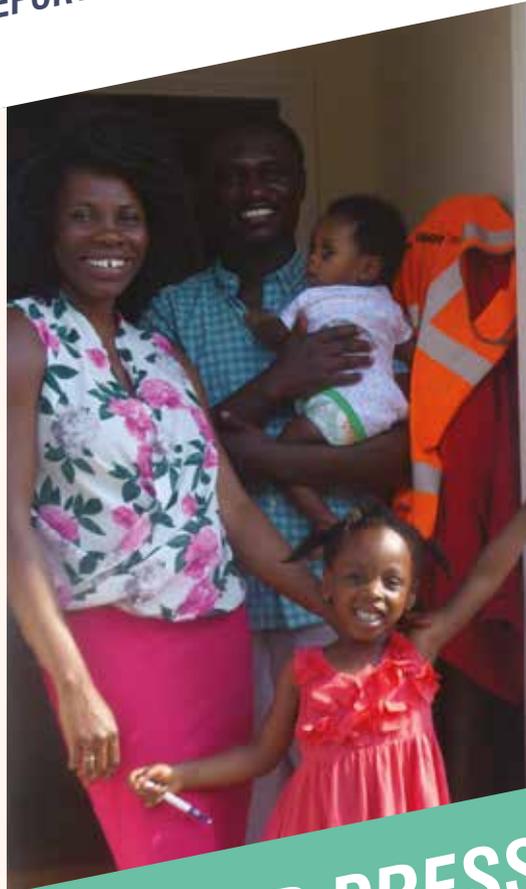




## GUIDE TO REPORTING SOCIAL HOUSING

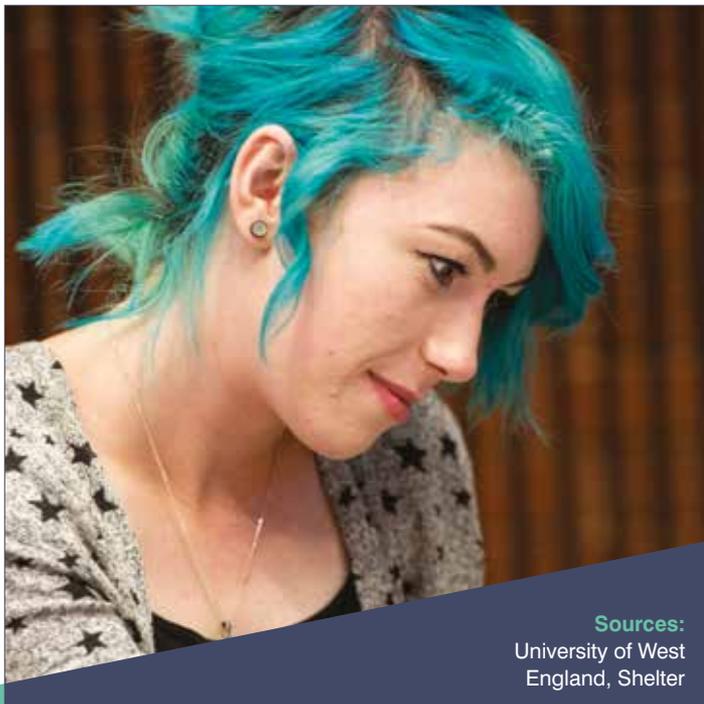


## FAIR PRESS FOR TENANTS

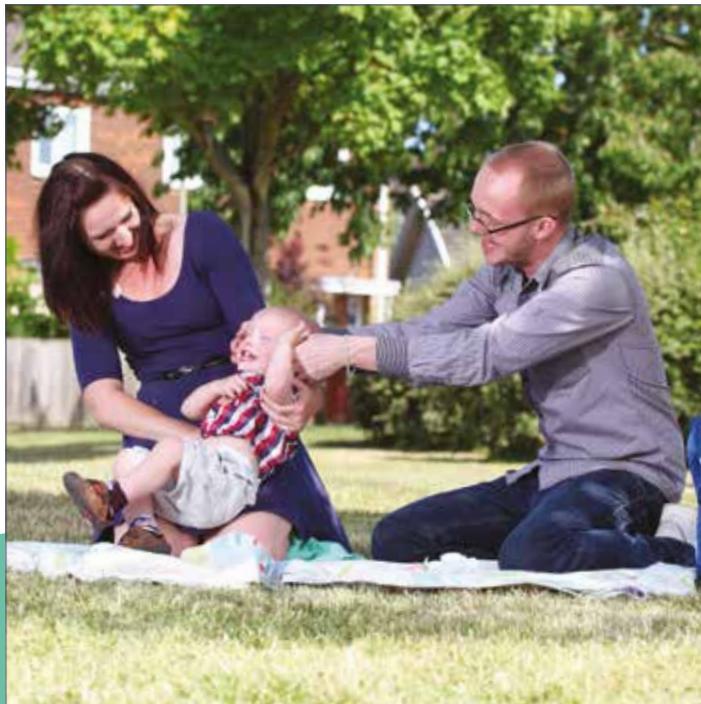
This guide has been produced by people living in social housing to help journalists and other media workers to report fairly. It's time to end social housing stereotypes.

