting. • Yes. Everyone should have access. Private renting is overpriced, and it's a lucky dip if you get a good landlord that will fix what's needed. • Yes, it should but I also believe it should be reserved for people who are homegrown i.e., soldiers, young families, OAPs. I'm not racist but I'm starting to think it's time we looked after our own first. • All should have access to it but putting UK citizens ex- servicemen/woman and homeless first. • No. The question is flawed - if something is a fundamental human right it is a 'right for everyone' that everyone has access to.

3. How can we encourage politicians to limit/stop their use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing?



“There is a need for politicians to fully understand what social housing does and close relationships should be built with all local politicians to support this. It is difficult for a politician when faced with their electorate about particular problems, but an understanding of housing procedures and services and positive working relationships will help address how this is dealt with, which would hopefully be in a positive manner. Government, and local Government policies and procedures are very much about supporting the most deprived or most vulnerable and language used in all documentation can be negative which then becomes the rhetoric as the politician is then only quoting the policy. It needs to start at the top of any politically managed organization and work down and into the language and thought patterns of the politician on the ground.”

SSH2

Our respondents highlighted how the negative narratives, propagated by politicians, around social housing as a safety- net or springboard for home ownership often depict them as second-class citizens who cannot afford to own their homes, and these narratives affect the way other stakeholders, including the media, engage and stigmatize social housing tenants.

3.1 Getting the political messaging right

In this section, we asked an important question to understand what needs to be done to encourage politicians to limit/stop their use of stigmatizing language or rhetoric in relation to social housing. The Stigma and Social Housing in England report highlighted the role played by politicians’ rhetoric on social housing tenants and social housing as deeply stigmatizing of its residents. A respondent to the consultation claimed, for instance *“it has become a convenient tool to stigmatize people in social housing.”*

Our respondents highlighted how the negative narratives, propagated by politicians, around social housing as a safety- net or springboard for home ownership often depict them as second-class citizens who cannot afford to own their homes, and these narratives affect the way other stakeholders, including the media, engage and stigmatize social housing tenants.

“The trouble is the narrative that comes from the higher echelons of society travels down to the way contractors speak to tenants. I’m always made to feel like a second-class citizen... They need to understand what their storytelling is doing. If they could empathize more.”

Ts-FG1

“To an extent, politicians are also playing to the crowd. The media stigmatization at its height, for example with ‘Benefits Street’, was providing an attractive narrative to some of those who were struggling as a result of the financial crisis, of de-industrialization and high unemployment and the housing crisis. Media, public opinion and politicians were all feeding each other.”

PTB2

The majority of the respondents alluded to how the government’s home ownership housing policies and narratives have been drivers of the stigma associated with social housing and highlighted how this affects social housing tenants. It creates an ‘us and them’ culture and drives classism. Our respondents revealed that the government/politicians are

encouraging this rather than helping to resolve this divisive language as it appears to serve their ideologies at the expense of residents in social housing. For instance, AD-FG2 suggests:

“Certainly, in terms of the language, that of the mixed and balanced communities that was pushed in by New Labour to assume that we could all be [mixed in but], that literally meant shoving out working class people to bring middle class and wealthier people into working class areas on working class estates by demolishing social rented homes. There have been different ways in which the language has been used. It’s not just the negative stereotyping of social housing tenants, although I think that one includes it, but as always, those in power change and manipulate to a million different ways to retain their levels of power in all this narrative really.”

Feedback from respondents highlighted that the language used by policymakers to justify their housing policies at the expense of investing in the provision of adequate and affordable social housing reinforces what is published by the media and how society responds to the housing policies and to issues that affect social housing. Our respondents, particularly PTB2, revealed that the housing policies have been heavily influenced by recent ideological arguments towards limiting social housing, prioritizing ‘getting people back to work’ as a way to reduce poverty, an individualistic view of success and failure in society (e.g. people who are homeless because their homelessness was through drink and drugs rather than their homelessness being a structural issue), and a focus on having to ration support through austerity measures. Many argued that these policies have fed the stigma of social housing. Consequently, it might be challenging to encourage politicians to stop using stigmatizing language, without tackling the assumptions which drive policies that create the ‘us and them’ perspectives as social housing is “more than bricks and mortar” and thus, it is important to “get the messaging right!”.

“Politicians need more understanding on what social housing is and should be and should promote this in the media. There is too much focus on getting people to own their own homes, but this is just not possible in the current climate.”

SSH2

“Part of the stigma arises from the language attached to home ownership. [...] It is unacceptable to stigmatize a third of the population! [...] People must be told that there are other ways to succeed in life other than to own a home. This is not to hide the unfair benefits of home ownership. In fact, “levelling up” is far more important in the housing sectors than in the geographical differences within the UK.”

ITs1

“Part of the stigma arises from the language attached to home ownership. [...] It is unacceptable to stigmatize a third of the population! [...] People must be told that there are other ways to succeed in life other than to own a home. This is not to hide the unfair benefits of home ownership. In fact, “levelling up” is far more important in the housing sectors than in the geographical differences within the UK.”

3.2 Politicians need better understanding of Social Housing

Our respondents highlighted how political rhetoric has created a “divide and rule” culture “right across British society”. Many argued that prejudices that generally exist or societal narratives around “poverty and unemployment, (un)deserving poor and the benefits culture” are driven by political rhetoric which creates and engrains these stigmas in society. For instance:

“When around a third of the population lived in social housing, it was a positive and aspirational tenure of choice for many. It is the same with Universal Credit. During the pandemic, large numbers of people moved onto Universal Credit, many of whom had no experience of using the benefit system before. This has made it more difficult for politicians to stigmatize benefit claimants as work-shy or the undeserving poor, and it seems to have had an impact on the language, which is politically possible, not just in relation to Universal Credit, but also in relation to poverty.”

PTB2

To change this, several of our respondents argued that policymakers need to gain an experienced view of the reality of social housing and its tenants by engaging with them more. Our respondents emphasized that politicians should be made to visit the social housing in their constituencies, to understand the lived experience of social housing tenants and their estates. Many believe this would help shape their perceptions of social housing and this experience could be crucial in influencing housing policies because most policymakers may not have had a lived experience of social housing and might need to step in their shoes (social housing) to understand how the lack of investment and the stigmatizing and divisive language shape their everyday realities.

“Ask your colleagues where they’ve lived, their experiences, schooling, social mobility, (if) poverty ever raised its head and then you will start to see that too many that make decisions on others have little or no clue as to the reality they are deciding on! Get them out and about and talking to real people and not guessing about what they patently lack real knowledge and understanding of. We saw {named past PM} and his behaviour towards his electorate and is the real issue that those in politics are not those that would do the best job in the role.”

HAs6

“Try putting them into social housing and let them experience the standard of living considered acceptable by most local councils who charge extortionate rent and council tax for their so-called quality housing.”

TSH3

“This is a difficult question to answer as for some politicians they benefit from the stigma associated with social housing to create a political platform for themselves. The simple answer is to work with these politicians and show them the positives and the way that social housing can improve and empower people but realistically

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the best way is to elect politicians who already know the benefits of social housing and understand the history of it and complexities of people living in social housing. Politicians who are going to fight for adequate funding for social housing schemes and fight to build more social housing.”

TSH1

3.3 Consistent and collaborative partnership

Many alluded to the need for a consistent and collaborative partnership between key stakeholders such as the housing associations and tenants to encourage politicians to limit and stop their use of derogatory and stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing. This is because social housing provides a home for at least 17% of the population (17% current estimates from Office of National Statistics, 2019), and social housing tenants make up a large proportion of the voting population with a significant voice. It is important to advocate for social housing tenants and help influence housing policies and rhetoric that will affect them. It is important to make policymakers aware of the role of tenants in developing services and so positive community action provides the opportunities to address and change the way that social housing is reflected in their language.

“Ensuring we lead by example in the language we use. Many of our residents are viewed as vulnerable due to discrimination as opposed to their protected characteristics. So often there is unintentional emotive language used when talking about social housing residents. The language used perpetuates the stereotype of people who live in social housing. Recently in the House of Commons, an MP called residents who lived in social housing “idiot nuisances” and blamed them for the antisocial behaviour cases in his constituency. It is important that we help show social housing residents as active members in society as keyworkers, working professionals and contributing to the economy.”

HAs5

“There may be examples of politicians who do not understand Social Housing in its entirety let alone the stigma associated with it. [...] We need to make them aware of how damaging it is, to speak negatively of social housing tenants. HA’s can share case studies and use positive messaging through media campaigns. We should also promote more extensively the significant contribution that housing providers make to the economy and the wider social impact of our work.”

HAs2

In challenging and addressing the stigma in social housing, our respondents proposed that the housing sector needs to make policymakers aware of the positive stories in social housing, and engaging with them to help them understand how damaging their negative rhetoric is. This will help promote the significant contributions that housing providers make to the economy and their social impacts on their tenants.

Many alluded to the need for a consistent and collaborative partnership between key stakeholders such as the housing associations and tenants to encourage politicians to limit and stop their use of derogatory and stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing.



"Tell the stories of ordinary hardworking people living in social housing, tell the stories of anti-social home owners... Break the stigma that only poor people on benefits live in council houses. Break the myth that only Councils have social housing. Promote the design standards and quality of social homes which are often larger than new builds due to space standards.... Share success stories and promote the services social housing do offer such as welfare support, tenancy support, employment support."

SSH2

Furthermore, in challenging negative political rhetoric on social housing, many opined that the sector's regulators, trade bodies and professionals such as the National Housing Federation (NATFED) and the Chartered Institute of Housing (among others) should be involved in campaigning to highlight how socially divisive and destructive the stigmatization of social housing is — and they should lobby to ensure that the discrimination of social housing be classified as a crime. For instance:

"Channeling the voice of our residents. As a sector, we have a responsibility to act as advocates for our residents, ensuring that they are at the centre of the decisions that we make, and we actively help influence housing policies that will affect them."

HAs5

"Maybe the responsibility falls more on the NATFED to do more direct lobbying promoting the massive benefits of social housing. I also think when proposed increases in tax/reductions in Universal Credit, the NATFED should be more aggressive in campaigning on behalf of stopping such changes because said changes disproportionately affect social housing tenants. Instead of their soul focus being about building more and more houses."

SSH2

Many also highlighted the need for social housing tenants and tenants' groups to be involved in any measures introduced by the housing sector to challenge the prejudice and divisive narratives at the local, regional, and national levels. To have a collective representation and campaign, people with lived experiences of stigma are an important tool in tackling stigma in social housing

"Ask customers and non (future) customers what is the actual language being used that causes offence and would stop them wanting a social housing home. You don't know unless you check that out. Gather the evidence needed to lobby government at local, regional, [and] national level. Use Northeast Tenants' Voice and similar groups to challenge the politicians. Better if it comes from the customers - Time to Change Campaign has had much success for tackling mental health stigma by challenging and making sure it's always on the agenda when mental health is discussed. People with lived experiences of stigma around mental health are key to getting the messages across. Could be similar for housing - always on the housing agenda to raise awareness, campaigning?"

OSSH

"Tell the stories of ordinary hardworking people living in social housing, tell the stories of anti-social home owners... Break the stigma that only poor people on benefits live in council houses. Break the myth that only Councils have social housing. Promote the design standards and quality of social homes which are often larger than new builds due to space standards.... Share success stories and promote the services social housing do offer such as welfare support, tenancy support, employment support."

“It is incumbent upon the housing sector as a whole to promote the good things about the homes we provide, our tenants and the communities we build. Our residents themselves have a role to play in this. Our staff has a role to play. The housing sector as a whole has a role to play. Everyone needs to play a part in changing false perceptions.”

TSH4

Overall, what is clear from all the responses is that there is a need for politicians to be conscious of the implications of their narratives put forward to project and promote their housing and welfare policies. Although our respondents reasoned that housing regulators, trade and professional bodies, and housing associations and their tenants can steer the conversation to inform policymakers on why they need to change their rhetoric, the onus to change the divisive stance lies with the government, particularly from the “central government” (Ts -FG4). For instance, there is a need to use inspirational or aspirational language when discussing communities where social housing exists and when describing social housing tenants.

It is incumbent upon the housing sector as a whole to promote the good things about the homes we provide, our tenants and the communities we build. Our residents themselves have a role to play in this. Our staff has a role to play. The housing sector as a whole has a role to play. Everyone needs to play a part in changing false perceptions.

Table 4 below represents further examples of the responses to question 3.

Respondents' codes*	Additional feedback from respondents' surveys
Ts -FG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Politicians should be seen as showing an invested interest in combatting stigmatization and refuse to comment or engage with any part of it to set a nationwide example from their level.
HAs2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There may be examples of politicians who do not understand Social Housing in its entirety let alone the stigma associated with it. [...] We need to make them aware of how damaging it is, to speak negatively of social housing tenants. HA's can share case studies and use positive messaging through media campaigns. We should also promote more extensively the significant contribution that housing providers make to the economy and the wider social impact of our work.
SSH2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobby them, encourage our tenants to contact their MP's if they use stigmatizing language. Encourage the CIH and other social housing advocates to do the same. Encourage MP's and politicians to engage, speak to, be involved with social housing tenants and projects in their areas. Encourage them to spend more time being actively involved in areas of social housing that they either know nothing about (which is pretty much everything in my experience), visiting tenants and areas/property types (the good and the not so good) and actually seeing for themselves what social housing providers have to do to keep the wheels turning. That way they would also see for themselves where providers are performing well and where they are not, such as dealing properly with disrepair issues and anti-social behaviour.

