Better
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Briefing

19

Meeting the supported housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities

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Key messages

1 'Supported housing' lacks a universally agreed definition

2 The Supporting People funding has helped to address supported accommodation needs

3 People from minority groups may be more likely to require supported housing services, but also more likely to experience difficulties in service access and use

4 While good practice can be identified in meeting the supported housing needs of culturally and ethnically diverse communities, meeting the needs of these groups within general provision remains an issue that must be addressed

5 The current financial pressures faced by local authorities will potentially have a very great effect on the provision of supported housing for the most vulnerable people.

Introduction

Supported housing is a combination of housing and services to help people live more stable and productive lives. This type of housing is often provided for those who are vulnerable due to complex challenges or who have persistent issues such as substance abuse or mental health problems. Such housing is often provided alongside social services or training to help people recover or succeed in managing everyday life. Supported housing is different from floating support, which is available to anyone with housing-related support needs, regardless of where they live, or in what type of home.

This briefing looks at steps taken to meet the supported housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities in the following five areas: mental health, young people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, young parents and older people.

1 **Defining supported housing**

Supported housing is designed to address the needs of:

• people suffering from mental health problems;
• people with drug or alcohol problems;
• people with learning difficulties;
• older people who require support to live in their own home;
• homeless people and others who are at risk of losing their accommodation;
• women at risk of domestic violence;
• young people at risk;
• people with physical and sensory disabilities;
• offenders and people at risk of offending;
• teenage parents.

Often people who may benefit from supported housing have multiple needs, and fall into more than one of the categories listed above.

Because of this wide range of service users, there *'is considerable diversity of models of supported housing and inconsistent use of terminology to describe them'* (Fakhoury *et al.*, 2002, p. 301). For example, while Exeter City Council defines supported housing as *'assistance that is provided to enable someone to manage on a day to day basis whilst they are living in their own home'* (Exeter City Council, online), Yorkshire and Humber Housing Related Support Group (YHHRSG) defines it somewhat more narrowly as *'specially developed projects, such as hostels, refuges and group homes, where people need to live in a particular kind of accommodation in order to be supported effectively'* (Sitra, 2010, p. 7).

This briefing focuses on provision in line with the YHHRSG definition, seeing supported housing as emergency accommodation (with out-of-hours access), hostels and temporary accommodation, women's refuges, and supported housing for young people/offenders or those at risk of offending, and for people with mental health problems. All of these services provide temporary support; and the length of time that people can stay, and the type and level of support given, vary according to the nature of the scheme or landlord and the needs of the tenant.

2 Supporting People

Supporting People is a government programme which was launched in April 2003 and funds local authorities to roll out supported housing services according to local need. The programme is designed to take a preventative approach, targeting vulnerable individuals before they come into contact with more expensive secondary services, such as Accident and Emergency departments or policing. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) website, Supporting People services:

help around one million people at any one time, including approximately:
- *826,600 older people with support needs*
- *38,600 single homeless people*
- *37,300 people with mental health problems*
- *12,000 women at risk of domestic violence.*
(DCLG, online)

Although the impact of Supporting People has been regarded as somewhat difficult to quantify, due to the number of services on which it can have a potential effect (i.e. mental health services, social care, housing, policing, and so on) and the varying costs of commissioning services in different areas, a recent report from CapGemini found that *'every pound spent on the programme across England saved [the Exchequer] £2.11'* (Sitra, 2011, p. 2). (This is an average figure across all geographical areas and user groups; for some user groups/regions the savings are higher.)

3 What is different about the supported housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities?

Although the Supporting People programme is clearly providing housing support to a large number of vulnerable individuals, little evidence exists on how accessible supported housing is to minority ethnic communities. Indeed, black and minority ethnic communities may be both disproportionately affected by some issues, and less likely to access support services. This section looks at some areas where black and minority ethnic communities are disproportionately affected, and at different approaches that have been used to identify and address supported housing need.

