



BLACK  
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MATTER

## Deeds not Words Leaders Briefing

30 March 2022



## Housing conditions & race:

overcrowding, repairs and maintenance.

*This briefing summarises discussions and learning from the Deeds not Words (DNW) Leaders meeting which focused on housing conditions and race – 30/3/2022*

## Relevant pledges

- Investigate reasons for overcrowding and worse housing conditions amongst some BAME groups. Start acting on findings
- Disaggregate ethnicity data in your tenant/service user satisfaction surveys and other tenant/service user surveys. Use other channels to learn about the experiences of BAME tenants/service users. Act on findings

## Context

*Alicja Zalesinska provided context for discussion. Presentation is [available here](#). Key points:*

- Good practice and action shared by members was highlighted
- In Wales 27% of Bangladeshi, 19.4% of Black and 18.5% of Arab households live in overcrowded housing compared to 4.9% of White British people.
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic households are also more likely to live in fuel poverty (20%) than White households (9.7%)

- Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African, Black Other and Mixed White/Black ethnic groups are considerably more likely to have damp in their houses; (UK Government, 2019)
- [ITV investigation into racism in social housing](#) in England exposed shocking cultural issues. Whilst England focused – Wales is not immune from systemic racism
- Stories from Women Connect First report showed issues with disrepair and accessibility of services in Wales
- Baseline DNW survey data showed that more than 40% of orgs looked into overcrowding with some good practice actions, but nearly 40% did not, with 17% stating they do not plan to do so.
- Baseline survey also showed that use of ethnicity data (e.g. to look into repairs and housing conditions) was limited.

## Highlights from Deeds not Words panel

- **Ethnic minority tenant voice:** Data on housing conditions incl. disrepair and overcrowding is important but there is a real need for engagement with ethnic minority tenants (and others) to understand their experiences and explore solutions together. Where prospects of obtaining large properties in short term are limited – tenants can inform solutions (e.g. extensions, loft conversions etc.)
- **Standard approaches may not work:** Maintenance is often geared up towards standard ‘two-up two-down’ builds and anything perceived to be ‘out of the norm’ (e.g. intergenerational, larger or overcrowded homes) can present challenges for maintenance staff, therefore big need for education, support and raising awareness.
- **Benefit cap:** can drive overcrowding, affecting affordability for larger families.
- **Increase in claims:** Need to see two sides of the story – not all housing conditions complaints are driven by claims firms, needs acknowledging.

*Other points made at DNW panel meeting:*

- **Renting Homes Act (FFHH):** crucial to prioritise comms and think through the needs of some minority ethnic people who might be less aware of rights and responsibilities in general or struggle to access information. Considering new powers for tenants to hold landlords to account on housing conditions – crucial to raise awareness amongst those groups who may struggle to engage.
- **Change to PAG formula:** ethnic minorities can already face barriers to access adaptations. Additional budgetary constraints may increase the gap, therefore a need to consider this in comms and engagement.
- **Other contributions from panel members below.**

## Pledge progress and current practice

**OVERCROWDING: What do members know about overcrowding/housing conditions amongst our ethnic minority tenants and communities we serve?**

- **Data systems:** Some members were able to access and analyse this data, often based in multiple sources, including LA waiting lists, direct contact with tenants etc. Many members

however did not have direct data on overcrowding or housing conditions which can be disaggregated by ethnicity. Some had separate IT systems for different types of data and are working on improvements.

- **Not all about data:** DNW panel and members highlighted that there are many sources of data and evidence on overcrowding and housing conditions, including evidence from direct contact with tenants. Members were encouraged to make full use of information available. [See below for further comments on this.](#)
- **An area to progress:** Several members stated that getting the data would be possible, but they haven't done so yet. We would encourage members to invest in good data systems, and where members stated that this is possible – extract the data asap, based on their pledge.
- **Research into intergenerational living:** One member participated in research into multigenerational living in Newport.
- **Stock condition surveys:** One organisation highlighted that they are awaiting the results stock condition survey (which will score each home) and when completed, they will be able to analyse by diversity group.
- **Closer contact:** One RSL introduced smaller local patches to allow neighbourhood officers to know their area and community better – understanding people and issues is not just about data direct data from stock surveys etc.
- **Less-diverse areas:** While some RSLs in more rural areas mentioned that ethnic diversity is very low and did not look at disaggregated overcrowding or repairs data, they mentioned that this is something they could do. One RSL was using a traffic light system to identify maintenance needs, and they would be able to break it down by diversity strands but haven't done so yet.
- **Changing policy and practice in less diverse areas:** Another RSL from a more rural area mentioned that although ethnic diversity is very limited and there were very few overcrowded homes in general, when they looked into it, they realised that biggest issue was not up to date data. Neighbourhood teams re-visited families identified through the waiting list and other sources and data had changed. Key learning was identifying the properties at risk and ensuring to advise tenants on how to request a transfer. This has now been introduced as a regular activity and the RSL is doing this proactively.