Respondents' codes*	Additional feedback from respondents' surveys
TSH4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was stripped away from working class people was the right to have a “home” in Social Housing. We were told there are no properties for you and your tenancy will be short if you manage to get one. The housing offered is now sub-standard and housing providers use the government’s Housing decency standard to avoid making properties habitable. It not just the politicians who need to change their attitudes, I have experienced first-hand this rhetoric from staff within your organization [referring to a housing provider]. I suggest you ask our local MP to engage with some of his constituents who live in Social Housing and make it clear they matter as much as house owners.
TSH3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The present government is made up of people who use degrading language when referring to people who they obviously consider inferior, especially the elderly and migrants at the moment. To change this, we need to vote for people who do not consider themselves entitled and superior.



4. How can we encourage the media to be more balanced and fairer in their reporting of social housing?



"We should educate media where possible - e.g., explaining more in press releases, putting more information on our websites, ensuring our media/social media is balanced. {named a housing association} has in the past conducted interviews with media outlets - explaining about Housing Associations' and our work. We need to ensure that all media outlets are familiar with the Fair press for tenants guide."

HAs2

The media plays a significant role in shaping the public's discourse, thoughts, feelings, opinions, and behaviour (McCombs et al., 2011). As evidenced in the Stigma and Social Housing in England report, our participants highlighted the key role played by the media in stigmatizing social housing and its tenants in England and this needs to be challenged and addressed. In this section, we explore responses to the consultation question on how to encourage the media to be more balanced and fairer in their reporting of social housing.

4.1 Is reporting balanced and fair?

Feedback from this consultation revealed that the stigmatization of social housing occurs via traditional media and on social media. This stigmatization which occurs through both media needs to be challenged and addressed. Our respondents revealed that the traditional media take their lead from politicians, editors, and the general mood in the country. Many claimed that televised territorial stigma TV programmes such as 'Shameless' and 'Benefits Street' were possible because the political narrative created an "us and them" or the "scroungers and strivers" culture (see Arthurson et al., 2014; Watt, 2020). Such TV programmes were built around "poverty stigma", "unemployment stigma", "class stigma" (low wages and poor working conditions) and "education stigma".

"I'm on an estate that was knocked down and rebuilt, ...In the lead-up to when it was knocked down, {named a traditional media outlet} made the dreadful film called Summer on the Estate, where they picked out about three people on the estate who happened to have very serious problems and highlighted them as if they were typical of everybody else on the estate, but of course, they obviously weren't. It served the purpose of leaning into the narrative about demolishing our estate because it was no good, which wasn't, of course, true."

AD - FG2

"The problem that we've got with that is that - and I'll use one example and it is one of many, {named a traditional media outlet}. If we look at {named media outlet} and what they had created and the type of programmes that they were creating which were stigmatizing a lot of these people. Creating an impression, and it is only an impression, that this is what people are like that live on housing estates where it is actually something construed, some things worked up into a frenzy. But it's actually a very, very small proportion of the people, and that's where sometimes the stigma comes from."

PC -FG

Our respondents argued that the media increases the stigma by focusing on the bad examples instead of providing a balanced view of the sector

Our respondents revealed that the traditional media take their lead from politicians, editors, and the general mood in the country. Many claimed that televised territorial stigma TV programmes such as 'Shameless' and 'Benefits Street' were possible because the political narrative created an "us and them" or the "scroungers and strivers" culture (see Arthurson et al., 2014; Watt, 2020). Such TV programmes were built around "poverty stigma", "unemployment stigma", "class stigma" (low wages and poor working conditions) and "education stigma".

to fix the problems of poor quality of social housing, poor management, lack of compassion and housing providers' failure to address tenants' complaints adequately and on time. They argued that the absence of a balanced reporting risk feeding the stigma associated with social housing as being poor-quality housing and a residualized tenure of last resort with social housing tenants being portrayed as "victims and lacking in agency" (PTB2).

With the advent of social media, many people get their news and information from social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (among others). Whilst the use of social media has been beneficial in disseminating local, national, and international news, it also allows people to tell their stories, get their voices heard and build camaraderie — which empowers them to reinforce their perspectives. However, our respondents argued that it is difficult to address the problem created by the dissemination of fake news, and subsequently the stigmatization and discrimination that emerge from the circulation of false information via social media. Many claimed this is a challenging problem because it reinforces the prejudice and stigma perpetuated by the traditional media.

"....when reality kicks in the media will always sway towards negativity and even if you have numerous good stories the negative will take precedent. [.....] One area that is increasingly uncontrollable is social media, which can be incredibly damaging and has the ability to spread locally quickly....."

SSH2

"Social media... builds on that [referring to a media narrative].... Next minute, everybody is agreeing with it without any real facts behind it. You know fake news if you want to call it.A lot of the newspapers and the proprietors of newspapers are picking up this sort of narrative against particular factions in society...." ..."

PC -FG

There is a clear consensus for the media to stop propagating TV programmes or articles that are sensationally designed to cause long term damage and stereotype social housing and its tenants. Feedback from all the stakeholders including tenants, board members, policymakers, housing providers, trade and professional bodies, and advocacy groups highlighted that the media outlets prioritize negative stories and are not necessarily interested in the positive stories, which will enable them to publish more balanced stories. Many highlighted that the negative portrayal of social housing and its tenants by the media needs to be challenged and changed, while a few argued that this would be a difficult challenge because the negative portrayal of social housing and its tenants is driven by political narratives and commercialization.

"Challenging and persuading people to change the story, we need to tell our positive stories, that will force them to change their view, many social housing residents achieve great things in life."

Ts -FG1

"Stop them from highlighting problems for their own gain and love of a horror story and give a more balanced oversight as there is a lot of good properties with good landlords."

TSH1

"Challenging and persuading people to change the story, we need to tell our positive stories, that will force them to change their view, many social housing residents achieve great things in life."



"...the media should stop with 'benefit porn' programmes. That perpetuates the stereotype that social housing is full of non-working, drug taking dodgy characters with multiple children of questionable parentage.... There are some that don't stigmatize social tenants, but most of the mainstream media outlets are untouchable and are no longer impartial, the changes must come from the top. So, until the people running the country change, then the majority of the media will stay the same."

TSH3

However, our respondents highlighted the need for the media (traditional media and social media users) to demonstrate empathy by putting themselves in the tenant's shoes to produce factual and credible stories not based on falsifications but based on real- life stories of people. This will help shape and sway the narrative away from the negative portrayal of this housing sector towards publishing balanced stories. Many revealed that this is because the angle of the stories is often very different from people's lived experiences.

"They need to put themselves in the person they are writing about's shoes, to understand how they would feel with what was being wrote, then edit or start again. When learning to become whatever they are, have them taught empathy and how to write without offending others."

TSH3

However, a few respondents argued that the media have been very true and fair in the reporting of disrepairs in the sector. They argued that they have helped in highlighting the lack of accountability from social housing providers to their tenants, and report on the disrespectful attitude of some housing providers.

"The media can only report what they see, and so far, all it is that they see is misery."

ITs4

"I think they do help us see housing and help people to know that they can report bad landlords. The media helps. [...] The media have been very true and fair and truthful what they have been reporting, if social housing was up to standard the media would not have nothing to report. [...] Also, the sector should not shoot itself in the foot by not maintaining properties in good condition, not paying attention to kerb appeal, not providing places where tenants are proud to live. The sector deserves bad press if it does not provide its customers with decent homes that they can be proud of and want to bring family and friends to."

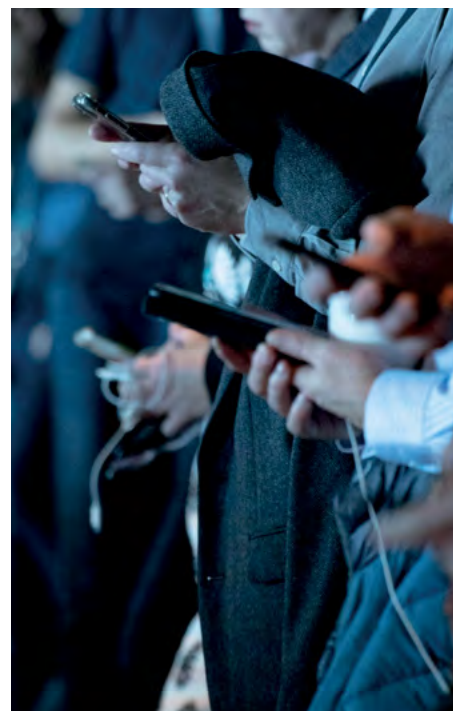
TSH4

"While these stories are awful and need to be heard, it is also the case that many social landlords are not like this, and in general the condition of social housing properties is higher than other tenures. We need to keep pressure on the media to provide a balanced view of social housing."

PTB2

The evidence above shows that it is not all our respondents that presumed that the media have not been fair in their reporting. Nevertheless, they also argued that reporting must be balanced and not one-sided because not all housing providers are not construed to be disrespectful or not accountable to their tenants.

They need to put themselves in the person they are writing about's shoes, to understand how they would feel with what was being wrote, then edit or start again. When learning to become whatever they are, have them taught empathy and how to write without offending others.



4.2 Tackling media stereotype by setting the tone from the top

To encourage the media to adopt a balanced and fairer reporting approach, many claimed the tone must emerge from the upper echelon of the society.

“There are some that don’t stigmatize social tenants, but... the changes must come from the top. So until the people running the country change then the majority of the media will stay the same.”

TSH3

Many alluded that policymakers need to raise awareness and make the stigmatization of social housing and its occupants an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issue. To influence and change media stereotype/stigmatizing narratives, our respondents indicated that politicians need to take conscious steps in evaluating how their rhetoric reinforces the stigma and then ensure they do their best at using the right language when discussing and describing social housing and its tenants because the media is their “word spreader”.

“This will always remain a major challenge but by lobbying and holding to account our Local MPs we hope the message gets delivered at the heart of Government. I also think that the way the media portray and explain this issue needs to change as media is the ‘word spreader’ of the country so if they use different and more appropriate language the message will have a bigger impact. The public can also seek to petition the Government to raise these issues in Parliament.”

SSH2

Feedback from this consultation indicated that policymakers need to put pressure on the media outlets and Ofcom to stop making programmes like ‘Benefits Street’ and have a guide for language. For instance:

“Without a total media blackout and a body that regulates the bigotry and lies within the media, it will make no difference as money can be made by using derogatory opinions on social housing and other social issues. People like to have someone to blame, and it is easy to blame people that have no voice and no funds to back them.”

TSH1

“Media watchdogs to be more vigilant of the stigmatizing effects of negative media reporting of social housing. It often forms part of a broader prejudice based on other protected characteristics and is a low-risk way to scaremonger. If socio-economic status was recognized as a protected characteristic under law, it would be far more difficult for media to make sweeping, discriminatory statements about social housing tenants.”

SSH2

“There are some that don’t stigmatize social tenants, but... the changes must come from the top. So until the people running the country change then the majority of the media will stay the same.”



4.3 Tackling stigma through the adoption of the Fair Press for Tenants' Guide

A few respondents argued that the media and policymakers should adopt the Fair Press for Tenants Guide produced by the See the Person (known as *Stop Social Housing Stigma*) in collaboration with the National Union of Journalists in 2019 to encourage journalists and media to consider the impacts of their negative portrayals of social housing and social housing tenants. This guide included a short history of social housing, sheds light on some of the common myths and stereotypes about social housing and tenants and provided lots of advice on how to engage with tenants and report fairly, including how the language used by the media reflects negatively on social housing and its occupants. The principles it promotes also translate to how social housing and its tenants are and should be portrayed on social media too. Our respondents believe this could discourage the media from portraying social housing tenants in a negative light.

"....Stop documentaries that make celebrities out of tenants who do not give a good example of the vast majority who are decent. Stop showing 'poverty porn' endless programmes portraying people in Social housing as feckless and on benefits or drugs. Lots of people work and are law abiding but of course this doesn't make entertainment for the viewers. Interview some good people who live in well-kept homes and can articulate. Ask genuine questions not loaded ones."

TSH4

"...the media should stop with 'benefit porn' programmes. That perpetuates the stereotype that social housing is full of non-working, drug taking dodgy characters with multiple children of questionable parentage."

TSH3

A respondent, PTB1, argued that much of the material in the Fair Press for Tenants Guide can also be used by marketing and communications professionals working in local government and social housing organizations themselves in educating and framing stories when publishing local stories. For example, around anti-social behaviour, for the social housing tenants and wider local communities within which they live. This view is supported by HAS2:

"We should educate media where possible - e.g., explaining more in press releases, putting more information on our websites, ensuring our media/social media is balanced. {named a housing association} has in the past conducted interviews with media outlets - explaining about Housing Associations' and our work. We need to ensure that all media outlets are familiar with the Fair Press for Tenants Guide."

Our respondents alluded that to address the negative media stereotype of social housing, social housing tenants need to take pride in their homes and estates and do their utmost to project that to the media when approached to discuss their estate and their lived experiences. Responses from social housing tenants suggest that social housing tenants need to start with themselves and how they perceive the stigma they are facing, and then they can challenge and persuade others to change the stigmatizing narratives that affect their lived experiences and their quality of life.

"...the media should stop with 'benefit porn' programmes. That perpetuates the stereotype that social housing is full of non-working, drug taking dodgy characters with multiple children of questionable parentage."



"I don't think you can, the change needs to start with ourselves and how we view stigma, before trying to get others to change their views."

Ts-FG1

"People who live in social housing could try and show that they appreciate their homes and want to live to the same standard as those who live in private housing."

TSH4

"We've got to have pride and unless somebody makes a stand and start and say right, yeah, I'm going to have pride in where I live. But you say to some people where you live and they'll say, oh God, it's rough up there, isn't it? No, it's not. It may have been some time ago, but you've got to get people out of that idea that it's rough up there. No, you need to take pride in where you live. Whether you're council, whether you're a leaseholder, or whether you're buying."

