

# Equality & Diversity in Social Housing

## Key Characteristics of Social Tenants

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## Acknowledgements

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## Foreword

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Raj Patel  
Chief Executive, Housing Diversity Network

It falls to me to contribute this foreword to a new report by the Human City Institute. Some context to the publication of the report. Equality and Diversity issues are fortunately gaining greater prominence in the social housing sector: both in terms of who is housed and social housing staff, plus how social housing can offer better opportunities to marginalised groups in future.

As well as providing much-needed housing and related services to 4m tenants in England, tackling inequality, disadvantage and exclusion are, of course, central concerns within the social purpose of the sector's social purpose framework.

The sector's social purpose is to offer affordable housing and opportunities to BME communities, women, disabled people and those with long-term illness, the economically and socially disadvantaged, and the stigmatised and stereotyped. That's why the Housing Diversity Network, the National Housing Federation and BMENational recently organised a conference for this entitled '**Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in Housing**'.

HDN has been committed to E&D principles for many years. As a major social enterprise that aims to inspire and empower people, and promoting equality, diversity and opportunity for all, we are a key driver of this agenda. HDN works collaboratively to support organisations to improve how they confront inequality, and deliver diversity, getting the most from their staff and meet the needs of the communities with whom they work.

And HDN organised National Diversity Day in March and will be doing so again next year, which we're hoping becomes even more successful.

All of this is why HCI's research, which explores the E&D characteristics of social tenants, is so important, asking whether the social housing sector has become more diverse over time, and what can be done in future to continue to cater for protected characteristics groups and other experiencing poverty, disadvantage and discrimination in the nation's housing system.

That's why I welcome this report and recommend it to all people interested in E&D issues and challenges in social housing and beyond.

## Introduction

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Cym D'Souza  
Chair, BMENational

This new report by the Human City Institute starts from the premise that the social housing sector recognises that one of its distinctive features is the diversity of the tenant group it accommodates and supports, and the equality of access to housing and services it offers to an increasingly diverse population. This is especially so for the BME housing sector, which is the representative body for BME housing organisations nationally.

Social landlords are also bound by the Equality Act 2010, of course, which sets out characteristics protected under the Act including ethnicity and faith, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender assignment. HCI's report reveals in-depth performance against these key criteria

Housing people from these groups, and others who may be vulnerable and/or experience disproportionate disadvantage, is a key element in the social purpose of our sector. In this sense, delivering diversity is driven by a desire to improve equality while reducing disadvantage between groups in society that goes unchecked by other tenures.

Our knowledge of E&D issues in social housing is supplemented by the research for this report **'Equality and Diversity in Social Housing'** produced by the Human City Institute, The report seeks to provide an E&D profile of social tenants and to establish baselines for our sector.

The report draws on a wide and deep range of data from national surveys (such as the English Housing Survey), and HCI's own survey work and focus groups with almost 7,000 social tenants. It also enables some E&D trends to be identified that provide crucial insights into our sectors ability to continue housing those in most need, disadvantaged groups and those with protected characteristics.

The report represents a major contribution to the public understanding of the promotion of E&D in social housing. It reveals how the sector as a whole performs on this policy terrain. And it suggests a few ways forward to improve our performance still further.

I hope that readers find the report as stimulating as I did and that it enables them to think deeply about how they further E&D in their own organisations in future.



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

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TO BE COMPLETED

### About the Report

The following is a summary of key findings from a forthcoming report by the Human City Institute (HCI), a Birmingham-based research charity and thin-tank that creates a profile of social tenants across a range of characteristics, including those protected by the Equality Act 2010. This brief summary, based on the findings of national surveys (such as the English Housing Survey, CORE Lettings) and surveys carried out by HCI, sets out to establish the E&D bona fides of the sector and the extent to which it still caters for a disadvantaged tenant group.

The social housing sector recognises that one of its distinctive features is the diverse range of people it houses and supports, coupled to the equality of access to housing and services it offers to an increasingly diverse population. Its social purpose is to house, provide services to, and to defend population cohorts, including BME communities, women, disabled people and those with long-term illness, the economically and socially disadvantaged, and the stigmatised and stereotyped. Key findings are shown below.

### Social and Economic Status

- Almost half of social tenants are assessed as officially living in poverty, with the majority living precarious lives blighted by low economic activity, insecure work, low incomes and asset control, few or no savings, and rising debt just to get by.
- Most social tenants are struggling economically. The ACORN classification system calculates that just 2% of social tenants are ranked as 'affluent achievers', whereas for home owners the proportion is 33% and for private renters it is 13%.
- A further 4% of social tenants are classified as 'rising to prosperity' (3% and 5% of local authority and housing association tenants respectively) compared with 8% of home owners and 19% of private renters.
- At the other end of the scale, 50% of social tenants are categorized as living in 'urban diversity', while just 9% of home owners and 22% of private renters are in this category. In addition, a further 37% of social tenants are said to be 'financially stretched', whereas the proportions of home owners and private renters in this category are 16% and 22% in each case.
- The socio-economic status of social tenants is diversifying at the margins, despite three quarters of social tenants having incomes in the bottom 40% of the population, with average income being much lower than for home owners or private renters.
- Some 43% of social tenants are in work today (30% full-time and 13% working part-time or on zero hours contracts). This compares to 34% twenty years ago (24% full-time and 10% part-time). The unemployment rate has fallen from 12% to 7% over the same period. The number of social tenants in full-time education, although still low at 2%, has doubled.