# A SHORT HISTORY OF SOCIAL HOUSING

It used to be that everyone but the very wealthy lived in private rented homes. A few enlightened 19th century philanthropists built quality homes for their workers – many remain such as Saltaire and Bournville – but safe, secure, stable housing was for the rich and slums were for the poor.



Sources:  
University of West  
England, Shelter



The interest in the need for better homes grew when people linked ill-health with squalor and poor housing. A limited number of homes for the working poor began to be built by some local councils. The Housing for the Working Classes Act intended to cater for those in most need, providing lodging houses for the poor, but low cost housing was limited.

After World War One, the desire for healthier living and helping war heroes led to more municipal homes 'fit for heroes'. Health, housing and communities were seen as vital. Governments of all parties enabled local authorities to start to clear the worst slums of the 19th century.

New estates were created and for most this meant homes which were a huge improvement, with inside toilets, parlours, and gas and electricity. Becontree Estate in Dagenham became the largest council estate in the world. Still, rents remained high and the poorest continued to rely upon private landlords.

World War Two increased the need for homes following massive bomb damage. A shortage of materials led to new types of construction such as prefabs - temporary bungalows which were in place within weeks of the war ending with over 156,000 delivered to sites up and down the country. New estates were also built, with 1.5 million new homes by 1955.

By the 60s multi-storey blocks seemed to provide the solution to housing need. The 70s saw councils building fewer homes, concentrating instead on repairs of the existing housing. In 1980 the government created the 'right to buy' policy and in England this meant 1.87 million homes sold in the following ten years.

In 1986, the ability to transfer housing from a council to a non-profit, private housing association, was introduced. This process is known as stock transfer and requires a vote from tenants. Housing associations now own and manage more homes than local authorities.

The 'right to buy' meant the start of the reduction in the number of social housing. It has become easier to stereotype a smaller section of society. Most of the four million social homes today are of high quality with households who live great lives contributing massively to our society.



“ There is an absolute need for enough social housing to cater for the needs of those unable to or who choose not to buy their home. ”

“ I don't want the city I was born and raised in to be turned into a museum for the rich and social housing makes that possible. ”

# CHECK YOUR FACTS

**Sources:**

Shelter, The Guardian, Office for National Statistics,  
2011 Census, English Housing Survey 2015-16

## Who lives in social housing?

There are 3.9 million households - 17 per cent of the national total - living in social housing. Tenants are people of all ages. Social housing provides homes for families, single people and the over 50s.

## What is social housing?

Homes provided, usually by a council or a housing association, to tenants who pay a weekly or monthly rent. These can be houses, purpose-built flats, bedsits, high rise blocks, maisonettes, in new developments and older buildings. Traditionally they are homes for life.

## When can people get social housing?

Most people in housing need are assessed by the local authority but homes are not always available. Some authorities have lengthy waiting lists – up to 10 years. Some 20,000 former social housing homes have been sold there since 1980. Every local authority has its own rules on who qualifies to go on the housing register, some categories include: being homeless, living in overcrowded accommodation, needing to move due to a disability. People who are seeking asylum, are on student visas or are staying in the UK on short-term travel visas are not allowed to apply.

## Where is social housing?

Social housing is available across Britain in rural and urban areas. The housing list for social housing in England was at 1,240,855 in 2016. Tenants are prioritised according to need associated with the property: family homes for families and



flats for single people and couples. Waiting times depend on what is available, the type of property you need and your personal circumstances.

## Why live in social housing?

Rents are likely to be cheaper. There is often more security against eviction than with private landlords. Social housing landlords can often be more relied upon to maintain properties and a security of tenure can mean more stable communities.