AD -FG3

4.4 Promoting positive stories in tackling media stereotype: housing providers and the regulator roles

To challenge stigma in social housing and to hold the media accountable, our respondents overwhelmingly believe that the housing providers and the regulator have an enormous role to play in ensuring that social homes are better maintained and that repairs take place in a timely and respectful manner to prevent their tenants from approaching the media to highlight the lack of accountability from their housing providers. The housing sector needs to change the narrative by promoting the benefit of social housing, partnering with its tenants in building cohesive and vibrant communities, and by disseminating positive stories. For instance, many argued that the good news stories showcasing the amazing work being done by social housing tenants and housing professionals can help challenge perceptions. Also, many suggest positive stories about what social housing providers are doing to provide decent homes, their diverse wraparound support services to their tenants, and how they work with communities to improve their quality of life all need to be publicized but unfortunately these stories are only circulated within the housing providers — and they are often not disseminated to the public to shape societal perception. This, many argued, needs to change if the sector is to challenge and tackle the stigma associated with the sector, and to provide counter-narratives to challenge the “deserving/undeserving poor” perspectives.

"We can't start to correct the narrative unless we involve the media showing the positive impact our residents are making in society. The sector should focus on promoting real stories and collaborating with the media on positive campaigns that shine a positive light on social housing residents. We also need to use our own influence as housing associations to correct falsified stories that stigmatize social housing."

HAs5

"Local councils and housing associations must be sure to push the good news hard in order to counteract the press's addiction to bad news and gossip. By promoting good stories about tenants, highlighting what is good about social housing, showing where

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communities come together and by the landlord encouraging and supporting good habits of tenants. This should be more about partnership working - landlord and tenant."

TSH4

"Housing Providers should look to work closely with local media initially to present positive stories about our work and our customers. We should look to challenge the accepted norm that Social Housing is for people in the greatest need, and they all need support. Many don't. We should look to link into work being done by academics to help get this message moved forward. There is significant work being done in the media at present to promote more equality in many aspects, but class and background is often missed. As a company, and a sector, nationwide, we should look to promote positive actions being done and challenge stigmatizing news stories in our localities."

SSH2

Social housing residents also suggested the use of social media platforms to get positive messaging across and using their 'promotion' features to reach new audiences, as well as focusing on getting the message out to local press which may take this on and run positive stories over and above the national press. A few suggested that the media should visit the social housing estates not only when there are disasters, but also when good news needs to be disseminated — thereby providing fairer and more balanced reporting of the sector.

Finally, many suggested the use of social housing champions/ambassadors to promote the positive stories at the local, regional, and national levels. For instance, the housing sector could rely on celebrities and businesspeople who grew up in social housing with success stories to share. In addition, feedback shows that to challenge and tackle stigma in social housing, the housing sector needs politicians, journalists, and editors and those who hold the power to come from a diverse range of backgrounds, including diverse housing backgrounds. For example, PTB 2 recommended that:

"... This means we need more well-paid internships and opportunities for people from less privileged backgrounds to get into journalism. As an example, the Big Issue is currently running the Breakthrough Programme, which is designed to help young people from underrepresented and underprivileged backgrounds to break into journalism. More schemes like this will help representation in the media."

Overall, what is clear from all the responses is that there is a need to change and challenge the media narratives and, in tackling the stereotype, policymakers, the housing providers, tenants, and the media have crucial and necessary roles to play in building a meaningful and impactful partnership to address the stigma. Also, policymakers are encouraged to set the right tone and invest in building more social housing to make it attractive and accessible to everyone regardless of their social status. In building this meaningful and impactful partnership, they are required to engage with the Fair Press for Tenants' Guide and referenced when in conversation with journalists. Social housing tenants, professionals and providers all have opportunities to lead the way in addressing the negative portrayal, instead illustrating how much social housing and tenants contribute to — and help to build — good neighbourhoods.

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5. How can we create a stronger and more effective tenant voice at the local and national levels?



“Ensure that tenants feel that their views are welcome, valued and will not impact their housing status. Provide a wide variety of options for tenants to contribute. To ensure their voice is effective requires others to listen to and value their views and experiences. For instance, some people feel that speaking out, or complaining, about any negative experiences will impact their tenancy or the service provided by the landlord.”

ITs5

5.1 Tenants’ voice at the regional and national levels

As evidenced in the initial report, several participants linked the intensity and the spread of the stigma in social housing to the lack of a strong tenant voice at the local, regional, and national levels. The participants highlighted the power imbalance between the housing associations and the tenants, which often results in the absence of accountability on the part of the housing associations to their tenants. The report highlights the frustrations and concerns experienced by tenants over their housing providers’ neglect and ineffective complaints procedures that often made them feel powerless and helpless. They also suggest that they are in a disadvantaged position compared with other powerful actors, such as the housing providers and the regulators. While at the regional and national level, the absence of a united and strong tenant voice implies that political and media stigmatizing narratives are left unchallenged by the tenants. In addition, participants in our initial study noted that the lack of an effective tenant voice means that tenants do not have the power, mechanisms or the resources/structure to lobby, control and challenge housing policies, regulations, expectations nor are they able to effectively demand for accountability from the housing providers. In this consultation, our respondents overwhelmingly emphasized that this lack of tenants’ voice at the local, regional and national level needs to change.

“Tenants need to be acknowledged as experts in their experience and listened to! Properly. ...Tenants need to be able to communicate with each other before this can happen. I have no idea about how I can communicate with a social housing tenant in Sunderland, for example. ...people feel afraid that if they speak out that will be penalized or lose their tenancy”

Ts -FG1

However, there are differing views as to whether there should be a national tenant voice. A few responses recounted the difficulties and the lack of support from the government when the National Tenants’ Voice (NTV) was introduced in 2010 and following the Green Paper in 2018 (see Hardman, 2010; Twinch, 2010; Robertson, 2010; Hilditch, 2019a⁵).

Tenants need to be acknowledged as experts in their experience and listened to! Properly. ...Tenants need to be able to communicate with each other before this can happen. I have no idea about how I can communicate with a social housing tenant in Sunderland, for example. ...people feel afraid that if they speak out that will be penalized or lose their tenancy



⁵. Following Professor Martin Cave's recommendation for the creation of a national tenants' voice in 2007, the National Tenants' Voice was developed in 2010 to enable tenants to have a voice nationally, to influence the policy and legislative framework that shapes how the sector operates, in the same way as trade and professional bodies, but it was abolished before it had been able to make any impact (Robertson, 2012, Cave, 2007).

Responses also made reference to the lack of government support for the, A Voice for Tenants (AV4T) initiative which was set up in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy⁶. According to Hilditch (2019a) citing Leslie Channon's open letter addressed to the housing minister, Kit Malthouse, the AV4T steering group advocated for the government to fund the consultation necessary to develop plans for the establishment of a national tenants' voice. Nevertheless, the government was accused of backtracking on its pledge to give social housing tenants a stronger voice on the national stage after the Grenfell Tower fire disaster. This disappointment was also expressed in this consultation as our respondents believe that the government will be unwilling to support such an initiative. For instance, PTB2 highlights that:

"Various bodies, such as the Housing Ombudsman, do hear directly from a resident panel, and both the Regulator and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities have consulted with tenant organizations including Tpas and TAROE on different areas. The former Department, MHCLG, also engaged with a massive number of tenants as part of their roadshows for developing the Social Housing White Paper. It seems likely that government will continue this more ad hoc engagement rather than setting up a national voice."

Having tenants' voices heard at the national level would itself be a significant driver to ensure that tenants are heard within their housing associations, at the regional levels to the central government. In addition, a few argued that it would be difficult to establish and make a representative an NTV, and it is better to focus on getting engagement right at the local levels because various bodies do directly engage with tenants, and the government would be reluctant to encourage a national tenant voice. For instance:

"Our biggest enemies are living in the same estates as us. There is no unity, society has become very atomized and fragmented, well, speaking from my perspective, I'd love to be corrected and shown different examples, but I really don't think a unified tenant movement can be – unless it needs some kind of catalyst to spark –one would have thought Grenfell would have been the spur to unite tenants, but I'm not so sure. So, I hope I don't sound negative..."

AD -FG2

This divergent perspective for an NTV was also evident in the feedback received from a few social housing tenants. For instance:

"Not sure creation of national tenant voice would likely be that representative as most tenants obviously don't want to be involved or engaged with their social landlord any more than they want to be involved or engaged with the post office or Tesco's. At local level, tenants should be able to influence behaviour of their social landlords."

ITs2

⁶. A Voice for Tenants (AV4T) steering group was established with the primary aim of establishing a national tenants' body (Hilditch, 2019a). The AV4T included representatives from several tenants' organizations such as Tpas, the Confederation of Co-operative Housing, TAROE Trust, National Federation of Tenant Management Organizations, The Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) Tenant Group, National Federation of ALMOs, and the National Communities Resource Centre (see [HYPERLINK "https://nationaltenants.org/a-voice-for-tenants/"](https://nationaltenants.org/a-voice-for-tenants/) A Voice for [HYPERLINK "https://nationaltenants.org/a-voice-for-tenants/"](https://nationaltenants.org/a-voice-for-tenants/) Tenants).

Having tenants' voices heard at the national level would itself be a significant driver to ensure that tenants are heard within their housing associations, at the regional levels to the central government.

However, predominantly, feedback from this consultation (similar to previous advocacies and rationale for an NTV (see Hilditch, 2019b) revealed that there needs to be a stronger tenant voice at the local, regional and national levels, and this should be aligned with increased recognized tenant's frameworks and mechanisms for accountability. For instance:

"I think perhaps a crucial thing...is tenants' voice and you'll know the government vaguely once upon a time almost set one up and then pulled back. I think that would have been a very government-controlled outfit. ...residents really need a plausible national organization that competes with the National Housing Federation, in the media amongst other places. ... Too often when the media want to look at social housing, they just interview somebody from the National Housing Federation, which is the organization of the Housing Associations, Boards and Executives, who are, in so many ways, as it were, on the other side to us. We should be speaking for social housing, not them."

AD -FG1

Tenants' representation at all levels is crucial as it will help project the experiences and perspectives of tenants at the heart of regulations. The NTV will be the best opportunity to build a forum to drive the necessary change in the sector and help tackle social housing stigma among other issues. Importantly, the NTV needs to be established for the tenants, with the tenants and run by the tenants, and this will ensure that power and voice are directly placed in the hands of the tenants and not at any third parties with limited power to advocate/lobby for them. For instance, tenants noted that:

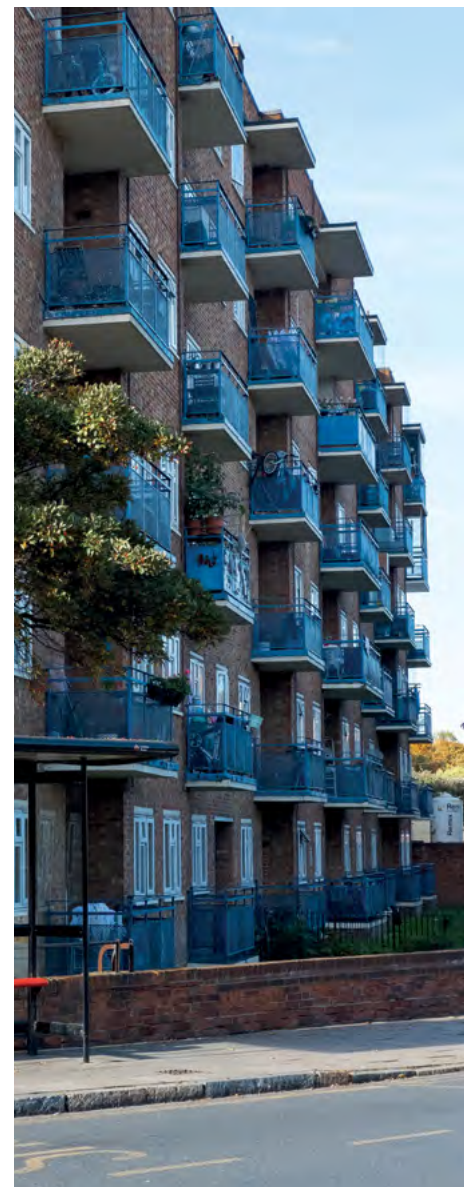
"The problem we have of course is that stigmatization comes naturally to the human being. We all wish to be superior to the other people and it feeds into the desires to have greater windows and greater timbers on your 17th century house and so on. It's an uphill battle, but I think we need to actually have a positive tenant voice at the national level and also at the local levels. We should enquire with Mr Gove, our new Housing Minister, as to whether they can reinstate the requirement, as the housing corporation did some years ago, that there should be a tenant on each Board. I managed to get onto the Board of my current housing association and that worked quite well."

AD -FG1

"Encourage government to reintroduce the national tenants' voice/forum. Encourage tenants to get involved. Promote organization such as NETV [North-East Tenants' Voice]. ... having tenants in important positions where they can help make choices about issues that directly impact them and other social tenants. For example, there should be a social housing group that directly works with the government and to be a member you must be a social tenant."

TSH3

"Encourage government to reintroduce the national tenants' voice/forum. Encourage tenants to get involved. Promote organization such as NETV [North-East Tenants' Voice]. ... having tenants in important positions where they can help make choices about issues that directly impact them and other social tenants. For example, there should be a social housing group that directly works with the government and to be a member you must be a social tenant."



5.2. Tenants' voice at the local levels (housing associations)

5.2.1. Tenants' voice at the local levels (housing associations): tenants' inclusion

"Ask tenants about this. But first of all, ensure that each organization listens and responds to its tenants and encourages them and gives them the support to speak up and as necessary, advocates on their behalf. Housing associations, councils and tenant representatives should be encouraged to get on board with initiatives like customer voice and join together with other likeminded organizations to maximize the message."

