Durham University
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Stigma and Social Housing in England

Amanze Ejiogu & Mercy Denedo

Ending Social housing stigma together...

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

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Foreword

It's hard to understand why someone would be judged negatively and even actively discriminated against because they rent their home from a social landlord, yet that is the nature of the stigma faced by too many people and their families in England today. The Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) June 2018 Rethinking Social Housing research and report identified that stigma was seen as a growing issue. The UK government also acknowledged stigma in its social housing green paper — A New Deal for Social Housing — published in August 2018.

While the stigmatisation of social housing and its effects are evident, research on this phenomenon has been scant. This report starts to fill the gaps in our understanding of the stigmatisation of social housing. It examines how we have come to a place where renting a home from a social landlord, something which 3.9 million households in England do, is seen as a negative thing. It shows that the causes of stigma are many and multi-layered. Government housing policy and investment prioritises home ownership as the tenure of choice and aspiration and sees social housing as being only for the neediest and a waiting room for better things. We have an acute shortage of genuinely affordable homes to rent. The print and broadcast media are too often allowed to demonise social housing tenants without any fear of being challenged. We also have to acknowledge the role that social landlords, their staff and their contractors play in creating and reinforcing stigma, both directly and indirectly. The negative impact of housing workers' language and behaviour as well as the way in which landlord services are designed and delivered are all too evident in the quotes from people interviewed as part of this research – and they make for very uncomfortable reading.

To try to tackle this stigmatisation, the tenant-led See the Person campaign worked with the National Union of Journalists to produce the Fair Press for Tenants guide and with the CIH produced It's Not Okay — a guide to tackling stigma in social housing (September 2020). It's Not Okay encourages housing providers and their staff to reflect on their language, behaviour, and service design and delivery. It stresses the importance of getting organisational culture right, being accessible, accountable, and avoiding complacency; communicating in a clear, positive, human and kind way; engaging in meaningful tenant and resident involvement; and making sure that homes, neighbourhoods, repairs and maintenance are all of the best possible standard. This report reviews these guides and other attempts at challenging stigma.

Along with challenging the government to recognise the positive role that social housing and its residents play and to invest in more of it, we need to emphasise and promote the importance of respectful professional practice and the right values and behaviours. We all have a part to play in tackling stigma and we have a duty to do just that. This report and the dialogue which it seeks to promote on the stigmatisation of social housing presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the past and create a future free from stigma.

Melanie Rees, is the head of policy and external affairs at the Chartered Institute of Housing, housing's professional body. She is a CIH chartered member and Fellow.

Contents Page

Executive summary, policy and engagement implications 6

1. Stigma and social housing in England: what we did 9

1.1. Introduction 10

1.2. Objectives 11

1.3. Methods: what we did 11

2. Understanding stigma: literature review 12

2.1. Conceptual framing of stigma 13

2.1.1. Defining Stigma 13

2.1.2. Stigma in social housing 15

2.2. Stigmatization 16

2.2.1. Defining stigmatization 16

2.2.2. Stigmatization of social housing in England 17

2.3. Challenging stigma in social housing — destigmatization 18

3. Stigma and social housing in England: findings (part a) 20

3.1. Construction of stigma in social housing 21

3.1.1. Pre 1970 – Construction of stigma in social housing 21

3.1.2. Post 1970 – Construction of stigma in social housing 23

3.1.2.1. Politicians, politics and policies 23

3.1.2.2. Media and press 26

3.1.2.3. Social housing providers 28

3.1.2.4. Tenant voice 29

3.2. Complexity of stigma 30

3.2.1. Drugs and crime 30

3.2.2. Poverty, benefits, employment and class 31

3.2.3. Race and immigrants 33

3.2.4. Mental health and disabilities 34

3.2.5. Geographic variations 35

3.2.6. Generational variations 36

4. Stigma and social housing in England: findings (part b) 37

4.1. Everyday realities of living with social housing stigma 38

4.1.1. Social housing providers and their contractors 38

4.1.2. Council 41

4.1.3. General Practitioners (GP) 42

4.1.4. Police 43

4.1.5. Postcode stigma 44

4.1.6. Homeowners and neighbours 45

4.1.7. Stigma at work 46

4.1.8. Poor doors 47

4.1.9. Education 49

5. Stigma and social housing in England: findings (part c) 50

5.1. Challenging social housing stigma 51

5.1.1. Reducing stigma through planning – tenure mixing and regeneration 51

5.1.2. Reducing stigma through staff training and tenant engagement 53

5.1.3. Challenging stigma through protest and the arts 54

5.1.4. Challenging stigma through counter narratives 55

6. Conclusion, policy implications and consultation 56

6.1. Conclusion and policy implications 57

6.2. Consultation and further research: way forward 59

References 60

List of Abbreviations

Participants codes*	Descriptions
AC	Academic
AD	Advocacy
JAC	Journalist and Academic
HR	Housing Regulator
HSEB	Housing Staff, Executive and Board members
NTR	National Tenant Representative
PBR	Professional Body Representative
PC	Councillor
TCHP	Tenant(s) of a Council Housing Provider
TSHP	Tenant(s) of a Social Housing Provider

**When a code is followed by (FG) this means the interview was a focus group interview. Codes without the (FG) designation are individual interviews.*

Executive summary and recommendations

Social housing sector in England accounts for over a sixth of the total housing stock in England. However, it was not until the Grenfell Tower fire of 14 June 2017 in which 72 people died that attention began to be focused, albeit tentatively, on social housing and those who live in it. The tragedy brought several issues to the fore of public consciousness including the stigmatization of social housing and its tenants. While there is undeniable evidence of stigmatization of social housing, very little is known about this type of stigma — how it is constructed, how it is experienced, and what is being done to challenge it. This study seeks to address this gap in our understanding of stigma in social housing by exploring how stigma is constructed, experienced and challenged in England.

The key findings of this study are:

Our findings highlight two distinct eras of social housing i.e. an era pre-1970 and an era post-1970. Pre-1970, stigma attached to living in social housing was not widespread and usually stemmed from the construction and build quality of estates. Over time, a stigmatizing perception of social housing as cheap and subsidised housing also started to emerge. Post-1970s, there was an intensification, spread and normalization of stigma in English social housing. Politicians, politics and policies; news media and social housing providers (including the local councils) and a lack of a strong tenant voice at local and national levels drove this stigma. Government's policies to prioritize allocations to the poorest and most vulnerable tenants as well as the depletion of the social housing stock through reduced investment and the right to buy scheme served to residualize social housing. This residualization coupled with the promotion of home ownership policies meant that social housing is cast as inferior, temporary and tenure of last resort.

The evidence points at social housing stigma being much more complex than is usually assumed as it intersects with other stigmas such as poverty stigma, crime stigma, mental health stigma and race and immigration stigma. Several of these intersections are direct results of the residualization of social housing. In addition, we also observed geographic and generational variations in the intensity of stigma. Tenants experience stigma in a variety of ways ranging from stigma in interactions with their housing providers, neighbours, the police, GPs, at work, at school, with potential employers etc. Being stigmatised in this way has practical consequences for social housing residents because it affects their everyday realities, the quality of their life, and their life chances. We provide evidence of these and other forms of stigmatization including postcode stigmatization and segregation through the use of poor doors.

The government has consistently approached social housing stigma as an issue to be tackled through the planning system. However, we find that this approach of encouraging mixed tenure developments and housing regeneration schemes has not been effective in combating stigma; rather the regenerations and mixing of tenures have resulted in a more directed stigma towards the social housing elements of estates. In addition, amongst housing associations and local councils, there is a growing awareness of the contribution of their policies and practices to the stigmatization of their tenants. Several of them have taken steps to retrain their staff and make staff more aware of stigmatizing behaviours and practices. Besides, retraining staff, housing associations and local councils also have redesigned procedures to give their residents a voice in the development of policy and in service delivery. However, these measures have had very limited success. More recently, efforts to challenge social housing stigma have coalesced around approaches of rebranding social housing and presenting alternative narratives of who the social housing tenant is and what life in social housing is really like. For instance, the See the Person Campaign has run an online campaign to create a positive image of social housing. However, these efforts to challenge social housing stigma suffer from structural and organisational issues like the lack of funding, political will and institutional support.

Recommendations:

Following our findings, we set out a series of policy recommendations, which are:

1. Government needs to adopt a rights based approach to housing which views access to affordable housing as a fundamental human right. Taking housing as a fundamental human right seriously would entail a complete rethink of the purpose of social housing and more particularly:

    i. Move them away from policies of residualization of social housing and the promotion of home ownership as a more superior tenure than renting.

    ii. Create an environment to address the acute shortage of safe and affordable housing, which has been used as a tool to stigmatize social housing residents. There is a need for investment in social housing to drive significant increase in social housing stock.

    b) Politicians need to stop their use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing.

    c) Recognize the intersection of social housing stigma with other stigmas and develop policy measures, which take a holistic approach to challenging stigma.

2. The social housing sector need to:

    a) Create a strong tenant voice at national, regional and local levels.

    b) Redesign the regulatory and governance arrangements of social housing providers to make social housing providers more accountable to tenants.

3. Media:

    a) Balanced and fairer reporting of social housing

We believe that for this to happen, everyone needs to play their parts. There is a need for honest conversations and spirited engagement around these issues by all stakeholders in the social housing sector including but not limited to the government, politicians, the media, housing providers and tenants.

Consultation and future research

To this end, we would like to open this conversation with a set of consultation questions on page 59. We encourage you to send your thoughts and responses to these questions to us through **stigmaconsultation@gmail.com** as well as invite us to attend any consultation forum/events/meetings to reflect on these set of questions to drive the changes we honestly hope will emerge from this study.

1. Stigma and Social Housing in England: what we did

1.1 Introduction

Although the social housing sector in England accounts for 4.19 million homes representing 17.3% of the total housing stock in England, its significance was largely ignored until mid-2017. The Grenfell Tower fire of 14 June 2017 in which 72 people died changed this. The tragedy served to problematize issues relating to social housing including the stigmatization of social housing and its tenants, the quality and safety of social housing and the accountability problems emerging from the marginalisation of tenants' voices. Indeed, stigma was the most consistent theme raised by tenants in engagement events organized by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) before it published its Green Paper "A New Deal for Social Housing" (MHCLG, 2018). This was also flagged in the recent MHCLG' social housing white paper titled "The Charter for Social Housing Residents" where measures to strengthen tenants' voices in England through effective engagement and transparent accountability mechanisms
were introduced.

The dominant discourse that surrounds public debates on social housing denigrates social housing estates as zones of urban disorder, criminality, menace and depicts housing tenants as benefit cheats and scroungers, less intelligent, lazy, untrustworthy and uncivilised people, unemployed and a burden on taxpayers. However while the evidence of stigma is undeniably present, there is very little academic research focused on understanding stigma in social housing. This study seeks to address this gap on stigma in social housing by exploring how stigma is constructed, experienced and challenged.