(i) Mental health

A leading mental health charity, Rethink, believes that *'Culture and race have an important role to play in the likelihood of someone being diagnosed with mental health problems'* (Rethink, online). Some black and minority ethnic communities appear to experience both higher rates of mental health problems (possibly due to: stress from emigration; concentration within inner cities; greater risk of exclusion from schools, social deprivation and participation in crime and drug cultures; racial victimisation and/or reliance on Western definitions of mental health problems) and greater problems with accessing the right care and treatment. For example, Keating (2007) found that African and Caribbean men were less able to identify mental health problems, less aware of sources of help and more likely to fear that contact with services would lead to loss of status. Likewise, Ashram Housing Association (Ashram, 2008) has highlighted perceptions of mental health problems in some communities as a barrier to accessing services, specifically citing a fear of 'bringing shame' on the family or of 'bringing in' social workers and/or police in South Asian communities.

(ii) Young people experiencing homelessness

The National Youth Homelessness Scheme (NYHS) has noted that *'young people [from black and minority ethnic communities] are more likely than their white British peers to experience the personal circumstances which can trigger a risk of or actual homelessness'* (NYHS, online [2]).

Phillips (2008) reports that 57 per cent of young people using Centrepoint's hostel and services are of black and minority ethnic origin. She further notes *'hidden youth homelessness among minority ethnic groups in general, and among Asians in particular, with many young people living in severely overcrowded households or sharing with friends'* (Phillips, 2008, p. 5).

(iii) Domestic violence

Supported housing for women suffering domestic violence is commonly recognised as an area for concern, with high numbers of women experiencing homelessness after fleeing a violent home environment. However, domestic violence may disproportionately affect women from some black and minority ethnic communities, in relation to issues including honour or forced marriage (Singh, 2011). In spite of this, research by Gill and Banga (2008) has highlighted the limited provision of accommodation by most local authorities to address the needs of black and minority ethnic women, whether through specific or more generic services. Moreover, when trying to access housing support, racism, sexism, disbelief and hostility from housing practitioners may have an impact on these women's experiences, and possibly exacerbate their overall experience of domestic abuse. A reduction in supported accommodation for women from black and minority ethnic communities experiencing violence has been challenged (Southall Black Sisters, 2008), reminding local authorities of the need to question how service provision is complying with equalities legislation.

(iv) Young parents

Teenage pregnancy has been a public issue for some time. The National Teenage Pregnancy Strategy aimed to reduce the number of conceptions among young women under the age of eighteen years by half, in addition establishing a downward trend in pregnancy rates by 2010 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Evidence suggests that Bangladeshi, African Caribbean and Pakistani young women are disproportionately represented among pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; Berthoud, 2001; Higginbottom *et al.*, 2005). Pregnancy rates for teenage women aged 15–19 remain higher than their white counterparts: 34.9 births per 1000 women for Black Caribbean, 35.9 for Bangladeshi, compared to 24.9 for white British between 1987 and 2006 (Dubuc and Haskey, 2010). However, care needs to be taken in generalising, as cultural influences (such as early marriage among Bangladeshi and Pakistani young women) also play a part in the numbers of those classed as teenage mothers (Berthoud, 2001; Robson and Berthoud, 2003). Nevertheless, there is an association between pregnancy at a young age and deprivation, educational attainment and low self-esteem, for example (Corlyon and Stock, 2009). Young parents from minority ethnic communities may also be more likely to

require alternative accommodation, due to difficulties such as a sense of bringing 'shame' on the family, or practical problems such as overcrowding (Higginbottom *et al.*, 2005).

(v) Older people

Although the age profile of the black and minority ethnic population is younger as a whole than the majority white population, as with the general population the number of black and minority ethnic older people in the UK is increasing. There has been a vast amount of research on the housing needs of these individuals and possible barriers to accessing services (see, for example, Jones, 2008), including:

• *Language barriers.* Older black and minority ethnic people may be less likely to speak English, and therefore translation and interpretation are essential both within services and in promotional materials.

• *Cultural appropriateness.* Supported housing should take into account the cultural needs of minority ethnic elders, including access to shops selling foods, and access to religious buildings, community groups, and so on.

• *A belief that 'they look after their own'.* The (sometimes false) belief that some communities prefer to look after their older family members, or live communally, may prevent the proper promotion of supported housing services to these communities.