- The UK has 3.9 million social homes, with 1.6 million managed by local authorities and 2.3 by housing associations and other social landlords.
- 42% of social housing tenants are employed with 7% unemployed. 28% of social housing tenants are retired.
- Social rent usually works out at 50-60% of market rent. However, new build 'affordable housing' is often 80% of the market rent.
- The average rent in England is £82 per week – for London it is £108 per week.
- 93% of people living in social housing are British nationals. 3% are from the European Economic Area. 3% are from other countries.
- 1.8 million families and single people in England are on the waiting list for a home – an increase of 81% since 1997.
- Nearly 41,000 households with dependent children were living in temporary accommodation at the end of December 2012.
- There is a threat to the security of tenure with the Localism Act, which allows shorter term tenancies of five years or, exceptionally, two years.

VOICES HEARD:

# HOW ARE SOCIAL HOUSING TENANTS REPRESENTED?

Voices heard: tenants share their thoughts on media representations.

“There is an absolute need for enough social housing to cater for the needs of those unable to or who choose not to buy their home.”

“Newspapers tend to report council estates as riddled with crime and anti-social behaviour, drugs, dangerous dogs, graffiti, unsafe passages, elderly people too afraid to leave their property, children running riot and so on. TV programme makers reinforce this in dramas and soaps.”

“We are undeserving trash, to be mocked or pitied but never empathised with, let alone understood. We are also feared and othered, perceived as a threat to be contained and managed.”

“Sadly social housing tenants are portrayed as lazy, unemployed benefit claimants. Often there is an assertion that they are of lower intelligence and moral standing.”

“We are all branded as the unacceptable faces in society.”

“We are lumped together as socially unacceptable, of little or no intelligence or education and viewed, if not contemptuously, at least as something well below others.”

“We are stupid, ignorant, lacking political awareness and in constant need of surveillance and vigilance.”

“Every time a stock photo is used on anything about social housing, it's the same photo and I am fed up of seeing my estate being the general photo for 'terrible social housing' or 'poverty' or 'deprivation'.”

“The media seem, whatever colour of their politics, to see social tenants as an undeserving class.”

“Any stereotype is bad journalism.”

## WHAT ARE THE STEREOTYPES?

That social housing is for those who take advantage of the system or immigrant families that 'queue jump', or for really old people.

Unemployed, unemployable layabouts on benefits waiting for public handouts who are on drugs or abuse alcohol.

The media tends to focus on the female single parent on the council estate, claiming benefits, or on male juvenile criminality. These stereotypes are portrayed on TV, film, journalism and even often by politicians too.

Usually words such as "welfare" or "poor" or "socially hampered" are used, which, of course, can be true but the way it is worded, and not in context, gives out certain signals.

### We're fed up of these stereotypes

- Riff-raff!
- Greedy.
- Lazy.
- Uneducated.
- Scum.
- Trouble-makers.
- White council estate trash.
- Chavs.
- Immigrants.



# A STEP FORWARD NOT A STEP BACK



Social housing means homes for people who simply need somewhere affordable to live, including low paid workers from all sectors. It includes shared ownership and key worker housing. It can also mean safety for people fleeing domestic abuse, security for people leaving the armed forces and peace of mind for many disabled and older people. Social housing is not a last resort - it's a new lease of life!

“ Renting a secure, affordable home from a housing association allowed myself and my daughter, now four, to rebuild our lives. My world was turned upside down due to the breakdown of my marriage and relationship; suddenly, I was a homeless, disabled, single mother desperately needing support to be able to find a new home for myself and my young daughter.

I was unable to return to my teaching role due to my severe rheumatoid arthritis (I was diagnosed just after I gave birth) and I needed an affordable, safe solution fast. We have a beautiful home adapted to cater for my needs. I can now see a positive future for us both and we very much looking forward to my daughter starting primary school.

Victoria Dingle



“ Being able to get somewhere affordable to rent saved me and my boy when we were in desperate need and enabled me to get on a trajectory where my career is taking off and my boy is getting onto the launchpad mainly thanks to the stability my tenancy has given us.

Katie Robertson



“ I live in one of the least affordable places in the country, but renting from a housing association means that I can live close to family. Most people will know how important a family network is when you're bringing up children. I worry less about the rent and know that we've got a stable home, so I can concentrate on the rest of my life. I work at a school and I volunteer in the community and sit on the board of my housing association.

Nasreen Razaq



“ I was a firefighter and, after a running accident, caught an infection in hospital which led to having my leg amputated. During the worst time in my life where I'd lost my good health, lost my family, and lost my career, the only constant for me was having my home to come back to.

Getting a stable home, with a lifetime tenancy, which was adapted for me, gave me security when I needed it most. My job now uses my experiences to help others: I recruit and train peer support mentors for a mental health charity. I did the London Marathon this year and I have plans to do many more!