Residents told us that they were made to feel like "second-class citizens". They reported being treated as "an underclass" and "benefit scroungers", rather than hardworking and honest people. Some residents told us of a "demonisation" of social housing and their communities in the media. (MHCLG, 2018, p.47)

Stigma and prejudice linked to social housing are rife. When social renters have issues, their complaints can go nowhere and too many feel powerless to influence the decisions made about their homes. And in the private market, the practice of refusing to rent homes to those receiving benefits is widespread. (Shelter, 2019, p.14)

1.2 Objectives

In this study, we aim to develop an in-depth understanding of how stigma is constructed, experienced and challenged in social housing in England. To this end, we seek to examine:

i. **How actors in the social housing sector in England (tenants, politicians, registered providers etc) contribute to the construction of stigma.**

ii. **How tenants (and other actors) have experienced stigma and its impacts on them.**

iii. **How social housing stigma is being challenged.**

1.3 Methods: what we did

We adopt a multi-method approach in carrying out this study. First, an analysis of documentary archives, press archives and oral history (from interviews, audio and video archives) was undertaken to explore the historical construction of the stigmatization of social housing tenants.

Second, we conducted a netnography research by exploring the social media campaigns of advocacy organisations, practitioners and professional bodies on Twitter and Facebook aimed at challenging stigma in social housing.

Finally, we conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with social housing tenants, tenant organisations, social landlords — covering frontline officers, directors and board members, trade bodies, industry associations, religious leaders, campaign groups, civil society organisations, politicians, regulators and academics. We conducted 45 individual interviews and 29 focus groups with over 200 participants drawn from regions in England (i.e. West Midlands, East Midlands, Greater London, North West, South East, North East, and Yorkshire) between March 2019 and November 2019. All interviews were conducted on a confidential basis, thus the empirical evidence reflected below was not attributed to any specific person, group(s) and organisation(s). The identities of participants were anonymised using the following codes.

Table 1: Overview of the interviewees' codes

Participants codes*	Descriptions
AC	Academic
AD	Advocacy
JAC	Journalist and Academic
HR	Housing Regulator
HSEB	Housing Staff, Executive and Board members
NTR	National Tenant Representative
PBR	Professional Body Representative
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2. Understanding stigma: literature review

Interest in the concept of stigma within the social sciences has seen significant growth over the last three decades. Stigma is now an important topic, which cuts across many disciplines including sociology, psychology, public health, housing, etc. Given the volume of literature on stigma, we do not attempt to provide a comprehensive literature review as this would take us in tangential directions. Rather, we focus on three key areas: understanding what stigma, is the state of knowledge in relation to stigmatization of social housing and how social housing stigma is challenged.

2.1 Stigma

2.1.1. Defining Stigma

Erving Goffman's (1963) book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* is considered the seminal treatise on stigma, which it defines as 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting' and which reduces the bearer 'in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman, 1963, p.3). In discussing stigma, Goffman highlights the importance of both social identity and context. Thus, an attribute, which stigmatizes an individual, may confirm the usualness of another in a different social context. These ideas of social identity and social context being pivotal to the definition of stigma have persisted. For example, Crocker et al. (1998) argue that 'stigmatized individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context' (Crocker et al., 1998, p.505). Goffman (1963) identifies three types of stigma: 'abominations of the body' (physical deformities); 'blemishes of individual character' (weak will, dishonesty, etc. arising from mental illness, addiction, imprisonment etc.); and 'tribal stigma' (race, religion, nationality).

While Goffman's (1963) conception of stigma is widely used, we do know that stigma is not about personal attributes alone as it can also be attached to places. Place based stigma is usually referred to in the literature as 'Territorial Stigma' (Wacquant, 1993). Wacquant (1993) conceptualizes territorial stigma as a negative public image of specific places. This negative image enforces a symbolic dispossession of their inhabitants of status, not only recasting them as social or urban outcasts, but also depriving them of their collective representation and identity (Larsen and Delica, 2019; Wacquant, 1993).

Unlike individual stigma, which is reducible to the specificities of individuals, territorial stigma is generalized to whole neighbourhoods. Thus, with territorial stigma, social discredit is anchored firmly in place (Wacquant et al., 2014). However, like individual stigma, it is produced through a complex social process involving a wide range of actors. While territorial stigma displays properties similar to Goffman's three types of stigma, it is most akin to tribal (race, religion, nationality) stigma as it 'can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family' (Wacquant, 2008, p.67).

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Stigma is not about personal attributes alone as it can also be attached to places.

Unlike individual stigma, which is reducible to the specificities of individuals, territorial stigma is generalized to whole neighbourhoods.

Horgan (2020) argues that although housing stigma incorporates aspects of both Goffman's individual stigma and Wacquant's territorial stigma, it is different from both of these. He conceptualizes housing stigma as the 'denigration of particular housing units due to their inhabitants, form, tenure, and/or location' (Horgan, 2020, p.10). Thus, housing stigma is neither generalizable to the level of neighbourhood or territory as in territorial stigma nor is it reducible to the particularities of individuals as with individual stigma but rather combines certain aspects of both. Horgan (2020) argues further that housing stigma will vary in intensity from place to place in accordance with the different combinations of individual and territorial stigma occurring in each context.

Common to all definitions of stigma, be they in relation to individual, place or housing, is the attribution of some 'quality' or 'characteristic' with negative meaning on people which denigrates them and results in the loss of social status. This then is the essence of stigma.

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2.1.2 Stigma in Social Housing

While there is a pool of literature on territorial stigma, this literature focuses broadly on urban neighbourhoods generally rather than on social housing. Research focusing specifically on social housing stigma is sparse. In this literature, a pathological explanation of stigma in social housing is usually given. The pathological explanation holds that social and urban problems are caused by the concentration of a 'poor moral underclass' in certain areas and that this 'underclass' is different from the rest of the society in terms of its behaviours and values (Hastings, 2004; Jacobs and Flanagan, 2013; Tuominen, 2020). Thus, negative reputation and stigma is linked to the characteristics and behaviours of the residents of social housing. The image constructed of the social housing tenant is of one who is an 'incapable tenant' (De Decker and Pannecoucke, 2004) who is feckless and antisocial, a drug addict of having mental illness, whose family and other relationships are dysfunctional and who, in order to avoid work, engages in irresponsible and sometimes criminal behaviour (Arthurson et al., 2014; Jacobs and Flanagan, 2013; Vassenden and Lie, 2013; Watt, 2020).

The literature points at stigma of social housing being also rooted in the perception of social housing units and estates as being poorly designed, constructed, built and managed (De Decker and Pannecoucke, 2004; Power and Provan, 2018a) as well as social renting being a residual tenure for more vulnerable households (Power and Provan, 2018a). Here, both the residual housing units/estates and the tenure are regarded as 'blemishes' which devalues the estate.

We then have social housing stigma operating both at the individual level (tenant) and at the level of housing unit and tenure. Horgan (2020) argues that this type of housing stigma is contagious between person and place. Contagion in this case is multidirectional as the individual level stigma rubs off on the housing units and tenure while the stigma attached to housing units and tenure also rubs off on the individual.

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The literature points at stigma of social housing being also rooted in the perception of social housing units and estates as being poorly designed, constructed, built and managed as well as social renting being a residual tenure for more vulnerable households.

2.2 Stigmatization

2.2.1. Defining Stigmatization

Stigma does not appear, as if by the wave of some magic wand. No, it comes to be because of a social process.

Indeed, Horgan notes:

> *"Stigmatization is a process, stigma is its product."*
>
> Horgan, 2020, p.9.

He argues that stigmatization is the social process by which qualities and characteristics with negative meanings are attributed and made to adhere to individuals, places or things.

Earlier work by Link and Phelan (2001) outlines the internal workings of the stigmatization process in relation to individuals thus:

> *"Stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labelled persons to undesirable characteristics – to negative stereotypes. In the third, labelled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of "us" from "them." In the fourth, labelled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes. Stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination."*
>
> Link and Phelan, 2001, p.367.

Thus, stigmatization of individuals is portrayed as a process, which involves labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination occurring within a power situation that produces and reproduces stigma. Both territorial and housing stigma are also produced by similar processes (Horgan, 2020; Wacquant, 2008; Wacquant et al., 2014).

Given its processual nature, Horgan (2020) argues that stigmatization, and its end product – stigma, can develop or diminish and as such meanings attached to particular types of housing, tenure or individuals can shift across time and space. However, this idea of stigmatization and stigma varying over time and space has not been explored in the literature on social housing.

Stigmatization is a process, stigma is its product. (Horgan, 2020, p.9).

Stigmatization of individuals is portrayed as a process, which involves labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination occurring within a power situation that produces and reproduces stigma.

2.2.2. Stigmatization of Social Housing in England

Recognizing that the stigmatization process will proceed differently in different countries, we focus this section on the stigmatization process of social housing in England. Although, the literature on social housing in England acknowledges that the dominant discourse that surrounds public debates on social housing denigrates social housing estates and mobilizes negative narratives about the tenants who live in social housing (Mccall and Mooney, 2018; Watt, 2017), there is very little research which explores how this came to be constructed or experienced.

The literature on social housing in England acknowledges that the dominant discourse that surrounds public debates on social housing denigrates social housing estates and mobilizes negative narratives about the tenants who live in social housing, there is very little research which explores how this came to be constructed or experienced.

Power and Provan (2018b) take a historical approach and explore how social housing in England moved from being seen as providing decent accommodation for a large section of the working class to being perceived as a residual tenure for the lowest classes of society and thus stigmatized. This residualization led to the labelling and stereotyping of both social housing and its tenants and ultimately to their differentiation and social exclusion. Taylor (1998) tries to describe this process thus:

> *"As people have been given more choice in housing, those with no choice are increasingly concentrated in the housing that few people want: of poor design and quality, expensive to heat, in bleak environments, often isolated on the edge of towns and cities. Although there have always been estates that have been difficult to let, the statistics of exclusion, unemployment, economic inactivity, low school achievement reveal increasing polarisation...between these estates and the rest of society. For many, social housing has become a symbol of failure in the consumer society, a tenure of last resort."*
>
> Taylor, 1998, p.820.

The literature also highlights the role of power in the stigmatization of social housing in England. Dean and Hastings (2000) in their study of three social housing estates (two in England and one in Scotland) identify a range of actors including public services (police, schools, etc.), private services (estate agents, social landlords, housing developers, insurance companies, etc.) and the media who contribute to the construction of stigmatizing images of estates. While this study throws some light on the historic development of stigma in social housing, they are about decades old and they leave us with questions as to how the stigmatization process in social housing in England has proceeded (developed or diminished) over the last two decades.

