HouseProud

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

No Place like Home?

Exploring the concerns, preferences and experiences of LGBT*Q social housing residents

Findings from the 2017 HouseProud HomeSAFE study

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Key points

The study aimed to uncover LGBT*Q residents' experiences in relation to their social housing and their views about what needs to be changed.

This brochure provides a snapshot of the findings from the survey, focus groups and interviews. A detailed final report will be available in April 2018 on the Centre for Research on Ageing and Gender (CRAG), University of Surrey website (search 'CRAG' 'Surrey').

The next step is for housing providers and others to reflect on the study and its recommendations and take action.

Despite equality laws, the study found that LGBT*Q social housing residents do not believe they are being listened to, taken seriously or treated equally.

LGBT*Q social housing residents are hypervigilant around their neighbourhood and home. A third felt their neighbourhood was not a safe place to live as an LGBT*Q person. A fifth of gay men reported that they regularly modify their home if their landlord or a repairs person visits to make their sexuality less visible.

A third of survey respondents felt that their housing provider was not able to deal effectively with issues like harassment.

Only a half of survey respondents felt a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, whilst a quarter reported feeling lonely.

LGBT*Q social housing residents want their housing provider to be more proactive on inclusion and be an openly LGBT*Q supportive organisation.

About the study

Despite changes in equality laws in recent years, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer and Questioning (LGBT*Q) people still face discrimination across a range of public services, including social housing.

However, little is really known about the needs and views of LGBT*Q residents who live in housing provided by a housing association or local authority.

We conducted this study to find out.

The study was commissioned by HouseProud and funded by six housing associations (Clarion, Genesis, Hanover, L&Q, Optivo and Riverside).

The study was conducted as HomeSAFE (secure, accessible, friendly, equal) by researchers from the University of Surrey and Goldsmiths, University of London.

Over 260 people participated, through a survey, focus groups and interviews. More details about what was involved and who participated can be found at the back of this brochure.

We are using the term trans* to cover the gender identity spectrum. This includes, but is not limited to, people who identify as transgender, transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer, non-binary, non-gendered and agender. We are using the acronym BME to refer to individuals who identified as belonging to Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

Recommendations and practical suggestions

Housing providers need to build trust with LGBT*Q residents. How?
Ensure all housing provider workers treat LGBT*Q residents with respect and on an equal basis with all other residents. Ensure complaints about housing provider staff (including sub-contractor staff) are taken seriously and acted on quickly.

Promote activities to create inter-community dialogue.

Recognise and respond to diversity amongst LGBT*Q residents.

If monitoring residents' sexuality/ gender identity, be clear what the information will be used for, why, who will have access to it and how the data will be protected.

Take complaints about harassment and abuse seriously. Investigate and act quickly. Follow policy in all cases, don't make exceptions - issue warnings, not just telephone calls. Remind people that the issue is taken seriously and tenants can be evicted.

Be an organisation who is openly supportive of LGBT*Q residents. How?
Going above and beyond legislation and token gestures.

Pledge to a series of ongoing activities, which demonstrate commitment to LGBT*Q equality and increase inclusivity. For example, through forums, surveys, social media, newsletters.

Have a permanent LGBT*Q liaison team and presence on websites.

Constantly advertise support for LGBT*Q residents across a wide range of media.

Provide spaces for LGBT*Q residents to meet, socialise and engage with their housing provider. With LGBT*Q community and commercial spaces disappearing, there is an opportunity for housing providers to help create new spaces.

What do LGBT*Q social housing residents feel about where they live and who visits their home?

Safety was a real concern for residents. 78% of survey respondents felt they lived in a safe neighbourhood. However, 32% felt their neighbourhood was not a safe place to live as an LGBT*Q person; this was 60% amongst trans* respondents. In interviews/focus groups people spoke of disturbing experiences of harassment and hate crime.

Neighbours. This was an area of real concern for some residents. 34% of survey respondents were completely open with their neighbours about their sexual orientation, but 35% were not open at all. 36% reported that they were uncomfortable having neighbours in their home, a figure that rose to 91% for trans* individuals. Some residents spoke about harassment and abuse from neighbours, yet felt housing providers do not deal with it effectively.

Operatives. 21% of survey respondents reported that they were uncomfortable with repairs people entering their home and 24% their landlord.

Self-censoring. Although a minority, a significant number of residents change their home environment in some way before people enter it to conceal their gender identity or sexuality. For example, moving pictures, books, DVDs. This was more common amongst gay men than other groups. 20% of gay men responded that they did this 'always' or 'most of the time' when being visited by their landlord or a repairs person.

We found that women were less likely to let people into their home, but men were more likely to self-censor it. Overall, there is a strong degree of hypervigilance on the part of LGBT*Q residents.

> "[Housing association] have got various different engineers for whatever it is and, you know, I'm very, very wary of who they're going to be sending here. Are they going to pick up the fact that I'm gay? When it's a male coming here, is there enough time for me to get rid of those pictures or whatever, they all come off the shelf"

Gay man, 45-54, BME

> "So I definitely have hidden flags and stuff, especially the trans Pride flag, because it's very difficult not being what you'd call assigned the gender you were at birth. You don't want people knowing that who come round to your house, because it starts the whole conversation and they usually ask a really inappropriate question."