## **OVERCROWDING: What have we done to address potential issues?**

- **Working with LA & exploring ideas:** One RSL is working with LA and tenants to develop ideas around alterations to older homes which are overcrowded (extensions, loft conversions)
- **Allocating homes close to each other:** One alternative solution for some families in communities where there are no larger homes is 'community living' - placing people in houses close to each other.
- **Converting:** One example provided was that where a large household was identified for allocation, the RSL was able to convert two semi-new builds into one (with an exit strategy)
- **Working with LA to identify overcrowding and challenging housing conditions:** Another RSL from a less diverse area mentioned that they looked at data and information available to them on overcrowding and housing conditions. While there were only a few families in overcrowded households, some of their housing conditions were very difficult. As allocations due to Covid were mostly suspended, this created more voids and an opportunity to work with the LA to re-house those in very difficult housing conditions. Whilst they are a part of choice-based lettings scheme, this proactive approach proved effective and they will continue

regularly reviewing those registered in this way. There was a discussion on the extent to which choice-based schemes offered real choice as there was a high level of dissatisfaction.

- **Transfer to two homes based on need:** One RSL from less diverse area highlighted an examples of overcrowding they identified in the course of this work. One ethnic minority household size increased dramatically due to collapse in family structure and wider family joining an existing household. This was resolved through housing in two properties, which was the right solution in this case.
- **Importance in less diverse communities:** Tai Pawb stressed that their contact with advocacy organisations in more rural areas as well as evidence from staff from Deeds not Words survey, indicates the importance of having some focus on ethnic minority households. Examples: staff can be less familiar with responding to diverse needs, issues can be more dispersed and hidden, limited access to support networks and isolation can exacerbate issues.

## **OVERCROWDING: What could help or hinder progress? What else can we do?**

- **Not all about data:** Alternative ways other than data systems to understand this question were discussed including:
  - Tenant forums (one RSL mentioned that although they had a tenant voice contact group, they didn't issue invites in the languages they were aware of but will do so)
  - Meeting people where they are at, in order to engage
  - People with lived experience and/or EDI expertise helping look at existing data (even if it's not perfect) to look for clues as to where overcrowding may take place
  - Intelligence from frontline staff, housing support, DLOs etc.
  - 121 contact with tenants
- **Need for proactive approach:** One RSL stressed the need for proactive approach to overcrowding. They provided an example of a severely overcrowded household who have been previously 'burnt' by services therefore too frightened or uneasy to ask for re-housing. Although various people knew about the situation, it slipped under the radar. They are now addressing the situation.
- **Rapid rehousing:** There could be opportunities around rapid rehousing and bigger properties (formerly hostels) becoming available.
- **Evidence from housing support:** One RSL pointed out that they could do more to analyse ethnicity data from housing support referrals to create a fuller picture of housing conditions situation and needs.
- **Mass telephone calls** or 121 contact with tenants – some members used insight from these calls to inform their knowledge of housing conditions, others are building on this.
- **Development priorities & homelessness:** there needs to be a recognition that building big homes can cost more and is rarely discussed as a priority, compared to 1-2 bedroom homes, as priority is often people who are homeless (street). Need for bigger homes needs to be part of conversation with LAs.
- **Better forecasts of need:** We need to be better at understanding and predicting future tenants' needs. There is too much focus on standard/streamlined homes and not building for current/future need & support. One member is focusing much more on trying to forecast future needs of tenants at allocation point, this includes potential 'shrinking and growing' – this will inform asset strategy for the future.
- **Co-design:** Important to have early conversations on co-design and identifying needs early on so home can be bespoke to certain extent – but LHMA and housing grant can hamper progress.