2.3 Challenging Stigma in Social Housing – Destigmatization

If stigmatization is a social process, which produces stigma, it follows that the process can also be reversed and stigma can be removed (Horgan, 2020). This process of reversal of stigmatization and removal of stigma is referred to as 'destigmatization' (Junnilainen, 2020). Much like with stigma and stigmatization, there is not much literature on how stigma is challenged in social housing. The territorial stigma literature views stigmatization of neighbourhoods as a prelude to gentrification, slum clearance and regeneration of neighbourhoods. Kallin and Slater (2014, pp.1353-1354)

> *"Stigma and gentrification to be two sides of the same coin, the former 'clearing the way' for the latter. When a place becomes tainted by derogatory terms, images and discursive formations, there are not only everyday consequences for people living within it; symbolic defamation provides the groundwork and ideological justification for a thorough class transformation, usually involving demolition, land clearance, and then the construction of housing and services aimed at a more affluent class of resident."*

Gentrification of social housing neighbourhoods has tended not to be directed specifically at addressing stigma, it is usually assumed that the negative image of the social housing neighbourhood will improve as material conditions in the neighbourhood improve (Hastings and Dean, 2003). However, the evidence is scant on the success of these regeneration projects in destigmatizing neighbourhoods. Indeed, Hastings and Dean (2003) in their study of the regeneration of three social housing estates in the UK show that stigma persisted after the gentrification projects to destigmatize had been completed.

Alongside gentrification, policies of creating mixed tenure neighbourhoods and operationalizing social mix within neighbourhoods has been pursued in several countries as a means of destigmatizing social housing and its tenants. Underlying these policies are two assumptions. First, that creating neighbourhoods with mixed tenures will prevent the spatial concentration of the *'poor moral underclass'* in particular neighbourhoods (Arthurson, 2013). Second, that the middle-income residents of these neighbourhoods would become role models for the lower-income social housing residents, providing them with access to broader social networks and employment related opportunities (Arthurson, 2010). Much like the regeneration strategies, there is evidence that stigma related with social housing and its tenants still persists even in mixed tenure neighbourhoods (Arthurson, 2013, 2010; McCormick et al., 2012; Raynor et al., 2020).

If stigmatization is a social process, which produces stigma, it follows that the process can also be reversed and stigma can be removed. This process of reversal of stigmatization and removal of stigma is referred to as 'destigmatization'.

Both the regeneration and social mix/mixed tenure strategies seek to address the symptoms of stigma but do not address the power relationships, which are at the heart of the stigmatization process. Addressing these power relationships is key to challenging stigma and the success of any de-stigmatization strategies (Jacobs and Flanagan, 2013). Also underlying the regeneration and mixed tenure strategies is an assumption that social housing and its tenants are 'helpless victims' of stigmatization (Junnilainen, 2020). However, there is a growing acknowledgement in the literature of tenants as actors who can deploy multiple strategies in resisting, managing and coping with stigma (Junnilainen, 2020; Palmer et al., 2004). The study by Palmer et al. (2004) highlights three strategies tenants deploy to include: *defining and separating themselves as living in a 'different' part of the neighbourhood; participation in social and civic activities to confound stereotypes; and, resident action and confrontation in conversations*. While this study starts to shed light on some strategies adopted by social housing residents to resist, manage or cope with stigma, there is still a lot to be learnt in this area. To address this gap, our report captures how stigma has been constructed, experienced and strategies adopted to challenge stigma by tenants and other social housing actors in England.

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Policies of creating mixed tenure neighbourhoods and operationalizing social mix within neighbourhoods has been pursued in several countries as a means of destigmatizing social housing and its tenants

3. Stigma and Social Housing in England: findings (part a)

The main findings from this study are presented in section 3, 4 and 5. Section 3, 4 and 5 are structured to address our specific research objectives, which are:

i. How actors in the social housing sector in England (tenants, politicians, registered providers etc) contribute to the construction of stigma.

ii. How tenants (and other actors) have experienced stigma and its impacts on them.

iii. How social housing stigma is being challenged.

3.1. Construction of stigma in social housing

The initial questions in each interview focused on gaining an understanding of how social housing in England came to be stigmatized. The responses highlighted two distinct eras of social housing in relation to stigma i.e. an era pre-1970 where stigma was developing and not yet widespread and an era post-1970 in which there was an intensification, spread and normalization of stigma in English social housing. We discuss these two eras in more detail.

Social housing having a rich history with oral accounts or social (public) housing being a respected tenure as social housing was initially focused on housing 'heros' returning from the war.

3.1.1. Pre 1970 — construction of stigma and social housing

Participants point at social housing having a rich history with oral accounts or social (public) housing being a respected tenure as social housing was initially focused on housing 'heros' returning from the war. Social housing at the time housed a wide range of professionals including schoolteachers, doctors, etc. Several of our participants who had experienced social (public) housing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War were keen to point out that no stigma was attached to living in social housing at that time. Indeed, they noted that for most, getting a council house was a thing of pride:

> *"I'm 72 years old and I have early day's experiences in social housing and current, and a big chunk in the middle of not being involved. I was born in Sunderland and we lived in a council house. This was obviously 1947, so it was brand new, post-war housing, and I remember my mother feeling privileged at having one of these shiny, new houses. It's on a big estate — the house I suppose still stands on a big estate that is now probably one of the most challenging estates in Sunderland, but at the time, in my childhood, it was extremely — it was good. There was nothing about it to feel bad. I went through education, went to grammar school, went into further education, so as a young person from a council house background, I felt no hold back and certainly no shame"*
>
> HSEB18.

By 1969, about 34% of the population lived in social housing (Adam et al., 2015). Tenants were drawn from diverse and varied economic and social backgrounds as the allocation policy followed up until about 1970 emphasised allocation to 'skilled workers needed by industry and others whose rehousing would benefit the community' (Pawson and Kintrea, 2002). While social housing was the tenure of choice at the time, we do have accounts from participants of changing societal attitudes to social housing and stigmatization of social housing as early as the 1950's:

> *"I was born in social housing. I was born on a council estate in Leicester. At the time people who lived in the private sector, people who lived in owner-occupied housing in 1952/53 also had negative views about people who lived in council housing. I remember as a teenager still living in council housing in the 1960s going to visit my friends who lived in their own homes, owner-occupied homes, private homes, and their parents were often quite negative about their sons and daughters having friendships with someone who lived in a council house"*
>
> AD2.

Participants linked this developing stigmatization of social housing and its residents to a view held by members of the public that social housing was subsidised and therefore residents were '*getting something on the cheap*' (AD2). In addition to this, issues of anti-social behaviour started to emerge in social housing estates, which were linked to the planning and construction of the estates. A participant notes:

> *"Immediately post-war, the answer was to build large numbers of houses and massive estates and things like that. Through time, those estates have evolved into sometimes-inadequate housing. You just think the most obvious thing is carparking. They were built in a time when family ownership of cars was low; maybe every fourth house had a car. Now virtually every house has two cars, so you can't park and all sorts of problems like that. The design of them was often inappropriate to society now in the way that kids kicking a football up against a garage door effectively did no harm to anybody, but... drugs and violence and all sorts of other negative influences have come in, the design of council estates sometimes lends itself to antisocial behaviour."*
>
> HSEB18.

Progressively, social housing estates came to be regarded as regions with high concentrations of crime, antisocial behaviour, substandard housing, and disorder. They became sites of stigmatization. Residents were regarded as 'other' and society started to deal with them differently.

By 1969, about 34% of the population lived in social housing. Tenants were drawn from diverse and varied economic and social backgrounds as the allocation policy followed up until about 1970 emphasised allocation to 'skilled workers needed by industry and others whose rehousing would benefit the community'. While social housing was the tenure of choice at the time, we do have accounts from participants of changing societal attitudes to social housing and stigmatization of social housing as early as the 1950's.

Participants linked this developing stigmatization of social housing and its residents to a view held by members of the public that social housing was subsidised and therefore residents were 'getting something on the cheap'.

3.1.2. Post 1970 – construction of stigma and social housing

Beginning around 1970, there was an intensification of the stigmatization of social housing and its residents in England. Our analysis highlighted the role of politicians, politics and policies; news media and social housing providers (housing associations and local councils) played in this stigmatization of social housing. The lack of a strong tenant voice at local and national levels is also highlighted. We discuss these in more detail below.

Our analysis highlighted the role of politicians, politics and policies; news media and social housing providers (housing associations and local councils) played in this stigmatization of social housing. The lack of a strong tenant voice at local and national levels is also highlighted.

3.1.2.1. Politicians, politics and policies

> *"There's an element of everyday practice as stigma I fear. In terms of discussion with people who perhaps should know better when you are talking about social housing and the function of the people who live in the social housing sector — so, there's that element of stigma where perhaps policy-makers should know better and some of their own language further embeds stigma."*
>
> AC1.

Residualization as a key driver of societal perception of social housing as 'different' and 'undesirable'.

Government's policies influence stigma in a number of ways. First, the shift in allocation policies to prioritize allocations to the poorest and most vulnerable tenants following the adoption of the recommendations of the Cullingworth report in 1969 to institutionalize needs-based allocation resulted in the residualization of social housing. Participants point at this residualization as a key driver of societal perception of social housing as 'different' and 'undesirable'. Second, the government's depletion of the social housing stock through reduced investment and the right to buy scheme under which qualifying tenants could buy their property meant that there are much fewer people living in social housing (17% current estimates from Office of National Statistics, 2019). This means it became easier to 'other' and stigmatize social housing residents. Third, the promotion by Margaret Thatcher's conservative government of home ownership as the ultimate goal to aspire meant that social housing and renting were cast as inferior to home ownership and so something to aspire to 'get out of'.

Feedback from our participants suggest:

> *"I think it did change during the 1980s. I suspect the right to buy policy had an important part to play in that, in that people who were successful as council tenants were given discounts to buy the property they were living in. I think that was seen as a — if you didn't do that, that was perhaps the beginning of a sign of some stigma, that you were something of a failure. I think there was a drive after that by the government to increase levels of home ownership. Some of that I suspect was simply because for a Conservative government, homeowners were simply more likely to vote Conservative, and council tenants or housing association tenants were likely to vote Labour. So, a constant emphasising of the virtues of homeownership was sold to the British people for a period of well over a decade. I suspect the other side of the coin is if you're selling the virtues of homeownership that indicates that not having ownership is a lack of virtue in some way."*
>
> HSEB21.

Several participants talked about how remaining in social housing was seen as a sign of failure and those who had the means, exit to become homeowners. These new homeowners also started to look down on those left behind in social housing.

> *"Over the years, the right to buy policy has been used — as an example of a policy that has impacted on the social housing sector — as properties have been sold and whole communities and streets have become residualised. You end up with pockets of deprivation and unemployment within areas. I think that is where this kind of residualisation of the housing stock has occurred. Talking about residualisation, I'm not keen on it as a term, but it's one that is used fairly commonly in the council housing history textbooks."*
>
> AC1.

Several participants talked about how remaining in social housing was seen as a sign of failure and those who had the means, exit to become homeowners.

The exit of higher income earning residents to become homeowners through the right to buy scheme further exacerbated the residualization of social housing caused by the shift to a need-based allocation policy. Participants highlight the interconnectedness of residualization, stigma and the right to buy policy and the perception that social housing stigma was intentionally generated by politicians to serve their own ideological ends:

The exit of higher income earning residents to become homeowners through the right to buy scheme further exacerbated the residualization of social housing.

> *"We were encouraged to think that buying your council property was better than living in it permanently as a tenant...I think the stigma and the suggestion that it's a last resort, a suggestion that you've failed if you live in social housing was used as a way to justify selling it. It's a Thatcherite ideology."*
>
> JAC1.