- The percentage of working social tenants in higher or lower managerial and professional occupations has risen marginally to 15%, while those working in routine occupations has dropped from 30% to 26%.

## **Homelessness and Housing Need**

- TO BE COMPLETED

## **Ethnicity and Nationality**

- Some 17% of social tenants are from a BME background (up from 13% two decades ago) in contrast to 12% of all households. Local authority tenants are more likely to be BME (at 22%) than those tenants living in housing association accommodation (at 15%).
- Of total households in England, 9% were classified as being of other nationalities than UK or Irish. This varies somewhat by tenure. Some 12% of local authority tenants are from other nationalities, although this drops to 7% for housing associations.

## **Gender**

- There has been a significant shift in the gender breakdown of social tenant household heads. Almost 58% of social tenant households are headed by a woman today – much higher than for other tenures – 37% in owner-occupation and 42% in private renting – and up from the 45% recorded two decades past.

## **Age**

- The age structure of social tenant households approximates that of wider society, although the social housing sector accommodates marginally more young people (at 5% compared with 3% for under 25s in the general population), and slightly fewer older people (at 27% of people 65 years and over in contrast to 28% in wider society).

## **Disability and Limiting Long-Term Illness**

- For disabilities and limiting long-term illness, numbers are up – half of today's social tenants have a household member with a disability or LLTI. Levels of self-certified disability and LLTI are much lower in other tenures: for home ownership it is 29% and in private renting it is 23%.

## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender**

- The number of LGBT people living in social housing is increasing and now falls in the range of 4-6% of all social tenant household heads (only estimates are available since a noticeable minority of tenants do not answer 'sexual orientation' survey questions).

## **Conclusions**

TO BE WRITTEN

# 1. About the Report

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## Backdrop

The social housing sector, comprising chiefly local authorities (including arms-length management organisations) and housing associations offering rented housing, recognises that one of its distinctive features is the diversity of the tenant group it accommodates and supports, and the equality of access to housing and services it offers to an increasingly diverse population. As organisations that receive public funding, social landlords are also bound by the Equality Act 2010, which sets out characteristics under nine headings protected under the Act:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Housing people from these groups, and others who may be vulnerable and/or experience disproportionate disadvantage, is a key element in the social purpose of social landlords. Their ability to do so is governed by a number of factors, but the end result of a more diverse tenure than determined by population norms across the protected characteristics is a basic tenet of the sector. This report by the Human City Institute (HCI), which has a special interest in equality and diversity stretching back more than two decades, sets out to establish whether this is so in practice.

## Report Objectives

The central objectives of the report are to:

- Establish a series of baselines for the majority of the protected characteristics listed above (subject to data availability) plus for other household and socio-economic attributes deemed important in confirming that social landlords perform the task of creating and maintaining a diverse sector.
- Review trends over time against the above characteristics to ascertain and progress or regress in housing a diverse tenant group.
- Compare and contrast social housing with other tenures for the main characteristics available from key surveys.

- Cross-tabulate protected and associated characteristics to enable a more detailed picture of the diversity of social housing tenants to be painted.

## Report Approach

The statistical analyses, trends and conclusions in the following report are based on a range of data to which HCI has access – both from national surveys by government agencies and through its own research. The primary data sources for the report are:

- The English Housing Surveys over the last twenty years.<sup>1</sup>
- The Continuous Recording (CORE) lettings system for social landlords over the last ten years.<sup>2</sup>
- The Wealth and Assets Surveys (WAS) for the period 2006 to 2016.<sup>3</sup>
- The Annual Surveys of Hours and Earnings (ASHE).<sup>4</sup>
- The Index of Deprivation 2015.<sup>5</sup>
- HCI's own surveys comprising 6,500 interviews with social tenants over the last five years.<sup>6</sup>

These surveys cover tens of thousands of data points for social tenants over the recent past up until almost the present, and enable a comprehensive depiction of the main features of the social tenants' group to be created and compared with other tenures.

## Structure of the Report

The report takes each of the protected characteristics in turn, looking at the current position in social housing; recent trends (mostly from 1996/97 to 2016/17); and drilling down into the above datasets to provide a more vivid portrayal of the sector's tenants.

Each section contains charts and tables, plus a commentary describing the main findings from the surveys listed above. Text boxes pick out key points.

There is a short concluding section at the end of the report.

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<sup>1</sup> ONS (2018) English Housing Surveys 1996/97 to 2016/17. UKData

<sup>2</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2018) Continuous Recording of Social Housing Lettings and Sales (CORE), 2007/08-2016/17 [Data Collection] 6th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7603, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7603-8>

<sup>3</sup> ONS (2018) Wealth and Assets Survey 2014-2016

<sup>4</sup> ONS (2018) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

<sup>5</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2018) IMD 2015.

<sup>6</sup> HCI Surveys (2018) for 2012-2017 for most English Regions (weighted)

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