- **Data and evidence sharing:** There can be lack of data sharing internally between teams but in particular from LA to RSL – one member highlighted that they often don't know what tenant need/support is until late. Monmouthshire Housing host and manage the choice-based lettings scheme. They highlighted the benefits of this, as close communication between lettings and housing managers/officers plays a significant role in allocating the right housing and planning for needs.
- **Things get missed:** Need to promote internal culture where things aren't missed. Aelwyd has a "See it, sort it" system where everything is logged so nothing gets missed and everything is tracked through progress. Every tenant gets an annual visit from a housing officer under their "what matters" approach. Nothing to do with rent arrears or anything else. Just a check-in and offer of support, building a relationship with the tenant/s.
- **Complaints engagement:** where complaints have been made, scrap any paper surveys if you're carrying out post-complaint analysis. Face to face or telephone engagement much better and produces better results (outcomes otherwise are very poor – one RSL said response rate to paper surveys was very low)
- **Reflecting communities:** Example given of Privilege Café where there was heavy criticism of several RSLs. Job adverts need to take account of the community in which orgs are based. Orgs really need to reflect the communities they work in – people looking, sounding like them – better able to reach out and trust them.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** baseline awareness needed among frontline staff in particular but also leadership. They are the eyes and ears of orgs, often the first point of contact and effectively the brand of the organisation.
- **Working across teams:** One member, based on a community development team, realised that they did not really know where ethnic minority households were located, their needs etc. They found the conversation 'illuminating' and will look into this. Stressed the need for data and knowledge of communities to be shared across the organisations so that various teams can keep the focus, inform on housing conditions etc.
- **Decarb opportunities:** Investment in decarb will support fuel poverty which will affect tenants including ethnic minorities. New builds will be more energy efficient. Extensive work on decarbonisation (and standards) should have some focus on meeting the needs of ethnic minority tenants.
- **"Do we know the whole truth?"** – not all tenants living in what is considered an overcrowded household would self-identify as such. Proactive data and contact is needed as some tenants are not aware that they can apply for a transfer etc.
- **Changing communities:** Point made that communities are constantly changing – orgs need to keep up and change with them. Data is only as good as the time it's collected.

#### *Role of Local Authorities, partnership work and data sharing*

- **LA Data:** Key role for local authority waiting list data. Centralised intelligence systems or registers are available for accessible housing need and accessible stock. This data should also be available for overcrowding/housing conditions.
- **Data, partnership and housing needs priorities:** Once data is gathered there need to be a regular sharing and conversations between LA's and RSL's to decide on priority over current vs. future need. This should also inform planning. One member with extensive experience in housing noted that the needs of ethnic minority communities have never come up in conversations on housing need he took part in over the years. Another member mentioned that their LA does not share this data therefore development not informed. Role for Tai Pawb to work with LA's and RSL's on this.

- **Working group:** One DNW panel member mentioned that their LA has set up a working group on overcrowding. Part of this work is a survey of tenants in overcrowded accommodation to better understand their situation, needs and potential solutions.

## **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE: What do we know about ethnic minority tenants' experience of and satisfaction with repairs and maintenance?**