This use of stigma for political ends was not the preserve of any one political party or ideology. Indeed, Tony Blair, the Labour Prime Minister (1997–2007) in his symbolic post-election 1997 speech stigmatizes social housing in order to justify his policies on social housing and welfare. For example, in his visit to the Aylesbury estate he argues that:

> *"Behind the statistics lie households where three generations have never had a job. There are estates where the biggest employer is the drugs industry, where all that is left of the high hopes of the post-war planners is derelict concrete. Behind the statistics are people who have lost hope, trapped in fatalism."*
>
> Tony Blair, inaugural speech, May 1997.

In that speech, he referred to social housing residents as an 'underclass' and a 'workless class' cut off from society's mainstream. This further exacerbated and cemented the stereotyping of social housing residents as unemployed, anti-social and dysfunctional. While the Blair government was arguing for an expansion of welfare and social housing, the tactics deployed were the same as those of the previous conservative government, which had tried to constrict these – stigmatize social housing and use this as a justification for change.

Participants indicated that the stigmatization of social housing and its residents intensified much more significantly starting from about 2010. They pointed out that politicians primarily drove this intensification in two primary ways. First, the politicians intensified the narrative of social housing being a residualized tenure, which should only be seen as a temporary arrangement with home ownership being the desired aim.

"I think that's all part of the narrative that certainly the 2010 Coalition Government was telling. This should only be a safety net for a certain amount of time for the absolute minimum kind of needs, and people who get a tenancy should be working to move into home ownership."

HR1 (FG).

In addition to this, politicians stigmatized social housing residents in a bid to justify reforms to the welfare reforms portraying them as immoral cheats who were an unnecessary burden on the taxpayer:

"It's always been there. But I think it was elevated to a national kind of political stage through the austerity measures, through the 2010 Coalition Government and the way they were talking about benefit scroungers and blaming people for being there, and it's only their own fault and we're going to have to get a grip on this."

HR1 (FG).

Participants highlighted how the pursuit of policies of austerity brought an intense form of stigmatisation of social housing tenants being regarded as an 'underclass' and reviving and pushing the Victorian narrative of the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. People, including those living in social housing, were put in the basket of poverty that suggests that they are worthless and unless they own their own homes, they are simply not fulfilling the British dream of being a homeowner.

"I can see how the whole austerity debate has impacted even further on those who were already in poverty. ...You look at how people are put in a basket of poverty, if you like, and I can see how austerity has further negatively impacted by creating stigma for anyone who can't seem to access the private market for pretty much anything, including housing. I think it goes back before Cameron. I think there is this assumption that unless you own your own property, then you are not really fulfilling the British dream of being a homeowner. I think that has as much to play really... I think we do need to look at the right to buy policy and the assumption in this country, compared with some mainland European countries, where there are much better regulations and lengths of tenancy agreements. There are better rent controls for those in the private rented sector. It is not seen as such a terrible thing to live in the private rented sector in some of the mainland European countries, but it is here. So, there is something about our cultural history and the assumption that you have to own your property, get on the ladder. Therefore, anyone who is not on that ladder is seen as somehow inferior in terms of their housing..."

AC1.

This stigmatizing narrative from the politicians served to conflate the stigma associated with poverty with social housing stigma. It also casts the social housing resident as 'unethical' and 'base', having value systems, which are dysfunctional.

It seems that irrespective of political or ideological leaning of politicians and governments, social housing has been used as a pawn in their political chess game. They have linked social housing to poverty and the welfare system and stigmatized social housing as a justification for change in policies they intend to effect on the system and as long as it serves their purpose, the stigmatization will continue.

The pursuit of policies of austerity brought an intense form of stigmatisation of social housing tenants being regarded as an 'underclass' and reviving and pushing the Victorian narrative of the deserving poor and the undeserving poor.

3.1.2.2. Media and Press

The media plays a significant role in shaping the public's thoughts, feelings, opinions and behaviour (McCombs et al., 2011). Our participants highlight the media as a key actor in stigmatizing social housing in England. They argue that mainstream media have a negative and stigmatized view of social housing and its tenants and this is reflected in the negative portrayal of social housing and its residents in the news media. For instance, the media, in 1976, coined the term 'sink estate' to describe problematic social housing estates thus:

> *"Somewhere, in every town that has council houses at all, there's a sink estate — the roughest and shabbiest on the books, disproportionally tenanted by families with problems, and despised both by those who live there and the town at large. ... As long as families on the margins of society are shunted into second best accommodation, there will be sinks."*
>
> New Society Magazine, 18 November 1976, p. 356.

Slater (2018) illustrates how this stigmatizing term made its way into political and national discourse, conditioning attitudes of politicians and the public are being used in justification of policy choices. He also shows how politician's stigmatization of social housing provides for this negative portrayal by the media by highlighting how the media's use of 'sink estate' to describe social housing increased exponentially after Tony Blair's inaugural speech at the Aylesbury estate.

Our participants noted an intensification of this negative media portrayal of social housing from 2010 under the coalition government through television programmes such as ITV's Benefit Street and Channel 4's Skint:

> *"I think in its current form started probably just after the Conservative Government came to power in 2010/2011. There was a...housing minister, who said a number of very negative things about social housing and people who live in social housing. There became a whole political agenda about stigmatising social housing, which I think was generated from a political point of view by the government at the time. It was picked up in a number of ways through various television programmes, in the media, in the press. There was an infamous series called Benefits Street where people living in social housing were shown in a very negative way, a very stereotypical way, in a way that I believe is totally fictitious and as far away from the truth as you can probably get."*
>
> AD2.

Participants are firm in their belief that the negative and stigmatizing media portrayal of social housing and its tenants is deliberate:

> *"As I shared before, we do a big community event, we've just had it, in one of the local parks, and it invites everybody from all different areas to come along. I sent three emails to {a media outlet named}, asked them to come along too — I put it as we get a lot of bad press, how about doing a nice story showing all the fantastic things we're doing? I didn't get one response, not one. But if I put it the opposite way, I would have had them at the door."*
>
> AD1.

Mainstream media have a negative and stigmatized view of social housing and its tenants and this is reflected in the negative portrayal of social housing and its residents in the news media.

Indeed, whilst highlighting that the negative and stigmatizing portrayal was deliberate, they suggest that it is also built on unethical practice, because journalists go out of their way to construct scenes of chaos, which bear no relation with the reality on ground:

> *"I remember being on a small housing estate, millions of pounds had been spent refurbishing the estate and the television crew wanted to film — North Manchester, it was in — wanted to film something. They said no, we want a couple of burnt-out cars and we want to put rubbish in the street. I said no, we just spent millions of pounds doing this place up. Go and film somewhere else, you're not filming here. Their expectation of what tenanted properties and people living on benefits were was it had to be run down. It couldn't be a nice place; you couldn't have a nice place for people paying rent. It had to be run down, it had to look miserable. It's just a perception then that the press and media have about rented accommodation."*
>
> NTR2.

This stigmatization material (news, TV shows etc.) produced by the media further conflates social housing with poverty, anti-social behaviour and dysfunctional value systems and is consumed by all facets of society.

This has had a significant influence on stigmatization of social housing and its tenants by the public at large.

Whilst highlighting that the negative and stigmatizing portrayal was deliberate, they suggest that it is also built on unethical practice, because journalists go out of their way to construct scenes of chaos.

3.1.2.3. Social Housing Providers

Interestingly, our analysis shows that another major contributor to the stigmatization of social housing and its residents are the social housing providers. Participants highlight the prevalence amongst social housing providers of a paternalistic attitude towards their tenants:

> *"Lots of social landlords and local authorities provide — or think they are providing for very disadvantaged people and they sometimes don't recognise that we have very hardworking and intelligent customers who can manage very well for themselves. So, I think perhaps there is a lot of paternalism in the way social landlords behave."*
>
> HSEB43.

Lots of social landlords and local authorities provide — or think they are providing for very disadvantaged people and they sometimes don't recognise that we have very hardworking and intelligent customers who can manage very well for themselves. (HSEB43)

This paternalistic attitude is reflected in the social housing providers' communications to their tenants, other stakeholders, politicians and the wider public. Indeed, in their communications, social housing landlords often portray themselves as heroes protecting the 'most needy and vulnerable' and 'turning people's lives around'. For example, a participant highlights this type of communication in social housing sector's response to the introduction of Universal Credit thus:

> *"If you look at the reaction to things like Universal Credit...the reaction to the sector about that was that tenants wouldn't be able to cope with monthly budgeting, it's just fundamentally paternalistic."*
>
> HSEB46.

This type of communication is deeply stigmatizing of tenants as it characterises tenants as unable to take responsibility for themselves and therefore constructs them as 'others' who have to be cared for, controlled and governed in a manner different from the rest of society. A participant highlights this mode of controlling and governing especially through the removal of tenants' choice in respect of services delivered as stigmatizing:

> *"When I came to live in social housing my bills dramatically increased. The reason for this is that I'm having to pay for my gas and electric supply from providers that the housing association has chosen for me. So I can't go and find competitively priced gas and electric supplies. Also the gas supply, I'm having to pay a £5 a month administration fee. It appears the assumption is that you're not going to pay your bill, so you have to pay this administration fee. Whereas previously, when I was a private tenant, I could choose who I had a gas and electricity supply from. The landlord didn't enforce that on me and the gas and electricity supplier then didn't impose this very high administration tariff on me. I think that to me is an economic stigma of we're going to charge this excess money because we don't think you're going to pay your bills. Because you're in a housing association we're going to enforce these high gas and electricity tariffs on you, with the assumption that you're not going to complain because you're not going to bother to question this."*
>
> TSHP14.

This mode of dealing with tenants further reinforces the already existing stigma amongst policy makers, the media and in society more generally.

3.1.2.4. Tenant voice

Several of our participants linked the spread and intensity of social housing stigma to the lack of a strong tenant voice at the local and national levels. They point out that the asymmetry of power in the social housing sector such that housing associations are not accountable to tenants means that at the local level, tenants are not involved in decision-making and housing associations can adopt a paternalistic stance and stigmatize tenants without any resistance from tenants. A participant note:

> *"I think there's a reluctance on the part of housing association leaders to really recognise tenants because their power base will be challenged. The chief executive of a housing association thinks, who am I accountable to? I'm accountable to my board but how much? It depends on the strength of your board. I'm accountable in a little way to my local authority, but if I work in 52 local authorities it doesn't really matter. I can upset one; I can work in another. I'm partly accountable to the government but actually the government aren't giving me very much money at the moment, so that's okay. I'm partly accountable to the regulator but actually the regulator has not said very much recently about tenants, so we've been okay. If the regulator says we have to do something about tenants maybe, we'll do something about tenants again. We'll do that. They'll judge that as a leader and say, where are my priorities in relation to my accountabilities? At the moment it's changing but there isn't a strong relationship in accountability to tenants and to support tenants. Therefore, unless you're really motivated by involving tenants it's not a priority for most businesses. It's not talked about at boards. It's not a major issue on lots of boards' agendas."*
>
> AD2.