TSH4

The consultation responses highlight a lack of meaningful engagement with tenants at the local level. The tenants believe that it would be beneficial for housing providers to embed tenants' voices in their organizational culture, similar to the way they embed value-for-money in their operations. There was a recognition that there needs to be more authentic consultations with their landlords. They indicated that tenants would like to be democratically consulted (not cherrypicked by their housing providers) and involved in the decisions made by their landlords, and the housing providers should ensure that tenants are heard, and their opinions are taken into consideration when making forwarding decisions. In our focus group with tenants, they felt that social landlords often adopt a tokenistic approach to tenants' voices by cherry-picking which tenants to engage with. For example, a tenants noted:

"....what housing associations do, is they elect their own tenants' voice, rather than forming a tenants' voice or a residents' group. They go and choose people that they want and then prime them with what they want to say. It's not very democratic or authentic, so I think there needs to be some massive organizing around what tenants' voice is and residents should be informing policy. Policy in government and change at government level. That's what I think a residents' voice should be. It would need to be organized group or forum of selected people. Obviously, you've got rules around the things that you say that they're not personal towards people. That is something that can be done."

AD -FG1

Respondents suggested that landlords need to establish closer links and communication channels between their tenants and the board. For instance, tenants suggest that scrutiny panels need to be strengthened and tenants should be members of the boards and committees such as the Tenants' Forums (also known as Tenants' Resident Associations) to enable them to express their opinions further up the chains but, to do this, the management culture needs to be less obstructive, and, in some cases, need to be changed. For instance, tenants said:

"I think a lot of organizations would not want to be obstructive, but sometimes it's just the management practice, and they don't realize that that actually can be. So, for me there's very much around the experience of tenants to say, these are some of the easy solutions, where you could make it easier for the bulk of your tenants, not just

There was a recognition that there needs to be more authentic consultations with their landlords. They indicated that tenants would like to be democratically consulted (not cherrypicked by their housing providers) and involved in the decisions made by their landlords, and the housing providers should ensure that tenants are heard, and their opinions are taken into consideration when making forwarding decisions.

your experienced tenants, who are used to championing the cause, but actually to really tackle that. I think a lot of it, we would want to do - and should be co-designed with tenants, because of your experience and expertise."

Ts -FG2

In establishing a closer link, our respondents argued that tenants need to be listened to and heard. Housing providers should establish a more robust and user-friendly system of communication that would encourage tenants to openly discuss issues and such a system must include people (including tenants) who can make significant impacts within the housing associations and outwit it. Many argued that there is a difference between being "listened to" and "actions taken on what had been listened to". For instance:

"Hear my voice, but then do something. For me it's the frustration of being asked the same thing again. So often tenant involvement can be tick boxy. Have been in meetings where people have been shouting and raving due to frustration."

Ts -FG1

In other words, our respondents argued that they would like to see more actions taken by their housing providers and not merely being told that "someone is dealing with their issue" or blame the tenants for their lifestyles. Here are some respondents' comments from our focus groups in relation to this:

"So having a strong tenant voice is actually very, very difficult...tenants have, for years, been told, we want to hear your voice, we want to hear your voice. So, they start something and then suddenly funding stops, all taken away, nothing happens. Tenants don't forget that! So even now, when tenants' voices are absolutely needed... it's just not happening. I mean one simple example to make a good point is that with the damp and mould you have many thousands of tenants that have been told, open your window and it's your lifestyle. Their lifestyle is no different than anybody else's. All they do is breathe and that breathe put moisture into the air, the same as we all do. So there's a load of reasons why we have damp and mould but tenants are blamed for it. So it's getting rid of blame culture. It's getting rid of the language which is used towards tenants all the time."

HAS -FG1

"Communication from tenants and those that are running these associations - that goes from the person people that work in the offices all the way up their chain i.e. management and CEO. THERE NEEDS to be Communication going both ways, that way people feel a part of system and to some point feel as if they are not just another tenant. ... There is very little contact between landlords and tenants generally. It should start with local housing officers being personally involved with tenants and acting as go-betweens. Would be good for trainee staff to go onto estates and see what estates all are about... Too many surveys are carried out, especially by housing associations, that never give feedback."

TSH4

Furthermore, in establishing a closer link, feedback from housing professionals elucidated the need for the housing providers to promote

"I think a lot of organizations would not want to be obstructive, but sometimes it's just the management practice, and they don't realize that that actually can be. So, for me there's very much around the experience of tenants to say, these are some of the easy solutions, where you could make it easier for the bulk of your tenants, not just your experienced tenants, who are used to championing the cause, but actually to really tackle that. I think a lot of it, we would want to do - and should be co-designed with tenants, because of your experience and expertise."

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the opportunity for tenants to be involved. For instance, feedback from housing professionals argued that besides tenants being members of the boards, they must ensure that communication and decision-making are clear and transparent and that housing providers need to raise awareness on tenant engagement/voice by promoting options for their tenants to get involved. This will help promote a co-design culture where tenants are empowered to identify issues as they occur, and the housing providers are quickly tackling and responding to those issues identified by their residents.

For example:

"Again, a challenge but by involving tenants in our processes and procedures, by getting their views we can feed these back to the NHF and the Housing Minister. The more we involve our tenants the more we can build their voice and improve.... Have more people represented from different backgrounds and those who have lived or do live within social housing."

SSH2

In addition, feedback highlights that landlords should make significant efforts to talk to a diverse set of tenants/people from different backgrounds and groups in their own communities by attending community forums to get input from a range of people rather than wait for the tenants/residents (not just social housing tenants) to come to them. They explained that such closer links and communication channels between the landlords and tenants/communities will establish a culture of trust, accountability and the co-design of policies and services delivered. Building a culture of trust and accountability should be the foundation on which the tenants and landlord relationships should be based as this would enable perspectives and experiences to be valued – and subsequently enable the housing providers and their tenants to celebrate the positive differences that could emerge from such relationships. Here are a couple of comments highlighting why diversity of voices is necessary:

"Locally – we need to encourage tenant feedback and input from the wide spread of demographics our tenants fall into, we can invite them to complete surveys, attend focus groups, face to face clinics, tenant involvement groups as well as having a key role on the decision-making Boards of the organizations. We need to use a range of ways to ensure that people have the opportunity to participate, if they choose to do so."

HAS2

"It is important that housing associations take on board what the tenants say and, equally importantly.... Housing associations must keep communication lines open. Engagement should be impactful – resident involvement will influence decision making.... Engagement should be Open and Honest.... Engagement should be valued – residents [should] be informed on how their involvement has made a difference and what impact this had had on services. Engagement should be demand-led.... Tenant voice is incredibly important in shaping the services we deliver and communities that we design. We need to get our repairs and services right, listening to our residents and working with them to improve how we maintain and repair their homes [would help]."

HAS5

"Again, a challenge but by involving tenants in our processes and procedures, by getting their views we can feed these back to the NHF and the Housing Minister. The more we involve our tenants the more we can build their voice and improve.... Have more people represented from different backgrounds and those who have lived or do live within social housing."



5.2.2. Tenants' voice at the local levels: expectations from the leadership team

The housing providers' leadership teams, who are primarily responsible for the management of the organization, should take responsibility and this should include conducting unplanned visits to their estates, properties and tenants to collect accurate information on disrepair problems or challenges faced by their tenants. Feedback indicated that they need to start at the local levels by critically evaluating the use of stigmatizing rhetoric, evaluating how the housing providers (including board members) are listening to their tenants, understanding how complaints are resolved, and identifying policies to achieve excellent outcomes beyond accepting targets for KPIs that does not depict excellence in service deliveries (including repair services). Many believe this will enable board members to understand the real stigma within social housing, and to bridge the division between housing built for sale or shared ownership against social rents. Here are a couple of comments highlighting why board members should make significant efforts to engage with their tenants and not wait to be fed "half the truth because someone is covering themselves":

"By making the people who are ultimately responsible for failings (usually the CEO and boards) stand up and take ownership which is why they are there in the first place. Again, how often do the CEO's and board members carry out unplanned visits to their estates, properties and tenants to see for themselves what is going on in real life? I don't mean how often do they all drive round in a minibus or walk a few streets then all go for lunch, how many have actually visited voids, or properties with real disrepair problems or difficult tenants etc? Not many have. I think you would find if they were being honest, they rely on others at the coal face providing them with a board report that is usually not telling half the truth because someone is covering themselves, boards get told lies and they need to start checking for themselves if what they are being told is accurate."

SSH2

"When it comes down to residents, yes, get outside! There is no excuse for it. The board members need to get on their bicycles or on their feet or whatever you want to call it and get out and look at what there is out there, to be able to understand the stigma within social housing. ... It all went a bit pear shaped about eight years ago when affordable housing was first mooted by government, where grants were taken away, so social housing became really a non-starter for many... ... I think the real stigma started to come in that there was that difference between housing built for sale or possible shared ownership as against social rent and benefits. That to me is the division line in terms of looking at the stigma at board level."

HAEB -FG

Involving tenants' enables organizations to co-design services, prioritize what really matters, and find solutions that might not otherwise have been considered. Tenants' involvement or having an effective tenant's voice should go beyond conducting a tick-boxing exercise but giving adequate effect to their concerns by being a lot more proactive

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rather than meeting the basic requirements on their complaints policies and what tenants can do afterwards. Our respondents, who are also board members, argued that involving tenants on the boards or as board members will help in tackling stigma because it gives tenants the opportunity to share their lived experience, which subsequently enables board members to understand what social housing is and the conditions attached to social housing to provide good homes and brilliant services. For instance,;

"....I must admit I am a tenant within social housing and have been for 20 odd years and it's in that respect that I got involved with housing. I have seen over a period of time when it comes down to stigma, where you have residents involved directly with the board or as board members that stigma tends to disappear. It is getting those other board members to understand just what is social housing and the conditions that are attached to social housing."

HAEB -FG

Fundamentally, it is about changing the governance structure to include tenants as board members, and the boards then ensure that there is a culture of accountability, respect, equity and inclusion —, and this ethos should underpin how the organizations operate, particularly in providing good homes and services. Tenants, who responded to this consultation revealed that involving them in decision making and planning, will enable the housing providers to acknowledge the challenges in some areas and this will enable allow housing providers to effectively work across diverse agencies to improve the quality of life for tenants in less desirable areas. Many respondents highlight that tenants needs to be treated as equals in this relationship and not as the others.

"On the board and with a real voice, not just on a tenant's group – tenants are shareholders, are they not and why the hell are they not more involved? Maybe HAs are too big."

HAs6

"I think a lot of organizations would not want to be obstructive, but sometimes it's just the management practice, and they don't realize that that actually can be. So for me, there's very much around the experience of tenants..., these are some of the easy solutions, where you could make it easier for the bulk of your tenants, not just your experienced tenants, who are used to championing the cause.... I think a lot of it, we would want to do - and should be co-designed with tenants...."

Ts -FG2

"Enshrine tenant board representation as a must. We need to be present in our communities.... reduce paternalism and increase 'citizenship'We need to ensure that we are listening to the views of all our customers, including our minorities and hard to reach groups. This is imperative to getting a clear view of what is required. Also, as staff, we need to challenge stigmatizing words and actions within the workplace."

SSH2

The need for a culture of accountability, respect, equity and inclusion, and the challenges that it poses was also recognized by the board members

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that engaged in this consultation. For instance, HAEB -FG argued that:

"Whether that's going out to people, people coming to the board, we need to know much more about what it feels like to be a resident in social housing. I do think we should have residents on the board... because they are bringing a level of expertise like we do in a particular area. The particular level of expertise that they are bringing which is going to be helpful for us when we make decisions as a board and that should be at the forefront.... we need to be speaking up for it much more... We need to be doing a lot more about that to talk about the positive impact that social housing has on society. But I think it's quite a complicated problem. As I said, it's not going to be easily solved."

5.3. Establishing regional and national tenant voice — some thoughts on how

Our respondents highlight that tenants should have a voice and be heard locally, regionally and nationally and they should be empowered to influence policy and legislative framework, processes and services to shape how the sector operates to address the concerns of social housing tenants. They suggest that tenants should be members of the board, which should lead to a tenant forum (TRAs) associated with the housing providers. The collective tenants' forums across the different regions should enable the formation of an effective and efficient regional tenants' forum established to provide a collective network to discuss wider housing related issues, and these regional tenants' forums would eventually lead to a national tenant forum to influence national housing policies. In addition, many elucidated that the NTV should be a non-departmental and independent body devoid of political influence. It should simply be established to give tenants a platform and a voice on issues that affect their lived experiences. It is argued that the NTV should be made up of tenants across the different regions in England which suggest that there should be a grassroots effort to establish a stronger tenants' voice at the regional and local levels. Our respondent provided several examples emphasizing how the tenant voice can be established. For instance:

"Embed a customer voice and tenant led mentality throughout the organization. All social housing providers' key focus should be on their tenant/s and making sure they are supported, where necessary, to live as best a life as possible. This should start with tenant Board representation, at least two tenants, then a tenants' forum which is linked to the social housing provider but has a mechanism to go into a regional forum to provide a wider discussion and voice, which eventually would then lead to a national forum. Each forum should be able to influence policies, processes and services to meet the needs of the tenants. The opportunity for tenants to be involved should always be open and advertised. This should be promoted from the beginning of the tenancy and throughout. There should also be regular meetings or drop-in sessions in local communities so that the social housing provider is seen as accessible and supportive"

"Embed a customer voice and tenant led mentality throughout the organization. All social housing providers' key focus should be on their tenant/s and making sure they are supported, where necessary, to live as best a life as possible. This should start with tenant Board representation, at least two tenants, then a tenants' forum which is linked to the social housing provider but has a mechanism to go into a regional forum to provide a wider discussion and voice, which eventually would then lead to a national forum. Each forum should be able to influence policies, processes and services to meet the needs of the tenants. The opportunity for tenants to be involved should always be open and advertised."

“A government funded independent organization that monitors the social and private letting, such as other industries. The independent organization should be encouraged to name & shame the poor suppliers and highlight the best suppliers. This is relevant to answers 3, 4 and 6.”