- **Examples of analysis:** A number of members reported results of their analyses with satisfaction and number of repairs analysed by ethnicity:
  - One RSL which analysed satisfaction with repairs by ethnicity stated that survey showed ethnic minority tenants 2% more satisfied than average. However, not sure why and need to look at whether anything in particular was done to achieve these results.
  - Another RSL also analysed average number of repairs/year by ethnicity with averages almost the same for white vs ethnic minority residents. Satisfaction was slightly higher with ethnic minority tenants.
  - Another RSL reported that their ethnic minority tenants tended to underreport repairs. Looking at reasons for underreporting.
  - One RSL has taken on research into disaggregation of data of complaints and repairs. Identified complex reasons for underrepresentation of ethnically diverse people amongst those reporting repairs/complaining. No information on follow up was provided.
- **A number of members were unable to analyse or unsure of their data:**
  - One RSL mentioned that they are currently not able to breakdown results by ethnicity. Work ongoing on trying to rebuild tenants trust – overall satisfaction dropped and customers no longer willing to accept Covid as a justification for delays.
  - Another RSL was unsure if they can breakdown repairs/maintenance data by ethnicity – have now emailed their colleagues to check.
  - One RSL stated that housing conditions related referrals to their tenant support service are increasing but the data from this isn't disaggregated by race.
  - One RSL mentioned response rate to tenant satisfaction survey was 60% but this was not disaggregated by ethnicity.
  - Data: WHQS does and WHQS2 will guide standards – however some RSLs mention they don't disaggregate WHQS data by ethnicity (there is not Welsh Government level data on this either). This could take several years to establish on proposed data systems.
- **Real-time feedback:** One RSL mentioned they had real time digital customer feedback (via text) but issued in English only (is there an opportunity to tailor languages and accessibility?). Not sure whether the feedback can be disaggregated by ethnicity.
- **Whole service review:** One RSL is reviewing the way repair/maintenance service is provided to tenants to make it tenant-focused and not only focused on business needs. Working around the needs and wants of the tenant first and foremost. Considering timings of appointments etc. and cultural sensitivity.
- **Languages:** CCHA provided satisfaction surveys in multiple languages as well as feedback options.
- **Intensive management:** One RSL used intensive housing management for the first 6 months of tenancy to increase sustainability. While not targeted, this allows for good evidence and identification of current and potential future support and household needs. This can include tailoring maintenance and support.

- **Voids standard:** Monmouthshire Housing mentioned that some time ago they introduced an increased voids standard (including provision of carpets/flooring) and that this has a big impact on tenants as well as the organisation. As statistically, ethnic minority people are more likely to experience poverty, this can help alleviate some financial pressures.

## REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE: What else can we do?

- **Communication:** DNW Panel member highlighted that good communication with ethnic minority people for who English/Welsh is second language is absolutely crucial. This can be improved by hiring diverse staff.
- **Extra time:** DNW panel member highlighted that at times, what is needed is simply extra time, e.g. to use tools like Google translate, or to access language support; to understand the needs of the households and reasons for maintenance issues etc.
- **Tenancy set-up:** DNW panel member highlighted the need to take time to inform new tenants on how to operate some facilities, if they have e.g. migrated to the country or may be unfamiliar with e.g. heating, ventilation, recycling etc.
- **Cultural sensitivity and responsiveness:** DNW panel member highlighted that there is a need for greater awareness of, sensitivity to, repairs/maintenance needs of some ethnic minority tenants' cultures due to different ways in which households operate, some maintenance staff are not used to diverse needs or don't feel they have freedom to provide flexible solutions. Panel member provided an example of some African households using showers differently. Other examples were provided by others e.g.:
  - Need for access to running water for religious reasons
  - Kitchens not being geared up for stocking bulk quantities of ingredients purchased by some families. If not adapted for needs – wear and tear can be significant.
  - Preference for squat toilets (one RSL highlighted an example where a family could not get help from landlord and introduced their own plumbing solution here which lead to flooding and other issues. Early adaptation would have prevented the issues.
- **Role of boards:** There is an important role for board members to provide impetus and to challenge senior staff to disaggregate data and follow up e.g. service use, outcomes, complaints or satisfaction.
- **Insight:** DNW panel member highlighted the need for housing managers to get more insight into tenant profiles.
- **False incentives:** One RSL mentioned previous bonus scheme for DLOs which incentivised rushing appointments (this has now been scrapped). This can be a particular issue if more time is needed due to e.g. language issues, time to understanding needs etc. Also applies to other diverse needs of households.

## Areas for action

- **Analyse available evidence:** While a lot of good practice and future suggestions were shared, at 1.5 years into the initiative, many organisations were yet to look into the issue of overcrowding. We would urge all organisations which pledged to DNW to:
  - Analyse data/evidence available on overcrowding by ethnicity
  - Analyse their repairs data/evidence by ethnicity
- **Work with Local authorities:**
  - RSLs to raise with LAs as part of allocations or development work.

- Tai Pawb to look into working with LAs at strategic level to encourage data sharing and partnership work.
- **Cultural sensitivity awareness:** it was felt that a practical guide/information on repairs/maintenance considerations would be beneficial to members. Tai Pawb to look at developing.