At the national level, the lack of a strong tenant voice means that stigmatization of tenants by politicians, the media goes relatively unchallenged, and policies, which institutionalize stigmatization, are developed and implemented without significant input or resistance from tenants. In relation to the lack of a strong tenant voice at the national level, participants point out that attempts to create a National Tenant Voice organisation have been blocked by the government and are unlikely to come to fruition without government funding or support.

The lack of a strong tenant voice means that stigmatization of tenants by politicians, the media goes relatively unchallenged, and policies, which institutionalize stigmatization, are developed and implemented without significant input or resistance from tenants.

3.2. Complexity of Stigma

Our analysis of social housing stigma highlighted that social housing stigma is much more complex than most other stigmas as it is interwoven with other stigmas including poverty stigma, crime stigma, mental health stigma and race and immigration stigma. Several of these intersections are direct results of the residualization of social housing. In addition to the intersection with other stigmas, we saw geographic variations in the intensity of stigma and generational aspects to stigma. We discuss these below.

Social housing stigma is much more complex than most other stigmas as it is interwoven with other stigmas including poverty stigma, crime stigma, mental health stigma and race and immigration stigma.

3.2.1. Drugs & Crime

In society the persona of the drug user and drug dealer are linked to violence and illness and stigmatized (Perrin et al., 2021). From our analysis of public discussions on social housing and from the interviews and focus groups, we see strong evidence of this stigmatized persona of the drug user and drug dealer being linked with social housing and contributing to the stigmatization of social housing.

Here are some examples of participants' comments linking social housing stigma to drugs:

> *"There was stigma on all of the eastern districts where it was full of drugs, it was full of gangs, it was full of everything else. I mean I'm not saying it's perfectly clear now, there are still the odd few about, but as soon as you mention you live in the eastern district, it's like oh, so which gang are you involved in? Well, do you sell weed at all? Do you know somebody who sells weed?"*
>
> TCHP13 (FG).

> *"We had a new build scheme handed over to us last July ... The nominations for new builds — local authorities get 100 percent of nominations. What the local authority had done was probably 50 per cent of the people they nominated to us were care-leavers. They nominated to a group of flats. So, these are a mixture of houses and flats. The flats all happened to be in one area. A lot of the care-leavers got allocated these flats. You had one drug dealer that moved in onto the scheme, not to live, but he had access to the scheme. He had a child with one of the people who lived on there. He started cuckooing all these care-leavers. The amount of anti-social behaviour – there was fighting out there and everything. He would bring his guys who smashed in the woman's door, who had the child by the drug dealer. He was downstairs in the one flat while his group of people smashed down the door. All this kind of stuff. That is what creates your stigma. That's a mixed site of owners and social housing customers. Because of the way that those properties were allocated, and the fact that they were all grouped in one particular area, it was easier to infiltrate for a drug dealer. Everybody had seen that happen..."*
>
> HSEB31.

In addition to intersecting with stigma related to drug use and drug dealing, we also found evidence of an intersection with criminality. Here is an example of this from one our interviews:

> *"What's happened is with social housing, the council said, right, so we're going to put all the ex-cons on Thorplands. There was a load of people released from prisons got moved onto Thorplands, single parents onto Blackthorn, drug dealers onto Kings Heath. Actually, if they'd have split them and had a few single parents, a few drug dealers and a few prison outlets as well as your normal run-of-the-mill council applicants, it would never have become a niche market for all the drug sellers."*
>
> TCHP3 (FG).

Here stigma attached to criminal offenders and ex-convicts, which often comes together with segregation, or exclusion from conventional society (Gålnander, 2020) is superimposed and articulates on to already existing stigma on social housing.

3.2.2. Poverty, Benefits, Employment & Class

Poverty stigma derives from the myth which can be traced back to 12th century England that poor people (usually the lower classes) are lazy, morally defective, irresponsible, and cannot be trusted with decision making and that the rich have the right to discipline, control, and punish the poor (de Souza, 2019). We found that in relation to social housing stigma, the most talked about intersection with other forms of stigma, in the media, by politicians and by our participants was the intersection with poverty stigma, which was intimately linked with the benefit system, unemployment and social class. Here are some examples of participants' comments on this intersection:

> *"I think poverty is stigmatised. I think that is what I am saying. So, there's evident poverty when it comes to street homelessness. If you are looking at a pecking order of stigmatisation, people who sleep in sleeping bags on the pavement are ultimately at the bottom of that ladder of stigmatisation. There's an element of, if you live in council housing, you are seen as someone who has failed "to access the private market", whether that is private rented or owner-occupied. So, I think there is an element of stigma around poverty of access to the private sector — because it is out of financial reach, or it's just not something that has not been happening in a family for generations. No one has access to the private sector; generations have lived in council housing. So, yes, I think the stigmatisation is because of perceived poverty."*
>
> AC1.

In relation to social housing stigma, the most talked about intersection with other forms of stigma, in the media, by politicians and by our participants was the intersection with poverty stigma, which was intimately linked with the benefit system, unemployment and social class.

"They feel that there's a stigma about those people, they're of the lower classes, they're a group of people who possibly have a higher percentage of unemployment, so they might have a high percentage of criminality."

HSEB 24.

"I think there is a general issue about social housing tenants are probably considered to be on benefits, yes. Probably a lot of them are. Well, we know 64 per cent or something like that of ours are on housing benefits or universal credit and I think there is absolutely a view of people on benefits that's very negative yeah.... The poverty stigma. Poverty, benefits, and stigma, I think that's been there for decades. But that link with social housing, I think probably wasn't quite as clearly defined as it perhaps is now."

HSEB 15 (FG).

What is evident from these is not just that poverty stigma is linked to social housing stigma but it is also linked to other stigmas e.g. crime. Therefore, the linkages between social housing stigmas are looking much more complex and web-like than is usually depicted.

3.2.3. Race & Immigrants

The first report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on equality and human rights progress for England highlights migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as one of four most disadvantaged groups in England (EHRC, 2016). This is consistent with academic research which shows that these groups are heavily stigmatized (Banks, 2012; Rodriguez, 2010). Our findings show that social housing stigma intersected with negative societal attitudes towards refugees and migrants. This was exacerbated by the debates around Brexit. Here are some comments from participants, which highlight this intersection:

Social housing stigma intersected with negative societal attitudes towards refugees and migrants. This was exacerbated by the debates around Brexit.

> *"That was the second layer of stigma that started to become attached to social housing. You were an immigrant, probably illegal. You didn't work and you were sponging off the estate."*
>
> TCHP3 (EG).

> *"We got some of the refugees and things like that and putting them in. I think some of our communities once they heard; they were up in arms saying why are we having these people, in our communities and things like that? Which I think was difficult."*
>
> HSEB 24.

Interestingly, we see migration stigma intersecting with both poverty stigma and social housing stigma. As expected from the literature (e.g. Fox et al., 2012) we saw several cases of migration stigma intersecting with stigma associated with racial identity. However, given that racial stigma pervades society independent of migration, it was not surprising that our study found evidence of social housing stigma intersecting with stigma associated with racial identity especially for the blacks. Here are some participant comments from one of our focus groups in relation to this:

> *"I do have a resident who lives in a very good cul-de-sac house. Everybody is a homeowner there. Very homeowner. Beautiful area. She is the only general renter in there. The only general renter. She happens to be a black lady with two sons. Now, the whole community of the whole 42 streets along that cul-de-sac, they keep going to the MP every minute reporting that she shouldn't be living among there. She's a housing association tenant. We should evict her. She doesn't live there. Her children are no good. They deal with drugs. There is no evidence to back their accusation. Nothing. Her only crime is she is black and she's living within a white community as a housing association tenant. That's just her crime. She does have two sons who are special needs. Having the neighbour next door literally sit by her chair so when she comes out, she [writes]. Every minute she spends outside and comes in, they send it to the MP. We've been [indebted influx] from the MP trying to ask us to evict her, that she doesn't live in the property."*
>
> HSEB12 (FG).

Intersection of social housing stigma with stigmas associated with migration and race is a complex one as there are also intersections with crime stigma and poverty stigma. Thus, the picture, which is emerging, is one of multiple intersections occurring simultaneously.

"Yeah. Just to add onto what S was saying, basically they also look at it as if you live in social housing this is where you put the gangs, the young black kids. This is where they put them all together because of their social ethnic background and that stigma sort of living with them from generation to generation."

HSEB 12 (FG).

Clearly, it is evident that this intersection of social housing stigma with stigmas associated with migration and race is a complex one as there are also intersections with crime stigma and poverty stigma. Thus, the picture, which is emerging, is one of multiple intersections occurring simultaneously.

3.2.4. Mental Health & Disabilities

Society in general holds a stigmatized view of people with mental health problems as violent and dangerous (Mental Health Foundation, 2015), or in general with other disabilities as being dependent and helpless. Our focus groups and interviews provided us with several examples of how social housing intersected with stigma associated with mental health and disabilities. Here is one of the instances of this intersection, which we heard from a social landlord:

"Ninety per cent nomination are people with mental health problems. Disability, prosecution. A brandnew block, a brand new building and when the Section 106 was going, it used to be in the middle of a cul-de-sac, there was a bit of land in there and they went and built in there a six storey. ...It's a brand new property. Those windows and everything are being smashed out. Only for us to realise that the Council has put all mental health tenants in there and we don't provide support. Most of them are not known to the mental health team. Most of them are not engaging so they've closed their case. As a landlord how do we do this? Now there's stigmatisation that is going around saying council tenant, housing association tenant, causing havoc. A neighbour went to the papers. One of them went to the local papers to put up a story. One of the people, one of the ones that bought the property, went to the papers and put up a story. It's that stigma again also where we feel the homeowners, how dare you come and build a house here and put people with mental health in it."

HSEB 12 (FG).

3.2.5. Geographic Variations

Interestingly, we found that stigma was perceived differently in different parts of the country, which we visited. In the more rural areas, we found that social housing tenants did not perceive stigma as strongly as those in the urban areas did. In addition, we found that stigma was felt more intensely in bigger cities like London and Birmingham where there was a more intense shortage of housing. In areas such as the North of England where social housing rents were at par or even higher than private rents, there was little, or no stigma attached to living in social housing. For instance, a participant in one of such area noted:

> *"But again, I just wonder, so it is regional because I don't — I never had it in,... It seems to be an acceptance that there are always going to be council houses, there are always going to be private houses and that's it. You get on with your life."*
>
> TSHP 11 (FG).

In the more rural areas, we found that social housing tenants did not perceive stigma as strongly as those in the urban areas did.

3.2.6. Generational variations

Our interviews and focus groups also showed that there might be generational aspects to social housing stigma. Several participants indicated that the generation, which grew up with the intensification of social housing stigma (post-1970), were more likely to stigmatize social housing tenants. However, there were also indications that the generation now growing up with the housing crisis and facing an inability to buy their own homes are less stigmatizing of social housing. Here are some of the participants' comments on this:

> *"My original work, which is the reason I moved here, I worked with a lot of older people who were in their 50s and I think they thought oh, they looked at me as though I must have been a very poor person. So I must have been quite poor to have to live in social housing. In my current job I work with a lot of younger people, I would say they're in their late 20s, they don't have any issues. They actually ask me how they could also do this, because they see this as the only way they could afford to have their own home. They think it's a very positive thing."*
>
> TSHP14.