Identifying service access issues

In Surrey, PS Consultants carried out a consultation for Surrey Supporting People Team (Surrey County Council, 2004) around the supported housing needs of black and minority ethnic groups and individuals across Surrey. The survey included questions on the accessibility of services, including the best way to publicise specialist housing services. In general, people were not put off from approaching services because they feared discrimination, but a greater understanding of cultural and religious needs was deemed helpful. Respondents also felt that interpretation and translation facilities would be beneficial, including translated written information and promotion through community or religious newsletters, groups and venues.

In their consultation, Westminster Council (City of Westminster, 2007) also identified a number of actions to ensure fair access to services, including:

• *Open days – Invite different groups to open days help to dispel myths*
• *Training and networking*
• *Newsletters flyers and surveys*
• *Mapping services in the local community and using the intelligence to fill gaps in provision*
• *Attending residents and community meetings.*
(City of Westminster, 2007, p. 13)

These approaches looked at barriers to accessing generalist supported housing services (i.e. non-ethnically targeted services); however, in a number of other areas (especially those with larger/more geographically concentrated black and minority ethnic populations) steps have been taken to tailor supported housing through ethnically specific provision. In Lambeth, an area where approximately 25 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities, the local authority has implemented a strategy where inclusion and diversity are central to the commissioning and delivery of housing support to black and minority ethnic communities (London Borough of Lambeth, 2005). Needs analysis research (London Borough of Lambeth, 2004) has found over-representation of these communities in such services as those for older people and for mental health, HIV and domestic violence, and has recognised barriers to access to support services.

In adhering to their Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework to promote fair access, diversity and inclusion (ODPM, 2004), the black and minority ethnic Supporting People strategy aims to improve access and meet the needs of these communities through:

- *Effective consultation mechanisms*
- *Accurate and inclusive information, and*
- *Delivering culturally appropriate services.*

(London Borough of Lambeth, 2005, p. 2)

This process enables gaps in access and current provision to these communities to be identified, and mechanisms put in place to address them.

4 Good practice

A number of supported housing projects designed specifically to meet cultural/racial needs can be identified.

(i) Mental health

In Bristol, Second Step, a voluntary sector organisation working with single adults living with mental health support needs, has taken on the management of Riverview House, a cluster of eight flats for black and minority ethnic men. Two black and minority ethnic specific workers support the clients, who receive a nominal one hour of support weekly. In practice, this amount is frequently more, depending on the state of mental health and specific needs of the service user.

In April 2005, a shared house in the Montpelier area of the city was completely overhauled and relaunched as Waaberi House, Bristol's first, and to date only, supported housing project specifically for single Somali men with mental health support needs. A Somali worker joined Second Step from the black and minority ethnic mental health project Black Orchid to work at the property. Waaberi houses four men at any one time, and culturally specific support is offered, in the Somali and English languages. Waaberi provides medium-level support, giving regular contact with a Second Step worker for up to three hours each week and accommodation for up to eighteen months. Residents are supported to work towards finding suitable move-on accommodation. To enhance Second Step's expertise in Somali issues, the organisation helped to convene the Bristol Somali Mental Health Forum between 2005 and 2008, culminating in a one-day conference at Bristol's Malcolm X Community Centre.

(ii) Young People experiencing homelessness

There are a number of supportive practices seeking to prevent homelessness among young black and minority ethnic people, including the UK Foyer network. Phillips (2008) notes:

> *the positive interventions of the UK Foyer network in supporting homeless 16- to 25-year-olds. Over 130 Foyers across the UK work with at risk young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and some are heavily used by BME young people (e.g. 90 per cent of Camberwell Foyer's users are from a minority ethnic background).*
> (Phillips, 2008, p. 5)

Another positive example is that of CAYSH (Croydon Association for Young Single Homeless), which provides accommodation and housing services for over 120 young people and manages the largest independent supported lodgings service for young people in England (see NYHS, online [1]). Seventy-five per cent of the young people using CAYSH services are from a minority ethnic background. Key factors in the organisation's success include:

- *The staff reflect the ethnic make-up of the local community.* Seventy per cent of staff come from community backgrounds. This is also true in management: three of the four managers and two-thirds of the Board are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

- *Acknowledgement of low literacy levels.* CAYSH understands that many of its service users have poor literacy skills, even if English is their first language. To make the service accessible, they use as little written information as possible.