TSH4

A few respondents also highlighted the need to have a collective communication channel established between the tenants (including younger residents), their housing associations, councils and even the police to tackle stigma and to give tenants a recognized voice. A more collective approach would make tenants feel their voice is being listened to by all stakeholders. For instance:

“Tenants should be advocates and have integrated relationships with stakeholders. Create wider resident voice and discussion groups that look into the issues surrounding the area... Better communication between HA and the council as well as others such as the police. A collective approach would make residents feel their voice is being listened to.”

Ts-FG

The Green Paper and Social Housing White Paper published in 2018 and 2020 respectively highlighted how social housing tenants' voices need to be strengthened to challenge stigma and hold housing providers accountable. The White Paper reset the agenda in terms of the focus that landlords must give to their tenants. However, several respondents highlight that there needs to be a recognition of the power imbalance between many landlords and tenants, and this needs to change because there need to be legislative requirements compelling this change across the sector to build an impactful tenant voice. For instance, PTB2 argued::

“Although we are waiting for the government to pass the legislation to allow the regulatory reform, we would expect this to have a significant impact on the tenant voice. A fundamental principle is the recognition of the power imbalance between many landlords and tenants, and the need to genuinely transfer power from the organization to tenants. This includes making sure that tenants have the tools, opportunity and skills to effectively hold their organization to account, that the tenant voice is heard at the highest level of governance, that there are many different ways of engaging with tenants, and that tenants know how their views and feedback have been used to shape and improve services.”

The Regulator of Social Housing has emphasized that social landlords should act now to listen to and address tenants' and residents' issues and concerns with services. Feedback from practitioners highlighted that the steer from the regulator and the approach to ensuring that housing providers engage with their tenants is a useful start in the process of bringing tenants' voices into the structures that shape and direct the social housing sector. Our respondents suggest that this will provide an opportunity to highlight and challenge poor practices, lack of accountability and stigma. This will include mandating housing providers to demonstrate they are continuously improving and learning from best practices or learning from others in the sector to drive improvement, including through having effective tenant engagement. Examples of good practice mentioned by our respondents include the tenant

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voice structures adopted by the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), which include the presence of tenants and residents on ALMO boards; the presence of scrutiny panels in the structures, residents' committees with a wider engagement, and feedback mechanisms (see NFA Best Practice Briefing).

Overall, this consultation concludes that there needs to be effective tenants' voices at the local, regional and national levels. To achieve this, the sector needs to adopt a collective approach with all stakeholders (including trade and professional bodies, tenants' representative bodies, policymakers, regulators) to implement tenants' voices but what is not clear — and will require further consultation — is how to establish and finance a national tenant voice. More productive consultation/research needs to be conducted to explore how a national tenant voice should be established, structured, and funded.

Table 5 below represent further examples of the responses to question 5

Respondents' codes*	Additional feedback from respondents' surveys
SSH2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need social housing champions; social housing tenants to be vocal, confident, powerful advocates. This will help counter some politicians' assumptions all social tenants are the same e.g. needy, inarticulate. We also need a change of tone around benefits (intersectionality): currently we are all making the case that nearly 40% of people on Universal Credit (UC) are working people because we hope this will have an impact on the impending UC cuts - but the risk is that this also feeds into the deserving/undeserving poor argument. We need to remind people of the legitimate reasons why people may be on benefits - including non-working benefits claimants.
OSSH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network local tenant representatives at national level. Affiliate to the housing minister and make it an objective of that office for this to happen. Engage with local and national media as described in responses above
TSH3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More input from tenants and having tenants in important positions where they can help make choices about issues that directly impact them and other social tenants. For example, there should be a social housing group that directly works with the government and to be a member you must be a social tenant.
TSH4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By highlighting the housing crisis from the perspective of working people and linking it to property prices and lack of stock rather than linking it to universal credit. Try and engage with tenants more often and ask for opinion. I know this is part of the process. Give feedback from meetings about tenant issues and legislation. Get people interested in what is happening then they might want to get more involved.

6. How can we make social housing providers more accountable to tenants?



“Involve them in decision making and planning. Acknowledge the challenges in some areas and work across all agencies to improve the quality of life for tenants in less desirable areas. Improve upon timescales for repairs... Listen to them [tenants] more.”

TSH3

“Put tenants at the centre of everything from the board downwards, without the tenants, there isn't a housing association. Residents need to have a true say, real interaction with those that can make a difference. Tenants need to be involved in policies and procedures, achieve real outcomes, have a voice, taken seriously by everyone who connects with the housing association. [it] has to be real, maintain a kind professional effective relationship.”

Ts -FG1

In the Stigma and Social Housing in England report, several participants linked the intensity of the stigma to the power imbalance between landlord and tenants and the consequent lack of accountability of social landlords to tenants. What is evident from this consultation is that housing providers have policies and procedures in place which should make them accountable, in a limited way, to their tenants. Accountability mechanisms in operation currently include scrutiny panels, customer complaints mechanisms, and surveys and feedback channels to ensure tenants provide feedback. However, it is also evident that these accountability mechanisms are not fit for purpose in terms of making landlords accountable to tenants.

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6.1. Effectiveness of the accountability mechanisms to social housing tenants

A few respondents also suggest that there are regulatory frameworks facilitating the accountability relationships between housing providers and their tenants. Here are a couple of examples from our respondents highlighting the statutory accountability relationship requirements between landlords and their tenants:

“We are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing. As per The Tenant and Involvement Standard requires us to demonstrate how we respond to tenants' needs in the way we provide services and communicate with tenants...”

HAs2.



“There is a landlord tenant relationship with obligations on both sides. The landlord should always be able to evidence that it is meeting its landlord obligations and be open where it is not doing so. There are lots of mechanisms both statutory and regulatory that enable tenants to hold their landlord to account. The sector is just not very good at explaining and evidencing what it does in terms of meeting its obligations and in many ways, going beyond simply delivering the basics.”

TSH4

Promoting and showcasing some of the good practices where landlords are listening to, communicating, and developing services with their tenants as part of the organizational culture and the benefits need to be publicized to encourage the sector to take on accountability and challenge stigmatizing language in the sector (see CIH and See the Person, 2020). Our respondents also highlight how established structures and systems can help reinforce accountability within the sector:

“Structure and functions such as scrutiny panels within organizations and partner councils can reinforce it. Training, events and qualifications are all vehicles through... sector bodies can champion this approach within the sector.”

PTB1

However, most of our respondents criticized the effectiveness of these mechanisms in ensuring that tenants have an effective voice to hold their landlords accountable. They argue that to enhance the functioning of accountability mechanisms, there is a need to encourage tenants to discuss and share experiences of living in social housing by having tenants as board members, offering community forums/discussions with the senior management team (SMT), by giving them the opportunity to discuss their concerns, and making sure they are supported by embedding their recommendations in policies, processes and services.

“Clearer communication channels between landlord and tenant. Offering community forums/discussions with our Senior Management Team in different locations so tenants can inform our top level of any issues/ concerns and hear first-hand from our SMT what measures we can put in place to help our customers.”

SSH2

This is more important when organizations are required to balance several competing and challenging issues such as stigma, building maintenance and safety, and climate change with a net-zero carbon target among others. See for instance Bryson, 2021; CIH and Orbit, 2021, and a few respondents linked accountability with involving tenants to prioritize and find solutions for these competing and challenging issues:

“Increasingly, landlords have to balance several competing and costly challenges, such as the net zero carbon targets, building safety as well as developing new homes, with limited resources. Where solutions depend on new and emerging technologies, such as retrofitting homes to achieve the net zero carbon agenda, working with tenants to find solutions that benefit both parties will

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increasingly be crucial, as recognized in a series of reports recently looking at the involvement of tenants in net zero strategies.”

PTB1

Our respondents also noted that accountability for service delivery is vital and this can only be effective when landlords are honest and provide the information required to hold them accountable. Here are a few comments on this:

“Ensure properties are proactively maintained. Make sure ASB is addressed quickly, and the actions and outcomes are shared with the residents. Listen and act on what tenants want and what is important to them. Be open and honest and publish what requests have been made and what has been done in response. Tenants involved in policy and strategy development and setting and monitoring performance targets.”

SSH2

“When consulting, don’t pretend you are giving choices on X Y and Z when in reality the other two are legal and contract, so you only have choice on Z, but when you do have opportunities make it count. Meaningful feedback, more ‘you said’ we did. It also possibly stems from comparisons if you tell the truth that another provider may not be doing the same, so you can look worse initially by being honest with your baseline. Over time, people will appreciate the honesty if you get better, but the world is too quick to pass judgement and do a reshuffle. Also, accountability works both ways – model policies should emphasize both what the tenant and provider should expect.”

HAs3

Our respondents also suggest that the housing providers should be accountable and transparent on how funding is utilized beyond what is disclosed in their annual reports. They argued that transparency on the use of funds and not just an overview of the service charges will enable stakeholders — including tenants — to hold housing providers accountable. Our respondents believe this will enable housing providers to review their expenditure, understand what improvements are being made, cap salaries and invite tenants’ feedback, which will further eliminate the “us and them” culture and attitudes. Here are a few comments on why transparency in finance is necessary to facilitate accountability:

“By being more transparent, every spending detail, more importantly the wages/salaries and bonuses given out to ALL at the landlord. How much does the CEO... earn? Did they get a bonus? If so... why?, [why] wouldn’t the money be better being put back into the housing?”

TSH3

“via 100% transparency- that upon request all accounts, decisions etc are available to a tenant scrutiny panel with no exceptions – nothing hidden.”

TSH2

Ensure properties are proactively maintained. Make sure ASB is addressed quickly, and the actions and outcomes are shared with the residents. Listen and act on what tenants want and what is important to them. Be open and honest and publish what requests have been made and what has been done in response.

Also, accountability works both ways – model policies should emphasize both what the tenant and provider should expect.

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6.2. Improved regulatory space to enhance accountability to social housing tenants

Our respondents highlighted that housing providers are required to be accountable (including to the housing ombudsman when mandatorily required) but there are no strong regulatory requirements for housing providers to be accountable to their tenants. The absence of an accountability requirement by landlords to tenants resulted in power imbalance, which further drives stigma in social housing and the culture of “be grateful for what you have” despite poor services. Feedback from this consultation indicates that for there to be any meaningful democratic accountability in the housing sector with stronger national tenants’ voice and decision-making powers for tenants at the local and national levels. Feedback from the consultation also indicates that there needs to be a consumer-focused regulation to compel the sector to embrace real accountability to their tenants, pure excellence in how services are delivered, and the use of language to tackle stigma. Our consultation revealed that the Regulator of Social Housing must have more powers of enforcement in terms of the consumer standards, while the Housing Ombudsman needs to be given more sanctioning powers so that they can hold housing providers more accountable. Here are some comments on this from our respondents:

“Through more meaningful tenant rights/consumer focused regulation and enforceable standards and through persuading the sector, that’s historically resisted and resented anything more than light touch regulation to embrace greater accountability.”

ITS2

“... when I hear someone say we should be in the upper quartile my immediate response is, but if all we do is benchmarking against each other and we’re all not delivering repairs more than half the time correctly, then that upper quartile is not a particularly good place to be. ... That’s the thing about benchmarking isn’t it, if you’re just benchmarking against your peers and if everybody is not really driving excellence then you’re just perpetuating a culture that says, well good enough is good enough.”

HAEB -FG

Furthermore, evidence suggests that the regulatory framework should tie housing providers’ performance metrics on service delivery to rent levels and the ability to increase rents as a means of making them more accountable. Different performance measures and easier complaints procedures that focus on tenant issues should be introduced to identify underperforming providers. For instance, feedback from our respondents noted:

“Make it a performance management issue in housing associations. Their key objective is to provide decent accommodation etc. If they are not meeting the objectives and mission of the organization, then relevant disciplinary or performance improvement steps should be taken.”

OSSH

“There has to be a standard and if that standard is not met, then damages for the deprivation of human rights should be applied and not

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just for housing associations but in particular, the local authorities that have gotten away with providing insufferable housing conditions for such a long time, it is time that serious damages are paid to each family member that has suffered as a consequence of the unlawful trespass against a family's right."

ITS4

Our respondents overwhelmingly recognized why and suggest that performance should be linked with increased fines and penalties, and with tenants compensated for any inconveniences experienced due to their housing providers' poor performance. Besides imposing larger penalties, access to the Housing Ombudsman need to be consistently promoted independently of the housing providers across the sector. Here are a few pieces of feedback on why housing providers' accountability should be linked to performance, rent and larger penalties to improve tenants' satisfaction:

"Easier complaints procedures and tougher penalties to the landlords that don't abide by rules and regulations... .. pass policies with minimal standard requirements. Fine those or break up those who provide a bad service. Tenants must be more accountable of their own actions as well."

TSH1

"Issue the housing providers with fines and the tenants with rent free weeks while waiting for overdue repairs to be done."

TSH4

"Housing providers need to allow staff time to investigate & resolve issues properly e.g. implement a robust complaints team. Increase financial penalties and compensate tenants that have been inconvenienced due to housing provider poor performance/repairs issues etc."