Matt Bromley



# VALUE MY EXPERIENCE AND WRITE MY STORY FAIRLY



“ Don't patronise  
or demonise. ”

## Tips from tenants on how to report fairly

- We'd like the media to consider a voluntary contract between us when they ask for an interview. We want mutual trust and respect.
- No time to visit us for an interview? We'll come to you!
- In a rush? Explain, don't ambush!
- Provide an agreement. Explain what you want from me and why.
- Research using alternative sources and tenants as experts.
- Respect our knowledge. Seek expertise from tenants associations and housing groups.
- Know who we are – not who you think we are.
- See the interview as a two-way conversation.
- Tell us your angle upfront.
- Provide examples of questions before the interview.
- Take respectful photos not ones that reinforce stereotypes.



- Use statistics accurately and honestly.
- Look for positive stories.
- Don't talk down to me. Be respectful.
- Don't interview me any differently to a homeowner – or someone in a mansion!
- Don't get facts wrong – check facts and details with me.
- Don't manipulate facts and statistics.
- Don't ignore the truth for a sensational story.
- Don't distort what I tell you.
- Don't only listen to the landlords.
- Don't only visit our communities once.
- Think about it. If you can't do this, why should I tell you my story?

VOICES HEARD:

# HOW DO THE REPRESENTATIONS AFFECT YOU?

Tenants share their thoughts on how poor media representations can impact on their lives.

“ I have been told that people outside of the estate will not send their children to the school my daughter will go to because all the kids from this estate go there. The school in question has an “outstanding” Ofsted rating.

“It makes you ashamed, and embarrassed, when people ask where you live, or where you come from.”

“You can be spoken to with sarcasm, disdain or arrogance. Treated like you are stupid.”

“Not recognising that if society wants teachers, nurses, carers, cleaners, and all manner of people who cannot afford criminal private rents or to buy a home, then social housing is the only way to provide homes for these people.”

“Despite having a 2:1 degree in English and Philosophy, being in a good job, with two studious teenagers, when people find out we live in a council flat they turn up their nose.”



“It ignores good homes, reasonable rents, community relations, security of housing, prompt repairs, resident engagement activities, knowing your landlord.”

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“If you tell someone something often enough - like the media always does - then they will believe it to be true.”

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“Tenants are made to feel defensive and that they have to justify being a tenant.”

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“We’re untrusted, ignored, looked down on and generally treated as a second class citizens.”

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“In a wealthy area, such as mine, people living in social housing can feel ignored and forgotten.”

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“It makes me feel anxious and not keen to admit I live in a housing association flat.”

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“It helps create a class of downtrodden no-hopers who disengage from the rest of society and politics.”

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“It’s overlooked that our landlords will do their best to help us continue to live in our homes, ensuring it remains both safe and secure.”

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“It makes people afraid to mention in conversation that they live in social housing.”

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“You’d think there’s no community spirit and co-operation, the people keeping their eye out for sick and elderly neighbours, doing their shopping, cooking the occasional meal.”

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“Tell people they’re worthless enough times and they’ll start to believe it.”

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VOICES HEARD:

# WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE REPORTED?

Tenants share their ideas on how to better report on social housing.

“ Positive stories about good communities coming together to make things better for their area. ”

“The value and importance of social housing, and the dire consequences of the lack of adequate social housing.”

“Stories about people taking part in resident involvement schemes, meetings, scrutiny panels, about housing refurbishment and improvements showing how landlords invest in social housing and involve their residents in these schemes.”

“How local residents take pride and look after their local estates, homes and communities with support from their landlords.”

“Reports of garden competitions, fundraising events, lovely gardens, good neighbour recognition, award winners.”

“Report the whole story not just the sensational parts or the amount someone on benefits gets.”



“ Social housing is not just tower blocks and run down estates. All kinds of people live in social housing. Tenants are real people just like those who privately rent or own their own homes. We all have dreams and problems and lives and responsibilities and regrets. ”

“Just stick to the facts and report them correctly, not twisted so they fit the stereotype.”

“Don't just pick one family or group because they make good headlines – dig deeper and seek the reality.”

“Remember that we are human but different in our own ways, and just because we rent our homes does not make us different to anyone else.”

“The well-kept properties that tenants clearly take pride in.”

“The reality that many tenants are proud of where they live and progress is being made to improve the communities.”

“Stories about ordinary people not a 'chav' stereotype.”

“Happy and healthy looking families.”

“People from all walks of life who have feelings and pride and should be treated with dignity and respect.”

“Social housing tenants are people with feelings, aspirations and are not all poor and vulnerable.”

“Show pleasant areas such as the many parks and greens that are common to social housing.”

“Family and community - most of the people I know are third and fourth generation living in social housing with a real community spirit.”





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