> *"I think the older generation probably grew up with the fact that people that lived in social housing have to be in a maybe very — how would you say? Not traumatic, but maybe in a very urgent need to be in social housing. Or they have to be in a predicament to be in social housing, whereas now the younger generation see it more as being the norm."*
>
> TSHP14.

Several participants indicated that the generation, which grew up with the intensification of social housing stigma (post-1970), were more likely to stigmatize social housing tenants. However, there were also indications that the generation now growing up with the housing crisis and facing an inability to buy their own homes are less stigmatizing of social housing.

4. Stigma and social housing in England: findings (part b)

4.1. Everyday realities of living with social housing stigma

Stigma has practical consequences for social housing tenants. It intrudes into their everyday lives, impacting their quality of life and life chances. In addition to the stigma from politicians and the media highlighted in the previous section, our participants provided us with a catalogue of other intrusions. We highlight the more jarring of these below.

Stigma has practical consequences for social housing tenants. It intrudes into their everyday lives, impacting their quality of life and life chances.

> *"...tenants define themselves as stigmatised because of the way that they are treated on an everyday basis... ...I think sometimes they feel stigma in practice. They may not necessarily call it stigma, or observe it from a discourse analysis level, but they feel it every day in their homes when the taps aren't mended, that kind of thing. There's an element of everyday practice as stigma...."*
>
> AC1.

4.1.1. Social Housing Providers & their Contractors

In interviews and focus groups with tenants, we heard several examples of staff of social landlords stigmatizing tenants. This stigmatization involved staff at all levels from the CEO to the frontline staff. Here are some of these examples:

> *"When you've got the CEO saying that involving tenants is like letting the inmates run the asylum, I think that's – it then goes all the way down through the housing association, doesn't it? Because if they don't believe in social housing, I'm not quite sure why they chose to have that as a career, if they honestly think that..."*
>
> TSHP6 (FG).

The housing association itself stigmatises in the way it treats its tenants. The root of it obviously is British class — the class system in this country, which is just impossible to eradicate really. But I've experienced it actually from employees of the housing association. (TSHP5 (FG))

> *"The housing association itself stigmatises in the way it treats its tenants. The root of it obviously is British class — the class system in this country, which is just impossible to eradicate really. But I've experienced it actually from employees of the housing association. I once was late turning up to a meeting, which was being held in a tenant's flat on a small estate, and I walked in unannounced. The housing association person was seriously talking down to people who were living in a block. I eventually got a chance to introduce myself and I sound quite middle class, which I wasn't originally, and her attitude changed completely to me. The way she was talking to them was completely different and as soon as I opened my mouth she was making eye contact and being really nice."*
>
> TSHP5 (FG).

"We moved in in 2013 and the heating and hot water did not work, the windows were not correctly fitted, the ventilation system did not work, it was not connected. The staff that were responsible for this were rude and obstructive. They blocked NHBC claims; we had roof leaks, which they then accused us of causing the leaks, and blocked any repairs. So we found the stigma of them towards us as a landlord — I've been a private tenant, the landlord would listen to you and take proactive action, whereas the landlord in social housing was very rude, obstructive and would not take any action. This is particularly upsetting given that they are a charity set up for social housing."

THSP 14.

Tenants also felt stigmatized by contractors employed by the social landlords to deliver repair services to them. In most of these cases, they felt that the social landlords permitted or at least acquiesced to their contractors' behaviour.

In our interviews with staff of social landlords, there was a recognition that some of their operations also stigmatize tenants. For example, a housing officer noted:

"Like I mentioned, the idea that we have got a separate team to deal with leaseholders and this is something that was introduced in the last few years and a separate team that deals with general needs, for me off the bat obviously it's not fair. It's going to stigmatise the level of service you get I would think. I don't know if it's equal or not but from a customer's perspective, if I know my call is being directed or getting different resources, yeah, it's going to get my back up."

HSEB12 (FG).

In addition to being stigmatized by social landlord staff and operating procedures, tenants also felt stigmatized by contractors employed by the social landlords to deliver repair services to them. In most of these cases, they felt that the social landlords permitted or at least acquiesced to their contractors' behaviour. Here are some comments from the tenants on this:

"Have I felt stigmatised? Yes, on numerous occasions and by the organisation that I rent from. Because they allow their contractors to make me feel like a second-class citizen. Or when I work, and I am out. I'm up at six and I'm out at seven and yes, I can get back in by about 4:30. But if there is something to be done and I book an appointment, and if I'm giving you even four weeks', five weeks' notice and you've booked me and I say, please make me the first and this is the reason I need you to make me the first because it means if you are there at eight, I can be back in work by 11 and my day is not — oh no we can't do that. Is there anything else booked in? This comes not just from the builders; this could be also from somebody in here coming to inspect your property. They book an appointment, whether it's a housing officer or what, or a surveyor. Now, he's got nothing in his diary, and yet he cannot make me an eight o'clock because I don't matter enough for him to take my reasonable request into consideration. So, yes, I feel stigmatised."

THSP7 (FG).

There's an assumption that you don't work or you don't have anything else to do. I just feel that the general way you're spoken to by the contractors...it's very patronising.... (TSHP4 (FG))

"There was a window replacement thing going on and I was trying to negotiate with the contractors about access to my home and he stood there, and he said, you have no rights. You know, we come, and we do what we want because you have no rights. You're a housing association tenant- you know, you're nothing. You can't tell me when it's sort of convenient for you."

TSHP7 (FG).

"When you're given a repair window, it's the entire day. There's an assumption that you don't work or you don't have anything else to do. I just feel that the general way you're spoken to by the contractors... it's very patronising.... Even the windows on our estate, we had them done 25 years ago. Lots of them have gone past their sell-by date, you know, getting lots and lots of condensation on the inside, and you'll get the surveyor out and the surveyor will blame everything in the world except the windows. You put clothes on your radiator. No, I don't, actually. You haven't opened the windows properly. I open my windows every day. But they won't agree, and they just lie to you constantly. If you were a private tenant, that wouldn't be allowed to happen...I got told, that was said to myself about our new front door. You should count yourself lucky that you got a new front door. I said you better leave now."

TSHP4 (FG).

We must note at this stage that while in general, tenants felt stigmatized by their social landlord, the degree of stigmatization varied. Some housing associations and local councils had recognized stigma as an issue and were actively working to minimize the stigmatization of tenants by their staff and contractors. However, there were wide variations in the effectiveness of the measures taken.

4.1.2. Council

Several of our participants had dealings with their local councils either as their tenant i.e. the council was their social landlord, or to access other council services. In many cases, they felt stigmatized in their dealings with the council. Here are a few of their comments:

> *"Sadly, there is a lot of stigma from the council departments themselves. There is an assumption made that if you live in a council house that you are either unemployed, retired or you're an immigrant. I work full time."*
>
> TCHP3 (FG).

> *"Having to access the services was the treatment that's for me the most stigmatizing. .... it was how you're considered as someone who's uneducated and I'm not uneducated, I'm very educated. You're considered as uneducated, incapable. I would almost go as far as to say uncouth, that's how much I felt that I was treated. It was the tone when spoken to. This is why I keep saying about sentiment. It's the tone you're spoken to and it was that it was the tone of that I felt I was less than and you're therefore — because we have these preconceived ideas that you live in this neighbourhood so that you come from probably, you're black, you come from a criminal background. You didn't finish school; you hang out most of the time."*
>
> TSHP10 (FG).

> *"My heating and hot water had gone and it was winter time. I had too much to do and didn't really want to chase up the council who did the repairs. However, when all my exams were out of the way I then decided, right, it's time to get this done. I'd go along to the neighbourhood office and I said look I haven't had any heating or hot water for months. It's a female who's sitting in front of me, so I was hoping for a little empathy in terms of personal hygiene. I'd say when I need to have a shower, I have to go to the recreation centre. She goes, that was the attitude. She literally went "I don't care"."*
>
> TSHP10 (FG).

Having to access the services was the treatment that's for me the most stigmatizing. .... it was how you're considered as someone who's uneducated and I'm not uneducated, I'm very educated. You're considered as uneducated, incapable. I would almost go as far as to say uncouth, that's how much I felt that I was treated. (TSHP10 (FG))

4.1.3. General Practitioners (GP)

Tenants highlighted the fact that GP practices, which served social housing estates, were usually dilapidated and under resourced. They also indicated that when accessing health services, they were usually regarded as incapable of taking responsibility for themselves because they lived in social housing. Here is a comment from one of our participants on this:

> *"If I go to my GP, and I'm going to be very personal now. A few years ago, my family has a history of diabetes and I've always thought I'm going to be diabetic. I used to go along and say please check my blood, please check my blood. One year I didn't go and they called me and sure enough, I was. The immediate thing was you are, these are not the words, but the attitude was you are not a capable individual therefore we must medicate you in order to control this condition. When I said — those were not the words but that was the attitude and that is the attitude to people in those kinds of neighbourhoods. If I lived in a middle-class neighbourhood and had said what I said, no, I'd like the opportunity to manage this myself. Oh, my doctor was oh no, no, no, you can't do that, you won't be able to do that. Six years later I'm still doing that. The attitude now is well we don't know what it is you're doing but whatever it is you're doing it's working. Had I been in another type of neighbourhood I'm sure the GP would have been receptive to me saying I'd like to do this myself. They would see me as a capable individual."*
>
> TSHP10 (FG).

When accessing health services, they were usually regarded as incapable of taking responsibility for themselves because they lived in social housing.

4.1.4. Police

Interviews and focus groups with tenants highlighted a difficult relationship with the police. They indicated that the police held a stigmatizing view of social housing as crime riddled or indeed a place for criminals. Here are a few comments from participants at a focus group:

> *"I was at a meeting with a police and crime commissioner doing a speech, who said to the audience of 200 people, if you break the law, you'll end up in council housing, the police and crime commissioner. Now to me, if that's not stigmatisation by the police."*
>
> AD1.

> *"Where I live, we've got a schoolteacher who's moved on through circumstances, and has lived on our estate for two years. She needed the police for something or something to do with the police, anyway but the comment the police officer made to the housing officer and me is a school teacher, what's a school teacher doing living on Turf Hill."*
>
> AD1.

Tenants told us that this stigmatized view of tenants held by the police has resulted in differential policing of social housing, as the police are usually slower to respond to calls from known social housing than they are to respond to calls from private homeowners/renters. They also indicated that helicopters and aerial surveillance were deployed over social housing estates regularly or over incidents, which did not warrant such methods and that this type of policing further stigmatized these areas.

Tenants told us that this stigmatized view of tenants held by the police has resulted in differential policing of social housing, as the police are usually slower to respond to calls from known social housing than they are to respond to calls from private homeowners/renters.