- *Links to community.* The organisation is well known in the Borough and is networked into the area. Among staff, there is good awareness of the community resources young people can access.

- *Awareness of risk factors.* CAYSH employees are aware of issues such as gang crime and culture, and will challenge unacceptable behaviour.

- *Engage with service users.* The organisation's 'top tip' is *'have a strong emphasis on service user involvement and the values that support that; if this is right, then the rest follows'.*

East Potential Focus E15 Foyer in Newham, East London is the largest Foyer in England and approximately 85 per cent of its young residents are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (see NYHS, online [1]). Again, emphasis is placed on the need to reflect the community at all levels, and Focus E15 has a diverse workforce, trained interpreters and a translation service.

Focus E15's 'top tips' are:

- *Be explicit about valuing diversity, through images and activities*
- *Make the accommodation as modern, bright and welcoming as possible – young people rightly expect high quality*
- *Run a range of activities to expose young people to new experiences from other cultures*
- *Make sure your staff team reflects the diversity in your community, not only in terms of ethnicity, but age, experience, gender and background.*
(NYHS, online [1])

(iii) Domestic violence

Newham Asian Women's Project (NAWP) is a specialised service providing access to support and accommodation for South Asian women experiencing domestic abuse, including honour-based violence, forced marriage and self-harm. As well as providing safe and emergency housing provision, NAWP also seeks to support women to move on to independent living, with rights-based advice, training and counselling services. They believe that providing culturally specific services not only reduces linguistic barriers and feelings of stigma, isolation or discrimination among their tenants, but also provides better value for money by reducing the burden on mainstream services.

(iv) Young parents

Nehemiah UCHA's Seacole Court is a multicultural supported housing scheme in Wolverhampton for young parents and pregnant girls aged 16–25 who are unable to live with their families or are at risk of being homeless. Although not exclusively targeted at minority ethnic young parents, a large number of service users are from these communities, reflecting the make-up of the area served by the scheme.

The association emphasises mutual support by residents, and says that a tenant should be able to *'knock on her neighbour's door and share the problem, before deciding whether to call for further assistance'* (Nehemiah UCHA, 2008).

A training room in the complex is used to encourage young parents to continue their education and to improve their employment opportunities and likelihood of moving on to permanent accommodation. Nehemiah UCHA works in partnership with local education authorities together with Sure Start and the Teenage Pregnancy Unit, and is able to run crèches while mothers study.

In London, Ekaya (a black and minority ethnic housing association established in 1987) provides *'housing and support services primarily to black and ethnic minority women [including young single vulnerable*

pregnant women and mothers aged 16–25], their families and other groups with similar needs in the London Boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich, Croydon and Bromley, the boroughs with the UK's highest teenage pregnancy rates'; as the association has noted: 'Research also indicates that BME women are more likely to be teenage parents than any other group' (Ekaya Housing Association, online).

Ten supported housing schemes are spread across these Boroughs, supporting 'around 124 young mothers per year to develop skills for independent living, through a holistic approach i.e. parenting, budgeting, life and social skills enabling them to successfully maintain and sustain their tenancies in the wider community' (Ekaya Housing Association, online).

(v) Older people

A report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Watson *et al.*, 2003) noted that service planners need to gain an understanding of the gaps in housing and support as perceived by 'hard to find' groups, rather than taking an approach based on population size.

In Middlesbrough, work between the Tees Valley Housing Group and the Chinese Association led to the development of a sheltered housing scheme which achieved high occupation rates thanks to its incorporation of cultural needs into the design. For example, no apartment was numbered four as this is unlucky in the Chinese culture, and a range of services, such as a community centre and units for Chinese shops and businesses, were provided. A learning point was that the development of a housing scheme should not be dependent on having a large population of a particular ethnic group (Housing Lin, 2005).