Trans* woman, 25-34, White

> "I vet them at the door because I've had someone be abusive before, so I'll ask for their badge and everything like that. And if I don't like their voice or the look of them, I won't let them in. It's as simple as that."

Lesbian, 35-44, White

> "I think it needs to be taken into account, but if somebody abuses you and they're your next door neighbour, whatever the abuse it needs to be acted on, and that's what housing associations aren't doing."

Gay man, 55-64, White

> "But how do you deal with, you know, the guy next door who won't even get in a lift with me?"

Trans* individual, 65-74, White

Do LGBT*Q social housing residents feel part of a community?

Belonging. Only 43% of survey respondents reported that they felt a sense of belonging to their local area. This figure compares starkly with a recent housing provider general survey where 82% felt they belonged to their neighbourhood[1]. In our survey, lesbians (53%) and bisexual people (50%) were more likely to express a sense of belonging to where they live than gay men (40%). Trans* individuals were least likely to express a sense of belonging to where they live (23%).

Togetherness. Despite feelings of belonging, residents talked about the need for greater understanding and tolerance amongst different communities in their neighbourhood. Some survey respondents belonged to resident groups (15%) or attended social events, but didn't always feel welcomed or treated equally.

Diversity. Residents spoke about the need to be recognised as members of more than one community and that they can face multiple forms of discrimination. In addition, some emphasised that they were more than just their gender identity and sexuality and should be regarded as multidimensional individuals.

LGBT*Q community. In the survey, the majority of lesbian and bisexual women (55% and 75%), as well as gay and bisexual men (61% and 58%) did not feel part of an LGBT*Q community. The majority of trans* respondents (60%) felt they belonged to an LGBT*Q community, 'to some extent'.

Well-being and loneliness. 42% of survey respondents rated their mental health as 'good' or 'very good'. Most respondents to the survey rated themselves as happy (65%). 25% rated themselves as unhappy. However, 26% of survey respondents described themselves as 'always' or 'mostly' lonely in the area where they live. In this study, this was not associated with the person's age.

Overall, many LGBT*Q residents feel excluded in multiple ways, which combined can lead to feelings of isolation.

[1]Clarion Housing Index 2017

> "Just to know that you are accepted, that they do know, that they're alright with it and just to feel that you're not isolated, you're not on your own. Because I see all the other people here [other residents] with their little cliques and stuff… You know, I think they [housing provider] could do a bit more to make it known that they do offer support."
>
> Trans*individual, 65-74, White

> "I have to travel quite far, but we mainly kind of keep in touch like on the phone. I don't have many LGBT friends who live round here"
>
> Bisexual woman, 18-24, White

> "[Housing providers should not] be so risk averse, not perpetuate that divide that can exist because by not bringing communities together and not focusing on different groups, on all varieties of families and people, you're perpetuating the cycle of division"
>
> Lesbian, 35-44, White

> "I think they [the housing association] need to think about how sensitive they are, not just to LGBT people, but I think people from different, diverse backgrounds. There is an extra, added fear quite often for us."
>
> Gay man, 45-54, BME

What do LGBT*Q social housing residents think of their housing provider?

Recognition. Residents felt strongly that housing providers should visibly acknowledge their LGBT*Q residents and that they should be treated equally with all others. This included being appropriately represented in policy and tenancy documentation.

Sensitivity. Survey respondents did not agree that housing provider staff were always responsive to their concerns (37%) or sensitive to the needs of LGBT*Q people (29%). This made them feel not valued as residents. However, 56% did feel that their housing provider was approachable.

Support. Respondents felt that their housing providers should go beyond equality legislation to demonstrate that they openly support them. This included making the organisation a visible symbol of LGBT*Q inclusiveness. 72% of survey respondents thought it was a good idea to introduce some form of certificate for housing providers to show they have a culture of social acceptance and benevolence towards LGBT*Q people.

Monitoring. 59% of survey respondents specifically stated that they had never been asked for information about their gender identity and sexual orientation by their housing provider. There were mixed feelings about whether this was appropriate. Concerns were expressed about the storage, accessibility and use of this information.

Harassment. LGBT*Q residents are ambivalent about how well their housing provider deals with cases of harassment. 31% of survey respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their housing provider deals effectively with cases of harassment, whilst 34% 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. Residents said that their claims were not always taken seriously by their housing provider, or that housing officers were slow to respond.

Lack of awareness. Residents felt that staff training is crucial. Residents repeatedly gave examples of poor staff understanding of LGBT*Q lives and, in some cases, outright discrimination. They felt that all housing provider staff, including sub-contractors, should receive training on an ongoing basis.

Overall, LGBT*Q residents were concerned about being able to trust their housing providers to treat them equally, with dignity and respect.