4.1.5. Postcode Stigma

Interviews and focus groups with tenants also highlighted territorial stigma of social housing estates. In several cases, tenants noted that the cost of services like insurance were higher and job opportunities and life chances were limited based on their postcode as people associated certain postcodes with social housing. Here are a few examples of this:

> *"Stigmatisation is for me personally I think I experienced it when I moved into social housing from private accommodation. I think that all my relatives and friends cut off because of where I lived. I think that the stigmatisation is also related to the job market, when they see the address, they don't give you a job."*
>
> TSHP10 (FG).

> *"I went for a job here and in the interview; I was told I'd done brilliantly, anything else? I didn't get the job and I phoned up and I just asked how can I improve to do better? To be fair the person was very frank. Move from WE10. That's what I was told."*
>
> TSHP10 (FG).

> *"Yes. I'm a university graduate, so I've a reasonable level of education, but I know if I apply for a job and a HU7 postcode goes in, I've got a slimmer chance of getting a job interview."*
>
> TCHP2 (FG).

> *"I think we're discriminated against in many ways. I think as soon as people know where you come from, as soon as you've got a council estate in your address, or they key your postcode in, I think for education, employment opportunities, I think there is a stigma. I think we are discriminated against."*
>
> TCHP2 (FG).

Tenants noted that the cost of services like insurance were higher and job opportunities and life chances were limited based on their postcode as people associated certain postcodes with social housing.

4.1.6. Homeowners & Neighbours

In the interviews and focus groups, tenants, especially those in mixed tenure estates, spoke of experiencing stigma from neighbours who were either private renters or owner-occupiers. For instance, one participant said:

> *"...I live in a street of private terraced housing, a very typical Manchester street, and then at the end is a selection of social housing or social-housing-built properties some of which have been bought. So my neighbours know. I've had some funny reactions from neighbours who when they speak to me seem surprised that I live where I do. Some of them have thought I'm foreign. No idea where that comes from. They've assumed I'm foreign. I've had a child shout at me in the street that I'm a skank because of where I live. Literally on my street that has happened."*
>
> JAC1.

Participants noted that this stigmatization from homeowners also came from those former social housing tenants who had bought their properties through the right to buy scheme:

> *"Some of the stigma comes out of the fact that so many people have bought their homes within what was basically a council estate. They turn around and in their own minds, we are better than you, you get this done and you get that done, we have to pay for ours. That is the sort of attitude you get from them."*
>
> TCHP13 (FG).

> *"I have had more disrespectful comments from people that own ex-council houses than I do from anybody that lives on a purposely built private property."*
>
> TCHP3 (FG).

Housing association staff and senior executives also provided us with instances in which their tenants were stigmatized by homeowners and neighbours:

> *"There was a press article from Guisborough where an owner occupier had bought a new build house from one of the builders — I think it was {named a prominent property developer}. {named a prominent property developer} had then sold some of their properties on that estate to go to Beyond and this owner occupier had gone to the press to say how disgusted she was, how house prices would drop. I guess it was all that negative assumption that just because the properties are owned by a social landlord that they're going to be a problem."*
>
> HSEB10 (FG).

Stigmatization from homeowners also came from those former social housing tenants who had bought their properties through the right to buy scheme.

[1] Definition of Shank from Urban Dictionary: "Derogatory term for a (usually younger) female, implying trashiness or tackiness, lower-class status, poor hygiene, flakiness, and a scrawny, pockmarked sort of ugliness. May also imply promiscuity, but not necessarily. Can apply to any race, but most commonly used to describe white trash."

I can think of examples where tenants have been stigmatised. ... we've bought two houses there, just on open sale. There was a Facebook campaign by owner-occupiers who were saying, this is disgraceful. When I bought my house for 200,000 or whatever it was, I was told that there's no social housing on here, and now I understand X Housing Association has bought some. We've got two, two units. So, that didn't feature but I think that's disappointing. Just yesterday at the management team, we were in negotiations with a major builder to acquire circa 80 properties off them. They had wanted to insert a clause, and I can only assume this has come from pressure from existing residents on the estate, because it's a big estate and we're having a block of it — we'll have 80 odd houses in it, and they wanted to insert a clause that we wouldn't let them at social rent."

HSEB28.

4.1.7. Stigma at work

Tenants told us about how stigma followed them to the workplace as colleagues and bosses who knew that they lived in social housing perceiving them as 'rough'. This stereotyping manifested in stigmatizing conversations in the office and in work allocations for some. Here are some examples:

Tenants told us about how stigma followed them to the workplace as colleagues and bosses who knew that they lived in social housing perceiving them as 'rough'.

"I'm going to go back — does anybody remember E that got murdered on Blackthorn? .... It was the first murder that we'd had on Blackthorn, the estate, which at that point was something like 4000 households because that encompassed all the little private bits that had come in. I went into work. My boss — who lived in a very, very nice private house down in Poets Corner area — said, well, what do you expect? You live on a council estate. ....The assumption was made. There was a murder because it was a council property or a council estate when in reality, statistically, it was a safer estate than where he lived."

TCHP3 (FG).

"I have been in journalism offices and there has been an assumption that I'm a bit rough and I can go out and do these stories and I'm comfortable on council estates because I don't fear these people... My response, my individual personal response would be to think that they're wrong to think that of me. So I haven't internalised that stigma."

JAC1.

4.1.8. Poor doors

Participants in the London area pointed at the 'poor door' phenomenon as deeply stigmatizing to tenants. A participant describing the poor doors in a new development on Commercial Street in East London, which had attracted protests in which she was involved, noted:

> *"So a lot of protests outside it because of two sets of entrances. There's one round the back, which was down a little dingy alleyway, which was for the social housing tenants, and one at the front which was for the private owners, and that had posh lighting and marble floors... I just think it's quite shocking that people would be categorised in that way, and wouldn't be allowed to use the same entrance based on their income, basically. It's almost a form of apartheid, in the least sense of the word."*
>
> AD3.

Other tenant participants, some of whom lived in these types of developments, noted that the segregation extended beyond entrances to communal and play areas. A senior executive from a housing association, which owned the social housing element of some of these types of properties, provided a rationale for this practice:

> *"That's often shown in the way in which social housing developments — there's a developer I think who has both private housing for sale and social housing. Social housing is often accessed through a different road, or the people who are buying the private houses are not told the social housing is going to be nearby. One picks up that people who live in privately-owned accommodations, owner-occupier accommodation, feel that having social housing tenants near them lowers the value of their property. Those are the ways in which I see that stigma happening."*
>
> HSEB21.

Thus, the developers and housing associations accept and act on the stigmatized view of social housing and its tenants as being 'different' and of 'lower status' and thus likely to reduce the value of properties situated close to social housing units. However, our interviews also pointed at some housing associations reflecting on this after the poor door protests in London and taking action to see that they do not continue this practice.

'Poor door' phenomenon is deeply stigmatizing to tenants.

For example, a housing association chief executive noted:

> *"Every housing association when they are designing their homes there'll be a range of different factors they need to consider. There'll always be an element of cost that has to go into that. There'll also be an element of thinking about the tenure because that's how — there might be some [planning] requirements that they have to meet. I think in the past — I've definitely seen that when you've got different COREs where you have a social housing CORE or shared ownership, sometimes — not even just inside the properties but in the communal areas — they may be — I remember seeing one where [they had a] rendered finish in the social housing CORE and a tiled finish in the other and this is just in the communal areas. How must that make people feel? Anyone looking at that — you're going to think that you're what, better tenants because you've got a tiled wall as opposed to a rendered finish? .... we've had to do a review of that so we can — it wasn't done with intention but that's what has happened.... It doesn't mean that we're speaking and being advocates for something that we're not happy with because we know it all, it's because we recognise that we ourselves have made mistakes in the past. We have to acknowledge that and it's now what can we do about that going forward and how can we address some of those issues and make those wrongs right."*
>
> HSEB19.

4.1.9. Education

The interviews and focus groups with tenants also highlighted how stigma affected children in educational settings and impacted on their life chances. This ranged from the schools serving social housing estates being under resourced and lower quality than those in mostly owner-occupied areas to the stigmatizing treatment received by children in school. Here are some examples of tenants' comments:

> *"It affects children at school. Because at schools you have children from council, housing association, and obviously private homes. I've seen that certain children in the class are not invited to the birthday parties, because they don't want that child at their kid's party. The kid who comes to school a little bit scruffy, the runny nose, hungry. Those are the children that don't get invited."*
>
> TSHP7 (FG).

> *"I think what I experienced particularly at school was an assumption that I wouldn't achieve. So I was told, girls like you don't become journalists, meaning girls who were growing up on this council estate in {named a location} in East Manchester, which is one of the poorest parts of the city. So those restrictions were placed on me because of where I lived."*
>
> JAC1.

> *"There's another effect as well, what schools are actually serving council estates and what exact education children are being offered. I never got my 11-plus, so I had to go to your nearest secondary school, whatever that was, because you didn't have a choice....It's as simple as that. It's interesting, isn't it, the schools as well — the sort of schools that are serving council housing estates."*
>
> TCHP2 (FG).

Stigma affected children in educational settings and impacted on their life chances. This ranged from the schools serving social housing estates being under resourced and lower quality than those in mostly owner-occupied areas.

5. Stigma and social housing in England: findings (part c)

5.1. Challenging Social Housing Stigma

A few attempts have been and are currently being made to challenge social housing stigma in England. We highlight some of these attempts and their limitations.

5.1.1. Reducing stigma through planning – Tenure Mixing & Regeneration

In November 2020, the government published "The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper" (White Paper) as a follow up on the earlier Green Paper published post the Grenfell disaster. The White Paper highlights the government's perception of stigma as being primarily related to the actions of front-line housing staff and to issues of separation and segregation of social housing in housing developments. Consequently, the White Paper indicated that it had acted to tackle segregation and stigmatization through the planning system noting:

> *"It is vital that social housing is treated as an integral and valued part of our housing system, rather than being separated or segregated from other forms of housing. That aspiration is reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework, which states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places. It also emphasises the need for planning policies and decisions to promote social interaction and provide shared spaces and facilities. It is supported by our planning practice guidance on Design: Process and Tools, published in October 2019, which includes guidance on the effective engagement of communities in shaping the design of their neighbourhoods."*
> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2020, p.61.