5 Current challenges in providing supported housing

At the time of writing, restraints on funding (including Supporting People), proposed changes to housing benefits (see, for example, Omar, 2011; Thorpe, 2011), and the 'localism' agenda pose a number of challenges for supported housing providers. As one of the few funding areas not currently 'ring fenced' by the government, the Supporting People programme is particularly vulnerable to cuts. A survey carried out for *Inside Housing* in May and June 2011 (Bury, 2011) found that:

• More than three-quarters of Supporting People service providers have seen their funding slashed by up to 50 per cent over the past twelve months.

• Demand for Supporting People services has increased as resources have fallen. Sixty per cent of respondents reported a rise in demand of up to 20 per cent over the past year.

• Seventeen per cent of those polled said they have had to deal with a 20 to 40 per cent additional influx of people who require their help.

• Forty-three per cent of respondents whose Supporting People budgets have reduced in the past twelve months said they had been forced to cut both staff and the services they offer.

The potential impact (although it needs to be pointed out that at present this is just a 'potential' impact) on the most vulnerable service users cannot be underestimated – indeed, as the DCLG (2010, p. 2) notes: *'If any changes to the Supporting People programme national budget cannot be met through councils making efficiencies and/or pooling resources, services for vulnerable people may have to be decommissioned, re-modelled or scaled back …'*.

Conclusion

The current financial strictures facing local government, and the non-ring fencing of the Supporting People budget, mean that meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic communities through ethnically specific supported housing, whatever the target group (older people, people with mental health problems, and so on) will become increasingly problematic.

This briefing has focused on five of the many client groups who can benefit from supported housing: people with mental health problems, young homeless people, women at risk of domestic violence, young parents and older people. Even within these groups, however, it is evident that African and Caribbean men are over-represented in mental health statistics, young people from black and minority ethnic communities are more likely to experience the personal circumstances that can lead to homelessness, and minority ethnic women are more likely than any other group to be teenage parents.

Given the current emphasis on the 'Big Society', the steps taken to meet these needs by voluntary and community sector organisations through specific and/or culturally sensitive provision are commendable. The fact remains, however, that the majority of black and minority ethnic people with housing support needs will not be able to access such accommodation, even if that might be appropriate for them (or it is their preferred option), simply because in most areas it doesn't exist – or if it does exist, availability is limited. Accordingly, meeting the needs of a culturally and ethnically diverse community within general provision is an issue that must be addressed by those providing supported housing, even if it is against a backdrop of budget cuts and service re-prioritisation.

Resources

Useful reports

Mental health

Department of Health (2005) *Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care: An action plan for reform*, London: Department of Health.

Pleace, N. and Wallace, A. (2011) *Demonstrating the Effectiveness of Housing Support Services for People with Mental Health Problems: A review*, University of York, The Centre for Housing Policy.

Rethink (2006) *Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and Mental Illness*, London: Rethink Advice and Information Service.

Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Mental Health and Social Exclusion*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Wilson, M. (2009) *Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care: A review*, London: Department of Health.

Young parents

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002) *Good Practice in Supported Housing for Young Mothers*, Housing Research Summary Number 171, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Other issues

Department for Work and Pensions (2011) *Housing Benefit Reform: Supported housing – public consultation*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

McKeown, S. (2006) *Safe as Houses: An inclusive approach for housing drug users*, Liverpool: Shelter.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Office (2005) *Guide to Housing and Housing-related Support Options for Offenders and People at Risk of Offending*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Office Drug Strategy Directorate (2005) *Housing Support Options for People Who Misuse Substances*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Spencer, S. and Corkhill, R. (2004) *The Housing Needs of People with Drug, Substance Misuse, and Alcohol Problems in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough*, Peter Fletcher Associates.

Useful websites

The Afiya Trust
www.afiya-trust.org

CAYSH
www.caysh.org

East Potential
www.east-thames.co.uk/foyers

Ekaya Housing Association
www.ekaya.co.uk

National Youth Homelessness Scheme
www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness

Nehemiah UCHA
www.nehemiah.co.uk

Rethink
www.rethink.org

Second Step
www.second-step.co.uk

Support Solutions (re proposed Housing Benefit changes): **www.supportsolutions.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=90&t=13127**

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- Exeter City Council, *What Is Supported Housing*, www.exeter.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=7781 (last accessed November 2011).
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