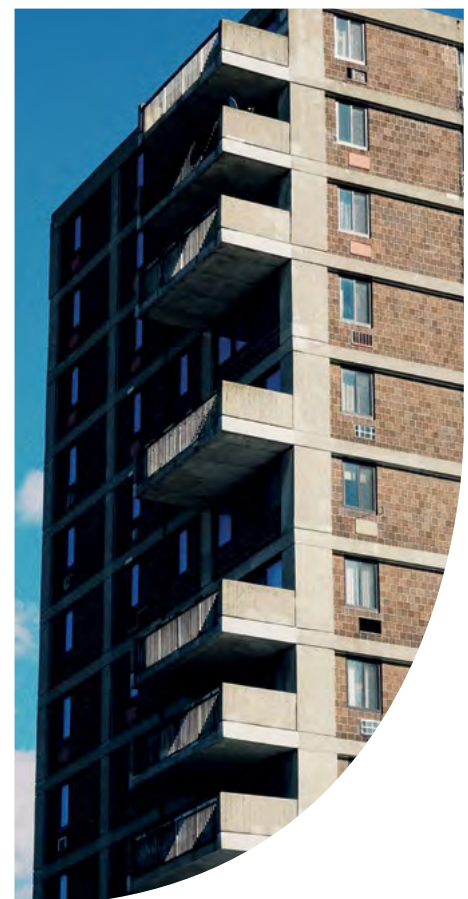
LC1

"Fines, loss of License and even imprisonment for repeat offenders, who don't keep their structural in good living standards. i.e. damp, condensation issues, plastering, walls and fencings. By punishing failure, as comprehensively as possible."

TSH3

Overall, what is obvious from all the overwhelming responses (as evidenced above) is that housing providers need to be more accountable and should be made to be to their tenants in order to eliminate the culture of "us and them" and its impact on stigma. What we saw was that tenants' satisfaction, accountability and engagement should be an important and valuable infrastructure for housing associations to improve their operations. However, feedback from the housing professionals indicated that the Social Housing White Paper has introduced several new measures including consumer regulation and tenant satisfaction measures which will make them more accountable to their tenants and will subsequently help tenants to hold their landlords to account. As academics, we are not yet convinced that this might result in any significant impacts that would address stigma within social housing, ameliorate the plights and everyday negative realities of social housing tenants, and promote accountability and tenants' voice beyond tokenism but the impacts of these new measures could be the focus of future studies.

"Housing providers need to allow staff time to investigate & resolve issues properly e.g. implement a robust complaints team. Increase financial penalties and compensate tenants that have been inconvenienced due to housing provider poor performance/repairs issues etc."



7. How can we⁷ build a sustainable and inclusive social housing system devoid of stigma?

⁷ “We” is used to connote all stakeholders in the housing sector and not just the housing providers or the tenants. This includes government, media, academics, regulators, trade and professional bodies etc.

"It starts from the very beginning making tenants feel that it's actually their home. That way they may take more pride in the home/estate they are living in. Stop looking at certain areas can only have a certain type live there other than sheltered and adapted properties. Areas should be a mixed bag and revenue needs to be more transparent. Deprived areas having more out the pot. As you can go to certain areas, and they look nice with additional works compared to those areas we know are not great. So, we have that attitude of we won't bother there! All estates to be treated equally."

TSH1

7.1. Combination of all previous measures

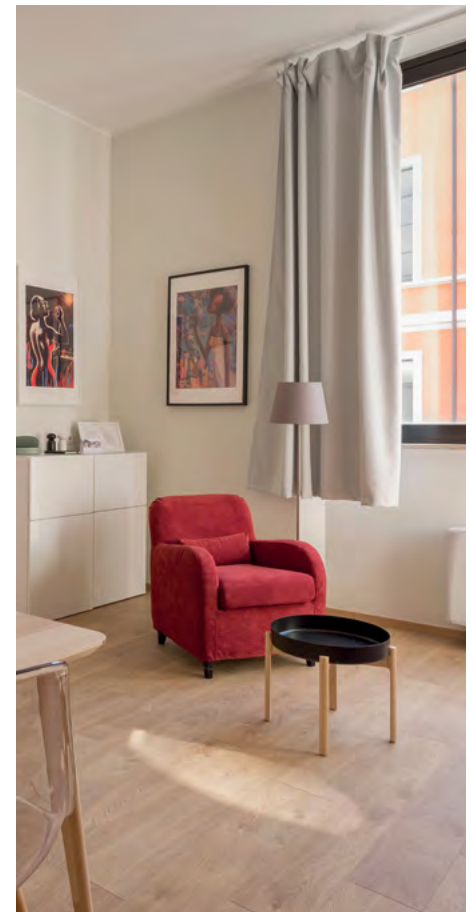
A few respondents highlighted that it would be difficult to build a sustainable and inclusive [social] housing system devoid of stigma because of several issues ranging from the negative rhetoric, lack of investment and housing policies geared towards maintaining and increasing social housing stocks, and the attitudes of some housing providers, with a few also mentioning the lackadaisical attitudes of some social housing tenants. Despite these concerns, they also argued that it could change but we should not expect the change to be an overnight or short-term change to tackle stigma; the effort to build a sustainable and inclusive housing system devoid of stigma must be deliberate, consistent and continuous. To challenge stigma, it is important to understand what influences perception of social housing stigma and how they can be addressed. For instance:

"I believe removing the stigma of social housing completely is almost an impossible job in the shorter term. However, working with politicians, the media and tenants we could change some people's perceptions of social housing. However, it is difficult when two out of three of these parties have already made their minds up on their perception of social housing. In the longer term, building high quality housing and maintaining strong diverse communities, social housing providers can change people perceptions of social housing. However, one show like 'Benefits Street' can completely undo all the positives and inroads housing providers have made in recent years in a matter of minutes."

SSH2

As evidenced in our initial report (Stigma and Social Housing in England), the media and politicians play a significant role in shaping public discourse, thoughts, opinions, and behaviours. What is also obvious in our report is that stigma has been perpetuated over decades, and its eradication will require a multi- faceted approach with sustained, deliberate, and collective long-term programmes, policies and efforts to shift societal perceptions to recognize housing as a right regardless of the tenure. Our respondents argued that feedback provided on the previous consultation questions have a part to play in developing a [social] housing system that is sustainable and inclusive because they are all connected to being a sustainable and inclusive housing system.⁸ As evidenced in the previous sections of this report, our respondents posited that perceptions can be challenged if the media, politicians, and housing providers make significant efforts to challenge and tackle the intersecting and complex stigmas

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associated with social housing. For instance, PTB1 argued that:

“...all of these threads considered are complex and interlinked, so action has to be taken forward across all parties involved in the sector. It will require political will and commitment of adequate resources to increase the sector, so that it can become an option for a wider range of households and individuals. The policy and legislative framework need to change, in line with the ambitions set out in the social housing white paper. Housing organizations need to consider how, by engaging more proactively with tenants, they can develop services that bring benefits all round.”

Government housing policies and the lack of adequate consistent long-term funding have failed to ensure that many have access to great quality and affordable homes. Building great quality energy-efficient housing and having a stronger national tenants’ voice, democratic accountability and decision making powers for tenants at the local and national levels are paramount to building a sustainable and inclusive housing system to challenge the stigma in social housing. Our respondents overwhelmingly emphasized that investment in more social housing is absolutely required to build a sustainable and inclusive housing system to make social housing a tenure of choice, and that the government should do so with the fullest integrity where housing is concerned. Many argued that building great quality and affordable social housing will help tackle the intersectional stigma experienced by social housing tenants. For instance:

“Ultimately, building 100,000 high quality social rent homes a year would have the single biggest impact on whether we have a sustainable and inclusive social housing system. It would move us back towards a situation where social housing was a tenure of choice, where a much greater proportion of the population lived in social housing or knew someone who did, and where it was not associated in some people’s minds with poverty, benefits, ASB and crime. This, combined with proactive regulation of the sector to ensure quality, would make the biggest difference.”

PTB2

In this consultation, many argued that the government needs to engineer a culture change to make social renting a brilliant and appealing option by not projecting social housing as a tenure of last resort. This suggests that the provision of accommodation that meets people’s needs, to rehouse and provide stabilities to families and those considered as vulnerable is necessary, and this must be driven by government housing policies to tackle stigma in social housing. Many highlighted that the ideology that people are somehow perceived as sub-standard if they do not own their home is ingrained in society and the government need to ensure that social housing is seen as a legitimate life choice and not the last resort for people who have failed or are somehow not quite good enough. Our respondents argued that there should be a distinct

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⁸. As a result of this, we decided to focus on the issues that were not highlighted in prior sections. Potential users of this report should understand that the evidence presented in previous sections are interlinked and they coalesce towards building a sustainable and inclusive housing system. The responses in each section of this report should not be considered in isolation from the others.

recognition that good housing is a key element of building a good society where people are valued and properties of any sort are valued, and this should in part be a springboard for everyone to build and live their lives in a safe, secure, and nurturing community/environment. In doing this, emphasis must be on getting rid of the focus that everyone must be homeowners. For instance:

"Stop the government banging on about homeownership all the time. The Charter for Social Housing has a bolt on chapter 7 on shared ownership - this is a Tory obsession. It doesn't work in the many parts of the north. Remove the Right To Buy. We have already sold off most of the best stock. We have a supply crisis in social housing - that is a mix of oversupply in some areas and drastic undersupply in others. Give LAs the power to prevent RtB..."

SSH2

7.2. Tackling stigma through challenging poverty and social disadvantages

Respondents point at the need to address other stigmas which intersect with social housing stigma. Particularly, they note that addressing poverty and social disadvantages, which are used to stigmatize those living in social housing should be a priority. For instance, HAs1 argued:

"It needs to come from the top. The government need to help to change the culture of Britain to make sure renting is a brilliant and appealing option and that social housing isn't a last resort. We need to properly address poverty and social disadvantage in our communities, rather than thinking it is ok to have food banks. We need to address all forms of privilege, so we recognize them, address them, and stop focusing on what white, middle-class men need/want. We also need to make sure our young people know about career paths in social housing, so we keep our ideas fresh and forward thinking."

Furthermore, many argued (including tenants) that social housing occupants should take pride in their homes and in being social housing tenants. For instance:

"We've got to have pride and unless somebody makes a stand and start and says right, I'm going to have pride in where I live. Why don't you tidy your place up? Come on, you're letting the area down. People are going to call us names because of X, Y and Z. So, you need to start and do it from your own. A lot of people do. Where I am, it's all bungalows and during summer, we've all got plants outside and one of them got a little patch where he grows potatoes and green beans, and he shares them out between the residents. We've got lights up and I know that I can leave my things outside and it's safe.you need to take pride in where you live. Whether you are council tenants, whether you're a leaseholder, or whether you're buying..."

AD - FG3

Our responses, particularly from tenants, agreed that tenants need to be involved in the conversation to tackle stigma and, without them taking pride in their homes and communities, the narrative

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would remain the same regardless of the effort from the government, housing providers and other parties. For instance, one of the participants in one of the focus groups noted:

"It's got to come from us. Unless we start and try and alter things, we're never going to get anywhere. It's up to us as well to instill it into the younger members. Have your families and everything that you do take pride in things. All these programs that they did with 'Benefits Street' and everything, some of them got paid to do it. So, they're going to be able to look bad for them. But that's what sells the programs. That's what keeps the programs going. That's what sells the newspapers. We need to turn it around and say NO! hang on. This is how things should be, not how it was. We've all got to change."

AD -FG3

While encouraging tenants to take pride in their homes, many argued that more investment is needed to provide the support required. Feedback from housing professionals revealed that not only do they provide homes, but they have also been saddled with the responsibilities to attend to and provide other wraparound services with little or no support from the local authorities or the government. Many argued that once those nominated for social housing are placed into social housing, all their previous support ceases and the housing providers are subsequently saddled with the responsibility of bearing the burden with little or no support from relevant government agencies. For instance, references were made to ASBs, crimes and drug culture, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), domestic violence (DV), poverty and unemployment, mental health issues, education, homelessness issues and so on. Tackling stigma should entail the provision of support from all relevant parties (not just the housing providers) to clean up unsafe communities, tackle ACEs, and poor schooling problems, and jointly and promptly tackle ASBs, and this should entail the impositions of higher fines and penalties to deterred ASBs and ensure that survivors of DV are promptly and adequately supported. For example, our respondents argued:

"Keep the areas tidy and free from crime and anti-social behaviour... It is not the housing which creates the stigma, it is the people who live in the housing. There was once a terrible distinction made between the deserving and the un-deserving poor. ... continued pressure on ASB and benefit dependency and negative lifestyle choices to help people turn chaotic lives around will surely help."

TSH3

"Very many of us know the issues and, how once someone is in social housing, every other service runs away and thinks that support will now go with the housing! We are beginning to feel like we are now the local authority in many areas. ... HAs having to pick up work on areas such as education (the impacts of the poorest schooling) training, social-prescribing, domestic violence, those leaving supported housing and not having ability to maintain tenancies without support, homeless issues, hoarding, ASB, mental health, poor employment behaviours, zero hours and the UC complications and even County Lines because of the move to joint-working [with] little or no support elsewhere and this impacts on how HAs have to work."

HAs6

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7.3. Improving the kerb appeal of existing social housing stocks to tackle stigma

Another focal point of this conversation is the need to improve social housing stock to tackle stigma. A few respondents suggest that there is a need to always ensure the external-facing elements of the properties are the same as the leasehold properties in the mix so that it is not immediately noticeable which are private versus social housing. Our respondents argued that the regeneration of the existing stocks is required to improve the kerb appeal of the properties and communities to tackle stigma. Here are a few comments in which our respondents advocated for the regeneration of existing stocks so that they don't "stick out" from private properties:

"For one don't have every house/bungalow or flat with the same doors and same colours (giving tenants a choice) then a social housing isn't as obvious to outsiders. Certain things look nice in unity form but not every home that's not privately owned in a village or town. HAs are basically pointing us tenants out to everyone else. Housing that's already built needs to be more sustainable as well as the new builds."

TSH3

"Build beautiful homes that everyone wants to live in - don't let them be bought! We need more social housing - if we have more stock the allocations criteria can be broader so that the people who rent from us are from a wider swathe of society... ... Change the way the houses look. Stigma is created though unknowing judging, the same as all things. The houses need to be better; we need to be better at bringing the standard of our homes up. Regeneration at the front of our company vision and not a nice to have. ... unfortunately, the stigma doesn't come from nothing, ... addressing the issues that are staining the sector is the first step. Whilst great strides have been made to improve social housing homes/communities etc. there is still a lot to do within the sector to improve the areas/communities that most contribute to the negative stigma. ... The commitment to building new homes helps improve the stock and gives residents a sense of pride when they receive them. Improving existing stock also helps a lot..."