This approach represents a continuation of the approach by both the government and social housing providers to use tenure mixing and regeneration of social housing estates as strategies to reduce stigma. However, our data indicated that these strategies were limited in their effectiveness in combating stigma. What we saw was that following a regeneration, general stigma associated with the area reduced or disappeared. However, these regenerations usually involved the replacement of the old estate with a new mixed tenure estate (often with a poor door element perpetuating segregation) on which a more directed stigma existed towards the social housing elements of the estate. In relation to the mixing of tenure, we found that in several cases, tenure mixing led to conflict between social housing tenants and other leaseholders/homeowners, which in turn led to stigma being directed at social housing. Here are some comments we heard from housing officer about mixed tenure schemes:

> *"...the idea was that it was meant to be a mixed tenure but what they did is they created a separate door for the general renter tenants and a separate entrance for the leaseholders. If you went through the leaseholder's door it was carpeted on the stairs, it was all beautifully managed, not a speck of dust, two immaculate lifts, everything. But if*

A continuation of the approach by both the government and social housing providers to use tenure mixing and regeneration of social housing estates as strategies to reduce stigma. However, our data indicated that these strategies were limited in their effectiveness in combating stigma.

you went into the general needs there were urine stains, piss smell, it was really badly managed, the lift kept breaking down. Then that was causing a war because the general tenants would go into the private renter tenants to use the lift to get onto certain floors and it was causing a right war regarding this. The leaseholders said that we pay our service charges, so because we pay service chargers you need to listen to us and you need to give us A, B and C and everything that we ask for and we would bend over backwards to accommodate them. But because of general needs, they still had service charges, but it was coming out through the rent...housing benefit was paying for them or they were partially paying for them, so we tended not to listen to them as loudly as the leaseholders were. The leaseholders were into litigation. They would run off to their lawyers and their MPs every second, so it was like who shouts the loudest, who do you listen to? It was a complete nightmare. A complete nightmare and I think it's a really bad idea to have mixed tenure."

HSEB12 (FG).

"The problem we have in some mixed tenure, is sometimes it's quite easy to tell. I think that's not necessarily in the way the property is developed — because sometimes they all look the same. But when you — so, we've tried pepper-potting, and we've also tried sections, so, where you've got all general needs here, then all market rent here, and all shared owners or private here. You tend to — as you walk down the corridor, you can tell as you walk through, the decline. When you look at things like that, you can understand where some of the stigmatisation comes from."

HSEB23.

Several of our participants argued in interviews and focus groups that governments focus on tackling stigma through the planning system was short-sighted and their efforts should be directed more at increasing funding to the sector. The increase in funding will enable more social housing to be built and ensure that politicians limit the use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing and its tenants.

Several of our participants argued in interviews and focus groups that governments focus on tackling stigma through the planning system was short-sighted and their efforts should be directed more at increasing funding to the sector.

5.1.2. Reducing Stigma through Staff Training and Tenant Engagement

In several housing associations and local councils, there is a growing awareness of the contribution of their policies and practices to the stigmatization of their tenants. Several of them have taken steps to retrain their staff and make staff more aware of stigmatizing behaviour. While this has had an effect, housing association staff note that this sort of stigmatization still occurs in spite of the training received. For instance, a housing association staff told us:

> *"I think yes, we are very — we can be very parent-child, and we are trying to be more enabling now, enabling residents to do things themselves. I'm not sure if Ms T has got you to speak to someone on EST, which is our Employment Support Training scheme. We do try and identify people and train them up and stuff. Yes, I think we're still very parent-child to a lot of residents. That is — some of that is because some of the services that would have normally done — like, social services have had a lot of their resources taken away, and there's a gap left. So, I think we do step in. Whether we ourselves — see ourselves as talking down to tenants and being derogatory — it's difficult to say absolutely not. Because I'm sure there are aspects of the business that probably does, and — but I would say from a housing point of view — it's a hard one, actually, because I want to say not really. I think we try and deal with residents with respect and everything, but there are times when, because you're going back into that parent and child situation, where you would possibly have to talk to someone in the manner that I wouldn't always deem that respectful. But because of the situation around it, and you're having very difficult conversations to help support that person, it can be quite difficult."*
>
> HSEB23.

In addition to retraining staff, housing associations and local councils have redesigned procedures aimed at enhancing engagement with tenants and giving them a voice in the development of policy and delivery of services. For instance, one of the senior executives in a housing association noted:

> *"I think the customer engagement model is much stronger, much more informed, much more involving, and actually probably more driven from the customer agenda point, rather than historically probably being driven from an organisation, or worst-case scenario, just having a standard agenda of just to go through the mechanics of sitting down and meeting with people."*
>
> HSEB41.

Housing associations and local councils have redesigned procedures aimed at enhancing engagement with tenants and giving them a voice in the development of policy and delivery of services.

In most of the housing associations we visited, we could see that these were genuine efforts to give tenants a voice and not just a tick box exercise. However, in most of these cases, although the intentions were good, the effect on stigma was not apparent as most of the tenants we spoke with still felt stigmatized and not listened to by their social housing providers.

At a national level, several attempts have been made to set up a national body to give tenants a voice. However, none of these has come to fruition because of lack of political will and funding from the government and social housing sector.

5.1.3. Challenging Stigma through Protest and the Arts

Stigmatization resulting from the poor doors phenomenon has been challenged through protests. For example, for over 20 weeks in 2014, protesters gathered every Wednesday in front of One Commercial Street, London, to draw attention to the segregated entrances of the building. In addition to street protests, artists also organised an art exhibition to protest against this particular development and against the poor doors' phenomenon and the housing crisis in London more generally. The artist who organised this exhibition, speaking to us noted:

Stigmatization resulting from the poor doors phenomenon has been challenged through protests.

> *"Yeah, that just seemed ridiculous and really disgusting, actually, that that kind of thing is going on today. So I've invited artists to — it wasn't just in response to the Poor Door situation, but it was in response to what was going on with housing. So I think about 10 or 12 artists put in their work and it was all to do with different aspects of what's going on.... I did it as an open call. I just put adverts everywhere saying any artists out there who are making work in response to what's happening with housing, and there were so many applications and I got a lot of very heartfelt messages, people telling me their own persona situations and personal challenges, but it wasn't just about the Poor Door, it was about all different aspects of it. But when the exhibition was running, people that came in, there was one woman who was crying, telling us all about what's happening to her, telling us — sharing their personal stories and experiences."*
>
> AD3.

While these protests did not yield results for that particular building, they served to raise awareness in society about the poor doors and stigmatization of social housing residents through segregation. As noted earlier, these protests and the media coverage of poor doors have also led social housing providers to be more reflective of their involvement with such developments.

5.1.4. Challenging Stigma through counter narratives

Attempts to challenge stigma in social housing have also taken the form of 'rebranding' of social housing or developing 'counter-narratives' which highlight the positive aspects of social housing and its tenants. So far, there have been two major attempts (one ongoing) at this. First was the 'In Business for Neighbourhoods' initiative of the National Housing Federation around the year 2000. One of our participants commenting on this initiative notes:

> *"It was called "In business for neighbourhoods", and it was trying to remove the sense of stigma that we felt already by 2000 that attached itself to social housing....It ran for a certain period of time, but I think it failed to dispel the stigma. I think that we involved some top-running consultants, a man called Mr X, who's one of the world's leading branding consultants at the time, came and worked with us all about this issue, how do we rebrand social housing to remove the stigma, and I think it has to said, the project failed. We didn't reduce the stigma. I'm not even sure we had any impact at all with it. We talked a lot to ourselves, but we didn't change the underlying perceptions in wider society around social housing and people who live in social housing....I think that was the largest attempt at it by a — by the trade body representing all housing associations. But I'm back at the very beginning of the 2000s. I'm not sure if there's been anything attempted on a similar scale ever since. It's been more a case of trying to deal with particular things in specific places, so dealing with some of the impact of stigma, which arises in particular locations."*
>
> HSEB21.

More recently, the 'See the Person' (previously Smashing Silly Stereotypes, and then Benefit to Society) campaign has adopted counter narrative strategies to challenge social housing stigma by creating a more balanced representation and understanding of social housing tenants and their lived experience. The campaign was started in February 2018 by a group of housing associations and charities to tackle stigmatization by developing alternative account(s) about those living in social housing. This has involved Facebook and Twitter campaigns, articles in the social housing press, events at the House of Commons and reports commissioned by the group. The group has also developed a fair press guide, which seeks to influence the way the media reports about social housing, and a guide to tackling stigma by social housing providers. While the campaign was initially driven primarily by the housing associations and charities that initiated it, it has become tenant led. However, the campaign faces issues of structure, participation and reach which limit its effectiveness in challenging stigma in social housing.

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6. Conclusion, policy implications and consultation

6.1. Conclusion and Policy Implications

We set out to develop an in-depth understanding of how stigma is constructed, experienced and challenged in social housing in England. Particularly, we sought
to answer these questions:

i. How actors in the social housing sector in England (tenants, politicians, registered providers etc) contribute to the construction of stigma.

ii. How tenants (and other actors) have experienced stigma and its impacts on them.

iii. How social housing stigma is being challenged

We found that politicians, social housing providers and the media were principal actors in the construction of social housing stigma and that the lack of a strong tenant voice at the local and national level meant that there was little check on these actors as they created and reinforced societal stigma of social housing and its tenants. We also showed that social housing stigma is complex as it intersects with stigma in relation to poverty, benefits, employment and class; drugs and crime; mental health and disabilities; and race and immigration. In addition to these, we highlighted several ways in which stigma intrudes and impacts on the lives of social housing tenants.

While our findings suggest that stigmatisation of social housing varies across regions in England, what is clear is that for the majority of our participants, stigma associated with their experience of living in social housing affects their everyday realities. Hence, there is an urgent need to recognize the magnitude, severity and impact of stigmatisation of social housing and to collectively take action to minimize or even eliminate social housing stigma. Given our findings on the construction of stigma, we believe that any attempt to tackle social housing stigma must be a deliberative and collective effort involving the media, government, housing providers, residents and the public. Any such deliberative and collective engagement towards challenging stigma in social housing cannot make much progress without a recognition of the multiple intersections social housing stigma has with other forms of stigma e.g. migration, race, mental health etc.

Any attempt to tackle social housing stigma must be a deliberative and collective effort involving the media, government, housing providers, residents and the public.

Our study also highlighted the different ways in which the government, social housing providers, tenants and other actors have sought to address and challenge stigma in social housing as well as the limitations of these attempts. Indeed, what is clear to us from this study is that to challenge stigma a few things need to happen:

1) Policy and political arena:

(a) Government needs to adopt a rights based approach to housing which views access to affordable housing as a fundamental human right. Taking housing as a fundamental human right seriously would entail a complete rethink of the purpose of social housing and more particularly:

i. Moving away from policies of residualization of social housing and the promotion of home ownership as a more superior tenure than renting.

ii. Acute shortage of safe and affordable housing has been used as a tool to stigmatize social housing residents. There is a need for investment in social housing to drive significant increase in social housing stock.

(b) Politicians need to stop their use of stigmatizing language and rhetoric in relation to social housing.

(c) Recognize the intersection of social housing stigma with other stigmas and develop policy measures, which take a holistic approach to challenging stigma.

2) Social housing sector:

a) Creation of a strong tenant voice at national, regional and local levels.

b) Redesigning the regulatory and governance arrangements of social housing providers to make social housing providers more accountable to tenants.

3) Media:

a) Balanced and fairer reporting of social housing

6.2. Consultation: way forward

We believe that for these to happen, there needs to be honest and spirited engagement around these issues by all stakeholders in the social housing sector including but not limited to the government, politicians, the media, housing providers and tenants. To this end, we would like to open this conversation with the following consultation 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?

We encourage debate on these issues within organisations, at conferences and events, with government and other stakeholders, indeed in any forum where debate is possible.

We also encourage you to send your thoughts on and responses to these questions to the authors at **stigmaconsultation@gmail.com.**

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