

Stigma of social housing

Social Housing is provided by the government or nonprofit organizations for those with particular needs or a low income, and introduced to improve the devastating amount of homelessness throughout the 19th century. Housing associations such as SHAL continue today to provide and support those in need. Despite its genuine intentions, social housing has become stigmatized.

*My
tenancy
does not
define who
I am*

Those living in social housing feel targeted for where they live, with a sense of shame attached to their tenancy. It is of the utmost importance that the stigma of social housing is removed, to reaffirm that “My tenancy does not define who I am!”

History of social housing

Social housing began to expand in 1919 after the Addison Act, encouraging the local authorities to increase expenditure on council housing after WWI and the economic damage caused by it – with just over 1 million homes being created.

This was only repeated again during the post war boom after WWII, and an increase in the need for social housing. Despite the peak of building being in 1953, there is still a housing crisis which exists today, suggesting that social housing is not necessarily a minority issue, or something new and shocking for the media to portray. Despite this, social housing remains a controversial issue which often offers negative responses from the public.

After the government introduced the Race Relations Act in 1976 and the Housing Homeless Persons Act in 1977, social housing was becoming far more common and accessible – thus becoming a far more noticeable part of communities.

Negative coverage in the media

Regardless of this, social housing has remained stigmatized through popular media, despite the increase in those using social housing – meaning people feel targeted and a certain prejudice is evident. This is alluded to in the Think Tank survey - with 50/54 tenants coming across negative media coverage of social housing. But this negative portrayal does not stop there.

*The worst
feature of
being a
social
housing
tenant is
what people
think
of them*

The majority of tenants stated that the worst feature of being a social housing tenant is what people think of them. One tenant even said “people who know where I live feeling they can voice a negative view of social housing tenants (family and friends) ‘but not you’.” It is evident that those in social housing feel like outsiders – whilst

making up a large portion of society. This negative view of people in social housing not working and claiming as much as they can in benefits simply isn't true, as in actual fact only 8% of social renters are unemployed.

The statistics are completely contradictory to the stereotypes of a social housing tenant, and the media has a large part to play in this. The rise in so called "poverty porn" with programmes such as "Benefits Street" portray a very one-sided view of those in social housing, as well as soaps which are meant to be a representation of reality only seem to show the frightening tower blocks riddled with crime.

Programmes such as "Benefits Street" portray a very on-sided view of those in social housing

Changing perceptions

However, within recent months, there has been a considerable shift in promoting the reality of social housing and its tenants. The work of the Benefit to Society campaign has begun to shed light on the 'territorial stigmatization' of social housing, particularly after the atrocity of Grenfell Tower.

The horrifying nature of such a situation has allowed the public to develop an understanding of social housing and empathize with those living within it – in fact, it has taken such an event to humanize tenants. The work of Benefits to Society has made a huge difference, displaying the vast array of tenants and their lives. This has highlighted the fantastic work that tenants do and how they in fact are a benefit to our society (and not a drain on resources as the media would portray).

It is the work of campaigns like Benefit to Society that allows people to be proud of their tenancy

Being proud of your community

It is the work of campaigns like Benefit to Society that allows people to be proud of their tenancy, and contributes to the removal of the stigma of social housing. It is important that the contribution to society that social housing tenants bring to the community is brought to light, and the stereotypes portrayed by the media are understood as the minority rather than the majority.