SSH2

Besides improving the kerb appeal of existing stocks, working with communities and partners to create social housing that everyone will be proud of is essential in building a sustainable housing system. At the core of such collaborations should be an emphasis on tenants and the tenants' voice, and an acknowledgement that social housing residents are equally deserving of respect.

"As providers, we need to enable customers to be the voice of change in this area. Customers are the ones who experience this stigma on a day-to-day basis, and they need to be at the forefront of driving this change forward. We are in a position to help this by linking in with research and liaising with Politicians. We could help build an inclusive housing system regionally and linking up with systems nationally."

SSH2

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Besides improving the kerb appeal of existing stocks, working with communities and partners to create social housing that everyone will be proud of is essential in building a sustainable housing system. At the core of such collaborations should be an emphasis on tenants and the tenants' voice, and an acknowledgement that social housing residents are equally deserving of respect.

7.4. Redefining social housing purpose from profit to non-profit

The sector needs to redefine its social purpose. Many argued that most housing providers are more like profit-making organizations and are no longer non-profit oriented organizations. If housing providers are classified as charitable organizations, building a sustainable and social housing systems social system should be driven by that social purpose. The sector needs to focus on its social purpose and move away from its paternalistic stance toward its tenants. For example:

“Ensure that social housing providers rebadge their provision as enabling tenancies rather than supporting. The ‘support’ badge is often unfairly viewed as absolving tenants of ownership and responsibility and social housing needs to provide a clear framework within which communities should be self-regulating and self-governing.”

SSH2

“Ultimately, housing associations are providers of a service, and we must not forget that (which sometime can happen in back-office functions). It is vital that we bring colleagues back to understanding what we do and the social impact. When colleagues within the sector operate knowing this, the service provided to our residents will be of a high quality, and residents with needs will be catered to. They will feel seen, not how society may see them but for who they are, and this will in turn create a better relationship between tenant and housing provider.”

HAs5

Overall, building a sustainable and inclusive housing system will require a multi-faceted approach to tackle stigma and build inclusive and sustainable social housing. We are not postulating that this will be an overnight task because the stigma in social housing has been perpetuated over decades — and it will take a long time to change existing perceptions. Stigma in social housing can be challenged when concerted and deliberate efforts are made by the government, the media, housing providers, regulators, and tenants among other parties. As evidenced in this consultation, building quality housing is a key factor in promoting a sustainable and inclusive system. Part of what exacerbates stigma in social housing is the perception that it is low quality compared to housing on the private market. However, if we are to build a sustainable and inclusive housing system, people should not be able to distinguish between social housing and that built for the private market, and tenants need to take pride in their homes, and the benefits of social housing need to be promoted. Besides all stakeholders being accountable (see previous sections), we need to look at the success stories of social housing in the UK past and other countries and build in syllabus knowledge that social housing is simply ‘housing’ in the same way that private ownership is also ‘housing’.

Ensure that social housing providers rebadge their provision as enabling tenancies rather than supporting. The ‘support’ badge is often unfairly viewed as absolving tenants of ownership and responsibility and social housing needs to provide a clear framework within which communities should be self-regulating and self-governing.

8. Others Relevant Issues



In this section, we set out to highlight a few re-occurring topics, which were flagged in this consultation.

8.1. Social Housing (Council estates)

A few participants argued that the term 'Social Housing' is also a key driver of stigma in social housing because it creates the perception that social housing tenants are poor, and the majority depend on benefits. Many argued that this re-occurring terminology needs to change because it is a convenient tool used to stigmatize people in social housing and results in tenants in social housing being treated differently. For instance:

"Stop calling them council estates, stop running down low-income areas, someone has to work these jobs... Stop using the word Social!! It is often anything but social housing. ... Stop labelling the houses as affordable, council, or housing association and just call them housing."

TSH4

"I always believe that people and the media and the government have always called us council estates. You end up with a stigma. Oh, you live on a council estate... It's time that we promoted that we're not council estates; we're communities and that's the thing that we can be putting across all the time. We're actually communities. ... I know it sounds a bit glib but that's what I feel."

AD -FG3

"A few of the questions I've asked over the last few years, I mean does the term social housing help? Because there were many people that would be stigmatized against social housing as in, I don't want to live in social housing, I want to stay in the private rented sector. But we are just a big landlord, a very big landlord in most cases but should we consider how we talk about ourselves as a sector. I suppose, is one big question."

HAEB -FG

What is obvious from all the responses advocating for a change in the terminology 'Social Housing' is that a broader conversation needs to be had on whether the name should be changed and what it should be to avoid enhancing the stigma associated with social housing.

Stop calling them council estates, stop running down low-income areas, someone has to work these jobs... Stop using the word Social!! It is often anything but social housing. ... Stop labelling the houses as affordable, council, or housing association and just call them housing



8.2. Use of Signage/logos

A few participants argued that the use of branded signage to identify social housing within mixed tenure estates also creates stigma. The use of signage/logos instantly singles out social housing tenants and their apartments/houses in a mixed tenure estate. Our respondents argued that:

"...remove branded signage and improve the tone of them, be more visibly active in our communities."

HAAs2

"I always challenge our organization quite a lot about signage. Why have we got any signs up at all? Why do we put whacking great big logos across the side of our vans? I accept there's a safety and security issue but quite often the only way you know [who lives in Social Housing] is because we've put this sign up on the car parking or something like that. [let's] think very carefully about our use of signage."

HAEB -FG

"That brings me to labelling. First of all, take all the signs down, ... take all the signs down on every estate. Now, watch the reaction of the doctors, the ambulance service, the fire service and the police, if you took the signs down. There is some housing association property opposite me with no signs, so you would not know who that was... ... take the signs down. This says these are tenants of the council housing associations, it actually says it, big signs. Take them down."

NTR -FG

We encourage the sector to have a wider conversation on the use of branded signage/logos, particularly within the estates going forward.

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9. Conclusion, policy and practical implications and recommendations



9.1. Conclusion

This consultation report stems from honest and in-depth conversations had with — and submitted by — key stakeholders in the housing sector. This report specifically sought to address the following questions:

1. What should the purpose of social housing be?
2. Should access to affordable housing be recognized as a fundamental human right and who should have access to it?
3. How can we encourage politicians to limit/stop their use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing?
4. How can we encourage the media to be more balanced and fairer in their reporting of social housing?
5. How can we create a stronger and more effective tenant voice at the local and national levels?
6. How can we make social housing providers more accountable to tenants?
7. How can we build a sustainable and inclusive social housing system devoid of stigma?

What is obvious from this consultation is that stigma is deeply rooted in social housing and the wider society to be tackled sporadically without a concerted effort. Our report “Stigma and Social Housing in England” published in 2021 indicates that stigma in social housing intersects with other complex and problematic stigmas (such as poverty, benefits, unemployment, crime and drugs, mental health and disabilities, race and immigration stigmas) that impacts negatively on the everyday realities of tenants. In the initial report, we advocated for a rights-based approach to housing, making access to housing affordable for all, and encouraging people (including the government and media) to stop using stigmatizing rhetoric to describe social housing and its residents. Throughout this report, these propositions still hold towards challenging stigma, and in building a sustainable and better social housing to meet the needs of all. The adoption of a rights-based approach requires the government to prioritize and ensure the provision of affordable, accessible, and safe homes and not a commodity out of reach for those in need of affordable and decent social homes. In addition, we envisaged that the adoption of a rights-based approach would drive an extensive investment in the construction and provision of quality tenure-blind, safe, and affordable homes. This will provide people with the opportunity to have homes that they can afford, and which meet their needs.

Seeing quality housing as a right will ensure that standard accommodation and standardized services are provided to meet the needs of the occupiers; regardless of whether they are social renters or owner-occupiers. It will also enable the government and other stakeholders to better understand the intersections of social housing stigma with other stigmas so that they can develop more effective and holistic policy measures to address the issue while ensuring that there is proactive regulation that protects the tenants.

Stigma is deeply rooted in social housing and the wider society to be tackled sporadically without a concerted effort. Our report “Stigma and Social Housing in England” published in 2021 indicates that stigma in social housing intersects with other complex and problematic stigmas that impacts negatively on the everyday realities of tenants.

There is a need to invest more in building more social homes, and there is a pressing need to improve the quality and value of existing social homes and estates to enhance the living experience of social housing tenants. To challenge stigma, the quality of social homes needs to be at par with owner-occupiers' homes. This means housing professionals must take actions to promptly respond to tenants' complaints and repair requests, and not allow social homes to degenerate to a state where they become substandard and inhabitable accommodation.

There should be deliberate, sustained, and genuine efforts by housing professionals to listen to their social housing residents by taking meaningful actions to consider and address their concerns and to be more accountable to their tenants. Challenging and tackling social housing stigma would require social housing tenants to have a voice and to hold housing professionals accountable. Housing professionals need to be prepared to give accounts of their conduct and to be held accountable for their conduct, policies, and practices.

We proposed that there is a need to re-evaluate and redesign the regulatory and governance arrangements of social housing providers (housing associations and councils) to make housing providers more accountable to their tenants. There should be an effective accountability mechanism that gives tenants the power required to lobby, control and challenge the poor services provided by their housing providers. In this consultation, our respondents advocated for deliberate, sustained and genuine efforts to establish a national tenants' voice, and the promotion of the regional and local tenants' voice to give tenants powers to hold housing providers and the regulators accountable when standards are breached or when tenants are not satisfied with the quality of the services and homes provided. Housing providers and regulators need to make efforts to listen to tenants and take meaningful actions to consider and address their concerns and be more proactive and accountable to them. In addition, the establishment of a tenant voice will enable social housing tenants to tackle and address the negative narratives on social housing being a safety net or the springboard for something better – such as home ownership etc.

This consultation report highlighted the different ways in which the government, the media, social housing providers, tenants and other actors need to tackle stigma and the residualization of social housing properties through the Right to -Buy and the limited investment in social housing. Indeed, what is clear to us from this consultation report is the need to direct policies, and conceived actions towards the following policy and practical recommendations.

There should be an effective accountability mechanism that gives tenants the power required to lobby, control and challenge the poor services provided by their housing providers.

9.2. Policy and practical implications and recommendations

9.2.1. The purpose of social housing

Social housing needs to be made available to all households who cannot buy and those squeezed into the private market. This should be to ensure that everyone is provided with the best possible chance of meeting their needs through the provision of affordable, safe and decent standard homes. This implies that a complete rethink of the current purpose of

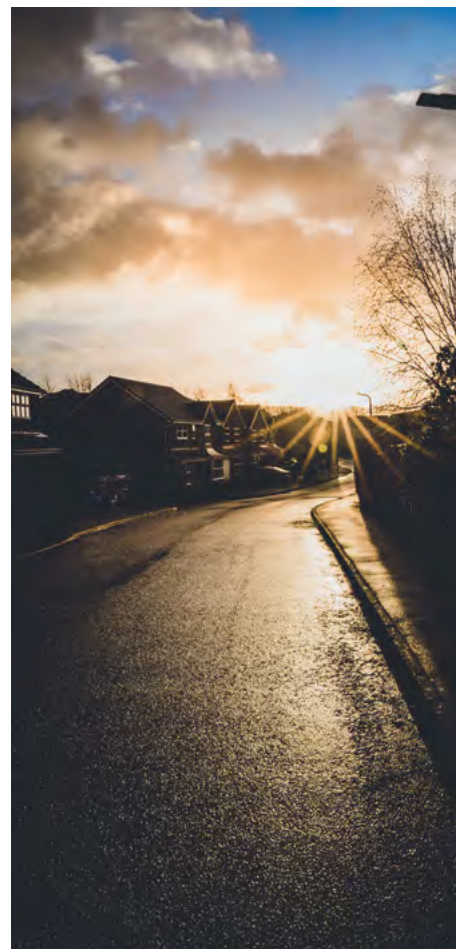
social housing is required and more particularly in the following areas:

- The current housing and welfare policy directions of the residualization and depletion of social housing stock needs to be changed to create a social housing system attractive to everyone regardless of their level of income. This would help tackle the stigma linked to social housing when social housing stocks are available to everyone and not necessarily considered simply for people in precarious circumstances. Social housing should be a decent and safe home for everyone that needs it, regardless of their financial status.
- As evidenced in this consultation report, the government is encouraged to create an inclusive and sustainable housing system instead of projecting social housing as a springboard to home ownership.
- For social housing to be effective, the wraparound support services provided by housing providers to enhance the experience of their residents need to be efficiently funded and supported by the relevant agencies/bodies. Currently, housing providers felt they are being saddled to take on responsibilities that are not adequately funded or supported by relevant agencies with the primary responsibilities to provide them.
- Housing providers are also encouraged to provide the best quality housing and services to social housing residents. The differential housing services should not be encouraged. For instance, housing providers should make efforts to ensure that services provided to social housing tenants are at par with those provided to leaseholders.

9.2.2. Affordable housing as a fundamental human right and who should have access

Affordability is a relative problem across the board, but this is even more problematic for those on a lower income with limited options to meet their levels of income. Access to affordable housing should be a social good that enables everyone to live in secure, safe and peaceful adequate homes. In this consultation, our respondents recommend that access to secure, safe, decent and affordable housing should be a fundamental human right to protect human dignity, and this should be a catalyst for the much-needed changes in housing policies. Given our findings, policies and practice could be directed towards the following:

- Joint commitment to embed human rights framing to the provision of affordable housing will help channel housing policies and investment to the provision of 'affordable' and adequate housing that reflects diverse household circumstances and levels of income.
- Emphasis should be on investing in building more social housing to attract people with a mixed level of income and mixed level of life experiences into social housing. Social housing should be used to offer secured tenancies to attract people with mixed levels of income.
- There is an urgent need to rethink the Right to Buy housing policy in England to address the ongoing housing crisis. The emphasis on the Right-to-Buy needs to be checked, and legislation needs to be enacted to eliminate selling off council housing (including social housing) to prevent the depletion of social housing stock. Right to



Buy arguably contributed to the depletion of social housing stocks. If allowed to continue without the political will to incrementally (re) invest in replacing and building more high-quality social housing, this could result in the exhaustion of the social housing stocks. This would leave those people in dire need of social housing vulnerable in the future.