> "I don't see anything that suggests that they are [supportive of LGBT*Q people]. They may well tick the diversity box and abide by their kind of law but they don't do anything other than that. And I think that's what it's about … it's about going above and beyond what you're expected to do in the law."

Lesbian, 35-44, White

> "They need to make their contact visible so that if you're facing a particular issue, you know who to call."

Lesbian, 35-44, BME

> "I wouldn't say they were, like, unaccepting but I haven't seen any stuff being, like, oh they're really accepting, if you see what I mean? There's been no specific communication about anything and kind of there's no like visual posters or things like that. But also there's never been anything where I've gone, oh, you know, they clearly hate LGBT people."

Bisexual woman, 18-24, White

> "I'm politically gay, so I believe that they must monitor. If they're going to hold data on my ethnicity and my disability why are they not doing it on my sexuality? The point of the exercise is to actually give people the opportunity to answer that."

Gay man, 45-54, BME

What do LGBT*Q social housing residents think housing providers are doing well and what could be improved?

Doing well

Some housing providers are actively listening and putting residents in contact with appropriate support services or organisations.

Some have a social inclusion officer or LGBT*Q-specific support officer.

Some have resident facing staff who are known to be very supportive of LGBT*Q residents.

Some do let residents know about LGBT*Q related events.

Some have LGBT*Q tenants' forums that have feedback on policy.

Needs to be improved

Communication with residents; this includes staff-resident interactions (treating people courteously and with respect), improving accessibility to relevant information and services, and constantly advertising the organisation as LGBT*Q affirmative across a range of media.

Staff training to improve awareness of LGBT*Q lives and interactions with residents.

Procedures for dealing with complaints about harassment and abuse.

Utilising LGBT*Q resident groups to help design and review policies.

> "Basically, not just do a token thing to make themselves look and feel good about how inclusive they are, but an ongoing series of initiatives aimed at increasing inclusiveness in a climate of safety and mutual respect, which would benefit all their residents, not just the queer ones. Oh, and training all their staff about the relevant issues would be a good thing as well."

Bisexual woman, 35-44, White

> "It's easy to put in leaflets, 'if you are gay these are the numbers you can call' … Stonewall, etc., but that's not good enough. They have to say, as a housing association, that this is important to us, this is the sign-posting but on top of it, this is what we're going to do about it."

Gay man, 25-34, White

> "Maybe [housing association] could have a couple of [LGBT*Q] liaison officers, specific people."

Gay man, 45-54, BME

> "Appropriate training as well for staff… make their contact visible, so that if you're facing a particular issue, you know who to contact."

Lesbian, 35-44, BME

> "The [housing association] manager's very supportive and understanding and in the main foyer the pro-active rainbow LGBT group is there. It's good."

Lesbian, 65-74, White

Study details

The study used focus groups, interviews and an online survey (paper copies available by request) to ask LGBT*Q social housing residents about their housing experiences, concerns and needs. The research took place in 2017.

Interviews/Focus Groups

17 out of the 37 participants in the total sample identified as gay men, 8 identified as lesbians, 2 bisexual men, 3 bisexual women, 1 pansexual woman, 3 participants stated 'none' or provided another term of their own choice. 4 individuals stated that their gender identity differed from that registered at birth.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of the sample self-identified as White (predominantly White British or White Other), 5 participants identified as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME). The sample was mostly composed of middle to older age adults. 21 participants were aged between 26-54 years, 14 were aged between 55-74 years, 1 participant was aged between 18-24 years and 1 participant was older than 85 years.

Survey

The survey received 225 usable responses.

Age range: 18-91 years.

Ethnicity: 87% White (including White Irish and White Other), 13% BME.

Sexuality: 23% Lesbian/Gay woman, 39% Gay man, 9% Heterosexual woman, 7% Heterosexual man, 7% Bisexual woman, 6% Bisexual man, 4% Prefer not to say, 5% stated another term.

Gender and Gender Identity: 43% Woman, 52% Man, 5% stated another term. 7% specifically identified as trans*.

Housing characteristics: 64% housing association , 13% local authority, 5% shared ownership, 18% other (including retirement, sheltered).

Relationship status: 45% single, 10% in a couple living apart, 13% in a couple living together, 8% married/civil partnership, 2% multiple partners, 3% other relationship combinations, 19% non-response.

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- Sandra Sanglin, Clarion Housing Group
- John Stevens, Clarion Housing Group
- Stonewall
- Stonewall Housing
- Graham Welch, L&Q

Useful Contacts

Albert Kennedy Trust for young LGBT people who are homeless, living in a hostile environment or in housing crisis.
020 7831 6562 (London)
0161 228 3308 (Manchester)
0191 281 0099 (Newcastle)

Stonewall Housing provide specialist LGBT housing advice and support provider in England. Advice line
020 7359 5767

Galop, LGBT+ anti-violence charity
020 7704 2040 (London),
0800 999 5428 (National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline)

Stonewall, National LGBT Charity,
020 7593 1850,
0131 474 8019 (Stonewall Scotland)
029 2023 7744 (Stonewall Cymru)

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