



## **HouseProud response to the New Deal for Social Housing green paper**

### **Introduction**

HouseProud was established in 2015 as the nationwide network for LGBT+ people working in social housing. Membership of HouseProud now comprises of over 50 organisations, including housing associations, ALMOs, local authorities and care providers. Our aims are to provide networking opportunities for LGBT+ staff members and to campaign on/for LGBT+ and housing related issues.

Housing and the home are of central importance to LGBT+ residents because they offer a space where people can feel express their sexual orientation and/or gender identity without fear of prejudice or reprisal. Therefore, HouseProud advocates the need for LGBT+ residents to have a stronger voice in order to influence decisions and to challenge the performance of landlords, particularly in relation to the safety of neighbourhoods and the quality of services provided.

Earlier this year, in association with the University of Surrey, we launched our '*No Place Like Home?*' research, the largest study ever undertaken in the UK into the lives of LGBT+ social housing residents. Funded by six housing associations (Clarion, Hanover, L&Q, Notting Hill Genesis, Optivo and Riverside), over 260 LGBT+ social housing residents participated in the study through a survey, focus groups and interviews.

Sadly, despite recent changes in equality laws, the study found that LGBT+ social housing residents continue to experience prejudice in their everyday lives. Additionally, a significant number of LGBT+ residents do not believe that they were being listened to or taken seriously by their landlord.

HouseProud is now working with the University of Surrey and the wider sector to develop a pledge scheme, to follow-up on the findings of the research, to address the issues raised and help landlords to affirm their commitment to LGBT+ equality and support.

### **Principle 2 - Effective resolution of complaints**

Our research revealed that despite equality laws, a significant proportion of LGBT+ social housing residents do not believe that they are being listened to or treated equally by their landlord:

- Survey respondents did not agree that housing provider staff members were always responsive to their concerns (37%) or sensitive to their needs (29%)
- A third of respondents felt that their housing provider was not able to deal effectively with cases of harassment
- A fifth of gay men reported that they regularly modify their home if visited by a housing officer or a repairs person to make their sexual orientation less visible

Because LGBT+ social housing residents are concerned that they will not be treated fairly by their landlord, we support proposals in the Green Paper to ensure that complaints are dealt with quickly and effectively. However, we believe that "swift and effective" handling of

complaints should not only apply where safety is a concern, but also to complaints that relate to harassment and discrimination.

We also support moves to ensure that residents have access to the right assistance to help them make a complaint, but believe that any service that residents are signposted to should be inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of different people, including those who identify as LGBT+.

### **Principle 3 - Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator**

LGBT+ social housing residents told us that they want their landlord to be more proactive on inclusion and to be openly LGBT+ supportive - 72% 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+ people.

HouseProud is currently working with the University of Surrey on a sector pledge scheme to follow-up on the findings of the research and address the issues raised. The pledge scheme is something that housing associations and local authorities will be able to sign up to, allowing them to demonstrate their commitment to LGBT+ equality and support.

The scheme is bringing together staff members, residents and academics to improve transparency and accountability in how services are delivered to residents. It is being funded by the University of Surrey and three housing associations (Clarion, Hanover and Notting Hill Genesis). Other organisations including Stonewall Housing and the Greater London Authority are represented on the project steering group.

So far, we have held focus groups with housing association CEOs and residents to shape the themes and commitments of the scheme. These will feed into an e-consultation that will be open to all social housing residents to comment on before we launch it in late February 2019. Our current thinking is that housing providers will sign up to core commitments, including one to have an LGBT+ resident forum in place with representation at executive level. Through ongoing engagement, LGBT+ resident forums will be able to set goals tailored to their organisation (e.g. signing up to the Stonewall Housing LGBT+ Inclusion Standard). These goals will be time limited, so residents will also be able to track the progress of these and hold their landlord to account.

In delivering the research and the LGBT+ pledge scheme, we have made significant progress in moving towards increased transparency and accountability with the support of all stakeholders. None of this would have been possible without the funding and backing of housing associations or the trust and participation of social housing residents. Therefore, proposals in the Green Paper to encourage landlords to be more transparent should take advantage of the goodwill that already exists in the sector, including the openness and willingness of landlords to improve services for residents. Our co-created model that we have developed could be replicated by others to engage diverse groups of residents to help influence decision making and enhance outcomes for residents.

### **Principle 4 - Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities**

We believe that more should be done to diagnose the issue of stigma highlighted in the Green Paper and to understand whether it increases for people who already feel socially excluded. Our research revealed that many LGBT+ social housing residents feel excluded in multiple ways, which combined can lead to feelings of social isolation. Almost half of LGBT+ residents surveyed felt lonely, whilst a quarter felt unhappy. Less than a half felt a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, which compares starkly with the findings of the

Clarion Index, where 82% felt they belonged to their neighbourhood<sup>1</sup> Residents expressed a clear desire to engage with other members of their community, but felt frustrated by the loss of local assets, including community centres that had closed in recent years.

Residents told us that that staff training is essential to help overcome prejudice and deliver good quality services. They repeatedly gave examples of poor staff understanding of LGBT+ lives and, in some cases, outright discrimination. Residents felt that all staff members, including sub-contractors, should receive LGBT+ training on an ongoing basis, the delivery which is now a focus of our pledge scheme.

## **Conclusions**

HouseProud is keen to play a role in helping to shape some of the ideas contained in the Social Housing Green Paper, including sharing more widely our experience of delivering the '*No Place Like Home?*' research and LGBT+ pledge scheme. We would be happy to discuss further the issues we have raised in this response and assist with provision of additional information should it be of assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> Clarion Housing Index 2017