- To tackle stigma, affordability of housing should be at the core of government housing policies to ensure the provision of social homes that attract and meet the needs of a diverse set of people and levels of income that people can afford. This will make social housing tenure of choice and not tenure of last resort.

9.2.3. Stopping the use of stigmatizing language by policymakers

Our findings alluded to the need to encourage policymakers to stop the use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing because politicians are argued to often benefits from the associated social housing stigma when justifying their home ownership policies. Given our findings, policy and practice could be directed towards the following:

- The government need, when justifying their housing policies, to acknowledge that renting a home is a valued housing option and that not everyone would be able to afford to buy a home. The residualization of social housing and social housing being projected as a springboard for home ownership which often depicts social housing residents as second- class citizens has to stop.
- Political will and policy need to be directed towards tackling stigma and policymakers need to be held accountable when found to have directly stigmatized social housing and its occupants. Policymakers need to make significant efforts not to drive and engage in the use of stigmatizing rhetoric.
- Social housing tenants are encouraged to lobby their MPs when they are found to have used stigmatizing language.
- Policymakers are encouraged to spend more time being actively involved in areas of social housing and engage with tenants to understand and challenge the stigma associated with social housing.
- Policymakers are encouraged to adopt a collaborative approach to understanding who lives in social housing and their everyday realities to inform their planning and housing policies to help tackle stigma and shape policies.
- Policymakers are encouraged to partner with relevant stakeholders including housing associations, regulators, trade bodies, housing professionals and tenants to challenge emotive language used when discussing social housing. The impacts and the complexity of stigma can be holistically tackled through a collaborative partnership approach with key stakeholders.
- Policymakers are encouraged to raise awareness of stigma in social housing by setting the right tone to influence the media stigmatizing narratives. As evidenced in this consultation report, conscientious



effort to set the right tone to challenge stigma should emerge from the upper echelon of the society.

- Housing providers are encouraged to use case studies to share positive messages through media campaigns to engage and enlighten policymakers and the wider stakeholders.

9.2.4. The media to be more balanced and fairer in their reporting of social housing

Our findings indicated that the media play an important role in shaping public discourse and perspective, and this is more so important for social housing and its residents. It is more important to highlight why fair and balanced reporting of social housing is crucial in shaping societal perceptions and discourse to challenge the stigmatization of social housing. Given our findings, policies and practice could be directed towards the following:

- The media is encouraged to break the stigma by reporting factual and credible stories, and not be sensational when reporting on social housing and its residents to prevent swaying public opinion.
- The media is encouraged to show a balanced reporting of the diverse groups of people including professionals living in social housing and not depict social housing as simply the homes for the unemployed, lazy, on benefits, or the scroungers.
- The media are encouraged to visit social housing estates to publicize good news stories and not only visit when there are disasters to provide a fairer and more balanced reporting of the sector.
- Policymakers and regulators – Ofcom – should discourage programmes such as “Benefits Street” that are deeply stigmatizing.
- The media is encouraged not to lend itself to the bad examples and news but should make significant efforts in providing a balanced view of the sector.
- In tackling negative portrayal by the media, social housing tenants are encouraged to take pride in their homes and communities and do their best to portray that to the media. Social housing tenants need to ensure that they are not a tool used by the media for programmes or articles that stigmatizes social housing and its residents.
- Partner with housing providers and tenants’ groups to report positive stories about social housing and its communities, and how social housing residents and housing professionals take pride in building inclusive and supportive communities in their estates and areas.
- Housing providers have an enormous role to play in ensuring that social homes are maintained to an acceptable standard and that repairs take place in a timely and respectful manner to prevent tenants from approaching the media to hold their housing providers accountable.
- The housing sector could consider the use of social housing champions and celebrities’ ambassadorship approach to publicize positive stories at the local, regional and national levels (including on social media).

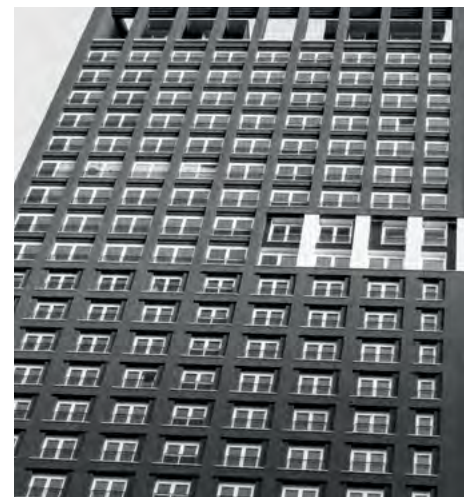


- The media are also encouraged to refer to the Fair Press for Tenants' Guide when in doubt about how to portray their stories.

9.2.5. Stronger and more effective tenant voice at the local and national levels

Similar to the findings in our initial report titled “Stigma and Social Housing in England”, our findings in this consultation also depict that tenants need to have a strong tenant voice at the local, regional and national levels to challenge stigma. In addition, the power imbalance between housing providers and their tenants often results in the absence of accountability and the power to hold the housing providers accountable or to co-regulate the sector. In this consultation, emphasis was laid on the power imbalance and mechanisms to lobby, control and challenge stigmatizing housing policies, lack of effective regulations, unaccountability from housing providers and media stereotype. Potential policies and practices to build a more effective tenant voice could be directed towards the following:

- The creation of a strong tenant voice at local, regional and national levels to be aligned with recognized tenant's framework and mechanisms for accountability.
- Government should support the establishment of a stronger national tenants' voice to give tenants an independent platform to effectively engage at the national, regional and local levels. This will ensure that tenants are acknowledged as experts and co-regulators of the sector to challenge stigma and engage more meaningfully with policymakers, the regulator, the media and housing providers.
- NTV should be established for the tenants and with the tenants, and the operations overseen by the tenants. This will ensure that power and voice are directly placed in the hands of the tenants and not with any third parties with limited power to advocate for them. There should be a grassroots, tenant-led mindset and effort towards the establishment of a stronger tenant voice from the local, to the regional and then to the national levels.
- Housing providers are encouraged to involve their residents in the development stages of policies and not just when priorities have already been decided. This will help empower tenants as well as give them a meaningful voice to shape policies and practices that affects them.
- Effective tenant panels and associations should be encouraged by housing providers and feedback from these groups should be taken seriously to improve services and their experience. The government and the regulators need to make effort to actively encourage housing providers to support the formation of effective tenant panels/ associations to have a strong voice and the opportunity to share best practices.
- Housing providers should make efforts to engage with a diverse set of their residents and not necessarily the “usual set of people” to build a culture of inclusivity, accountability and trust to co-design policies and services to provide decent housing.
- The sector needs to adopt a collective approach (including trade

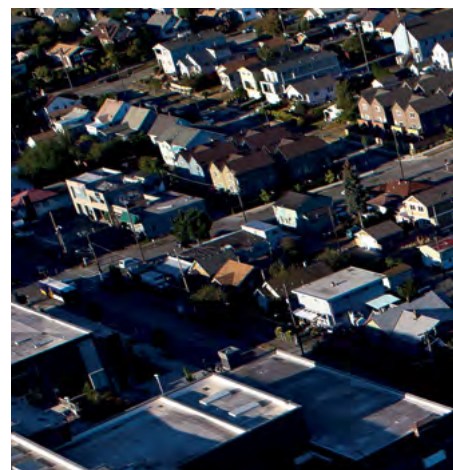


bodies, regulators, housing providers, tenant representative bodies and policymakers) to give tenants a meaningful and impactful voice.

9.2.6. Making housing providers more accountable

Accountability by housing providers to their tenants is crucial in tackling stigma and in building an organizational culture of respect and inclusiveness. In this consultation, our findings indicated that a huge regulatory shift is required to ensure that social landlords are accountable, respectful and follow through with complaints and feedback. The regulatory shift should empower and ensure that accountability works for both the tenants and the landlords to increase citizenship and reduce paternalism. Potential policies and practices to make social housing providers more accountable could be through the adoption of the following:

- There needs to be a shift in organizational culture, and a change in paternalistic attitude and rhetoric within the organizations to challenge stigma and to enable landlords to be more accountable and transparent. Listening and being responsive will help build a culture of trust and accountability.
- The government should consider the introduction of a regulatory metric where housing providers' performance and compensation (including managerial remunerations) are tied to service deliveries. This is envisaged to be necessary to improve the services and enable social landlords to get better at learning from complaints to enhance accountability practices, with tenants adequately compensated for any inconveniences experienced because of poor performance.
- The Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman should be respectively empowered to proactively enforce its standards and sanction housing providers when compliance is below acceptable standard to improve services, tenants' satisfactions, and experience.
- The Regulator of Social Housing and the National Housing Federation should consider setting up regulatory targets (not tokenistic nor box ticking targets) around tenants' engagement and customer's voice to close the accountability gaps in the sector.
- Housing providers are encouraged to establish robust, user-friendly systems and open communication channels to give their residents the opportunity to identify issues and submit repair complaints with speedy feedback and remediation loops. Repairs complaints should be adequately, effectively, and timely dealt with, and the blame game culture and stigmatizing rhetoric need to be eliminated to build a more effective tenant voice.
- Housing providers and government should make significant and genuine efforts to enshrine tenants' board membership in their organization with their voices heard and listened to when making decisions without adopting a tokenistic approach to such engagement. This should empower tenants to be directly involved in making choices about issues that directly impact them and other social tenants.
- Housing providers should provide adequate training, awareness and opportunities to their staff to discuss stigma in order to tackle it from the grassroots.



- The housing sector (i.e. regulators, trade bodies, professional bodies etc) should make effort to showcase/publicize good accountability practices within the sector. This is important where landlords do their utmost to provide decent housing by listening and co-designing quality services with their tenants. This could help drive the cultural shift required to challenge stigma and compel housing providers to adopt an impactful culture of *“you said”* and *“we did”* attitude toward their social residents.
- The Government and the regulator should make a genuine and impactful effort to drive the housing standards up to an acceptable level by redesigning the regulatory and governance arrangement of social housing providers. This will ensure that tenants are given legal support to hold social landlords more accountable. Effective regulations should give confidence to social housing residents that their voices will be heard, and their complaints addressed with necessary and timely actions to resolve problems. The regulatory mechanisms should be used to drive standards to ensure housing providers take complaints seriously to provide social housing residents with decent housing.

9.2.7. Building a sustainable and inclusive social housing system devoid of stigma

Building an inclusive and sustainable social housing system devoid of stigma should not be expected overnight. Stigma in social housing has been perpetuated over decades, and its eradication will require a multi-faceted approach with conscious, consistent, deliberate, collective and sustained long-term programmes, policies and partnerships to change people’s perception of social housing, invest in building high-quality social housing, and in driving responsive engagements. The adoption of the policies and practical recommendations above have roles to play in building an inclusive and sustainable housing system because they are all interlinked. So, meaningful actions must be taken across all parties involved in the housing sector, — including the media —, to implement them. However, below are additional recommendations proposed in this consultation on this subject, including:

- Regeneration of existing stocks to improve their kerb appeal.
- The acute shortage of social housing needs to be addressed through incremental investment in building high-quality social housing and through the withdrawal of Right-to-Buy which has resulted in the depletion of social housing stocks.
- The housing sector needs, to lobby for increased and sustained funding to build high-quality social housing so that it can be available and affordable to everyone, and not residualized to those in precarious circumstances. Investment in building more high-quality energy- efficient housing, along with having a stronger national tenants’ voice, democratic accountability and decision-making powers for tenants at the local and national levels are paramount to building a sustainable and inclusive housing system to challenge the stigma in social housing.



- Implementation of an equitable and realistic mixed model of affordable social housing will help meet the needs of a diverse class of people to make social housing a tenure of choice and not a last resort. This should be considered and implemented by the government to prevent a market system that will/have priced out the low-income earners from the housing market.
- Tackling stigma should involve the provision of support and services by all relevant agencies/parties. Housing providers should not be burdened with the provisions of wraparound services with little or no support from the local authorities or government for support services that could have been effectively provided by other relevant agencies/bodies.
- The government need to make a significant and impactful effort to change the tone to emphasize that social renting is as brilliant and appealing an option as buying and that it is not a tenure of last resort but of choice. Social housing should not be portrayed as a springboard for home ownership but simply as “housing” in the same way that private ownership is construed as “housing”.

9.3. Closing remark

We believe that for these to happen, there needs to be honest and spirited engagement around these issues discussed in this consultation and the proposed recommendations by all stakeholders in the social housing sector including but not limited to the government, politicians, the media, housing providers and tenants. We encourage debate within organizations, at conferences and events, with government and other stakeholders, and indeed in any forum where debate is possible. We also encourage you to send your thoughts on and responses to us via [@ stigmaconsultation@gmail.com](mailto:@stigmaconsultation@gmail.com)

We would like to conclude with the words of one of our respondents:

“All stakeholders have a key role to play in restoring pride in social housing, such as ensuring that landlords are providing a professional service to tenants, incorporating a culture of openness and transparency as well as investing in people and their communities. The media needs to address its negative approach and use of stereotypical language with the government leading by example. The government has a role to play in addressing stigma by strategically investing in the housing system, supporting the supply of quality new social housing, and ensuring existing homes and places are thriving.”

PTB3



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Stigma and social housing in England: feedback on the consultation responses

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