

NEWS RELEASE

Social housing more diverse but satisfaction of protected characteristics groups a concern

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A new report from Birmingham-based research charity the Human City Institute reveals that the social tenant group has become more diverse in the last two decades, with more BME tenants, more women-headed households, greater levels of disability and long-term illness, and more tenants identifying as LGBT. The report also identifies levels of satisfaction with social landlord services among some protected characteristic groups – especially BME tenants, women, disabled tenants and LGBT.

The report '**Fit for All – Equality, Diversity and Satisfaction in 21st Century Social Housing**' draws on a wide and deep range of data from national surveys (such as the English Housing Survey), and HCI's own survey and focus group work with almost 7,000 social tenants. It is supported by BMENational, Housing Diversity Network and Central Consultancy and Training plus housing associations Black Country Housing Group and Nehemiah UCHA, all of which have major commitments to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.

Report author Kevin Gulliver and Director of HCI said: *"What these analyses describe is a social housing sector increasingly diverse in relation to the past, and to other tenures, and one that still fulfils its social purpose to house people most in need and that are disadvantaged in the UK's economy and wider society. There remain some satisfaction issues, however, and social landlords will need to put greater effort into improving services to BME, women, LGBT and disabled tenants, or dismantling barriers that drive perceptions of differential service levels."*

A key finding of the research is that 17% of social tenants are from a BME background (up from 13% two decades ago) in contrast to 12% of all households. There has been a significant switch 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 tenure.

For disability and limiting long-term illness too, numbers are up – half of today's social tenants have a household member with a disability or LLTI. HCI's research also suggests that 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.

The socio-economic status of social tenants is diversifying at the margins too, despite the majority of social tenants still having incomes in the bottom 40% of the population and poverty rates remaining high.

Some 43% of social tenants are in work today compared to 34% twenty years ago. 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.

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', with 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 are 16% and 22% in each case.

'Fair for All – Equality, Diversity and Satisfaction in 21st Century Social Housing' by Kevin Gulliver

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Report

Background

Below are the key findings from a new report by the Human City Institute (HCI). The report creates a profile of social tenants across a range of characteristics, including those protected by the Equality Act 2010. 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.

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 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%.

LGBT

- 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).

Economic and Social 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%.
- Exploring the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015 shows that 1 in 3 social rented homes are located in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 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 relating to 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

- In many cases, protected characteristic groups experience disproportionate levels of homelessness and housing need.
- BME households form 1 in 3 of statutory homeless – double their representation in the population. And they are more likely to be living in poor or overcrowded housing.
- Women have specific housing needs – relating to domestic violence for example. Lone parent households (mainly headed by women) are often in greater housing need and rely more on social housing.
- Disabled and LGBT households also both suffer higher levels of housing stress.

Satisfaction with Social Landlord Services by Protected Characteristics

- Satisfaction with homes, neighbourhoods, services, trust of social landlord and with opportunities for resident involvement tends to be lower among protected characteristics groups.
- This is especially so for BME tenants compared with whites, where there is an average 'satisfaction gap' of 10%.
- For women-headed tenant households the 'satisfaction gap' is 5%. And for disabled/LLTI tenants, the 'satisfaction gap' is 6% compared to other tenants. LGBT tenants tend to be 4% less satisfied on average than others.

About the Human City Institute

HCI is a Birmingham-based, independent, charitable 'think tank'. HCI undertakes research into 'human city' issues, investigating exclusion, and promoting solutions to the problems of the most disadvantaged groups in today's complex and diverse cities, towns and communities. HCI works around research themes that incorporate new visions for housing; mutualism; social value; health, wealth and life chances; left behind communities; and cohort studies. It researches inequalities in health, wealth and income, and disparities related to ethnicity, gender, lifestyle and disability; often related to the built environment.

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