

# UNCOMFORTABLE HOME TRUTHS

&

THE PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO

FOR FAIR HOUSING

**BIRMINGHAM  
FAIR HOUSING  
CAMPAIGN**

Not everything that is  
faced can be changed,  
but nothing can be  
changed if it isn't faced.

- JAMES BALDWIN, WRITER, PLAYWRIGHT, ACTIVIST

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# 01

# INTRODUCTION

“My children and grandchildren have no security of tenure, despite paying high rent. They stand no chance of owning their own home. I am filled with shame when I see the plight of homeless people in Birmingham.”

– MARGARET, HOMEOWNER\*

In February 2020, Shelter Birmingham launched ‘Home Truths’ listening campaign with the simple aim of hearing first-hand the views of people affected by bad housing and the high cost of housing in our city. They wanted to bring to light the problems people were facing and ask them what they thought should be done about the housing crisis gripping our city.

A month after ‘Home Truths’ began, due to the outbreak of Covid-19, England was plunged into a national lockdown and people were instructed to ‘stay at home’.

For thousands of people in our city, the lockdowns meant being forced to ‘stay at home’ in the worst kind of substandard accommodation.

People living in temporary accommodation were confined to B&B’s and hotel rooms, often with little or no cooking facilities. During the ‘Home Truths’ listening campaign, Shelter Birmingham spoke to families who had spent weeks and months in one room with no space for their children to play or be home-schooled.

Those living in shared accommodation such as hostels and houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) told Shelter Birmingham about having to share facilities during the lockdowns with other people – thereby putting people at risk of catching Covid-19. Others told them that they were only allocated half an hour slots during the day to use shared facilities, in order to avoid the spread of the virus.

For others, ‘staying at home’ in rented homes meant not being able to escape the mould, damp, disrepair and infestation which had plagued their homes well before the threat of Covid-19.

Yet for others still, the lockdown meant being forced to stay in overcrowded homes where the virus was able to spread quickly because people did not have the space to self-isolate.

Without a doubt Covid-19 has shone a light on what was already known; that there is an undeniable link between bad housing and health inequalities – with those in the most deprived housing being more at risk of contracting the virus.<sup>2</sup>

Unable to meet people or hold focus groups, in March 2020 Shelter Birmingham halted their listening campaign, in the hope that they would be able continue it at the end of the first lockdown. They resumed their listening campaign in August 2020 and until the end of January, reached hundreds of people through an online survey and 1-2-1 telephone conversations.

Following the end of the listening campaign, Shelter brought together people who had taken part in ‘Home Truths’ to examine the findings. Over four months we interrogated the findings of the listening campaign, listened to people with lived experience, heard from experts in housing policy, and drew on our own lived experiences, in order to respond. At the end of this process, Birmingham Fair Housing campaign was established and we have carved out a ‘People’s Manifesto for Fair Housing’ as a response to the housing crisis which besieges our city.

In this report, we share with you both the findings of listening campaign ‘Uncomfortable Home Truths’ and our ‘People’s Manifesto for Fair Housing’ in Birmingham.

This report and manifesto represents a beginning and not the end. From here, our work is to win the demands of our manifesto. We hope you will join us!

\* All names have been changed in this report

<sup>1</sup> A listening campaign seeks to hear the stories of people affected by an issue and build a relationship with them in order to bring people together to share stories and take action.

<sup>2</sup> [www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on](http://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on) and [www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/unequal-pandemic-fairer-recovery](http://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/unequal-pandemic-fairer-recovery)



# 02 BIRMINGHAM AT BREAKING POINT

“The whole system is unfair, inconsistent, incompetent and needs a complete turn-around. It is very stressful and has caused me anxiety. It is not good for young children to be in this situation – being homeless and passed from pillar to post. It is unsettling and confusing for them, not to mention embarrassing. It affects them mentally and emotionally. There is no empathy for those of us in this situation.”

– TRACEY, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

## IT IS NO EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT THERE IS A HOUSING CRISIS TAKING PLACE IN OUR CITY.

Birmingham is a city of two halves.

On the one side, people are being pushed into neighborhoods characterised by; bad housing, disrepair, high rents, insecurity, overcrowding, cramped HMOs and out of control exempt supported accommodation.<sup>3</sup> There is an increasing disquiet within these already marginalised communities on how much more they can take. People who are homeless are confined to the worst types of accommodation; families are hidden in temporary accommodation, in hostels and B&B rooms, for weeks and months, with no or little cooking facilities. People in our city are being pushed into ‘sofa-surfing’, sleeping under our bridges, in disused factories or in our back streets.

The people affected by the housing crisis look out from their confined misery and see the other side of the city: a skyline of cranes symbolising everything out of reach – unaffordable private housing developments; apartments and penthouses for the prosperous, bursting the seams of the city centre and encroaching out; consuming public land for profit; pushing out people – further and further.

In its ‘Housing Prospectus’ 2015, Birmingham City Council predicted that our city’s population would grow by 100,000 by 2031 – creating the need for 80,000 new homes. With HS2 promising shorter journey times from London, private housing developers have begun scrambling to cash in on the opportunity this brings. Housing has become a profit-making opportunity and a genuinely affordable home has become unobtainable for so many.

This is our Birmingham and these are the problems we face.

### WE ARE IN THE GRIP OF A HOUSING CRISIS

#### 1.14M

Birmingham is a city with a population of slightly over **1.14 million people**<sup>4</sup> living in approximately **423,870 households**.<sup>5</sup>

All the evidence suggests that we have an ever-increasing housing emergency in our city:

#### 3.2K > 4.2K

In 2018/19, **3,207 households** became homeless. In 2019/20, **4,244 households** became homeless.<sup>6</sup>

#### 12,121

In 2020, there were **12,121 people** living in temporary accommodation in Birmingham – of which, **6,480 were children**.<sup>7</sup>

This means that **over half** of all people living in temporary accommodation **were children**.<sup>8</sup>

The number of homeless households living in TA has **more than doubled** in the last five years.

The number of homeless children living in TA has **almost doubled** in the last five years.

#### 1 in 94

In 2020, **1 in 94** people in our city were living in temporary accommodation.<sup>9</sup>

#### 21%

At the end of March 2021, **21%** of the temporary accommodation provided by Birmingham City Council was hostels and B&Bs.<sup>10</sup>

#### 283

At the end of March 2021, **283 households** were living in ‘out of area’ temporary accommodation.<sup>11</sup>

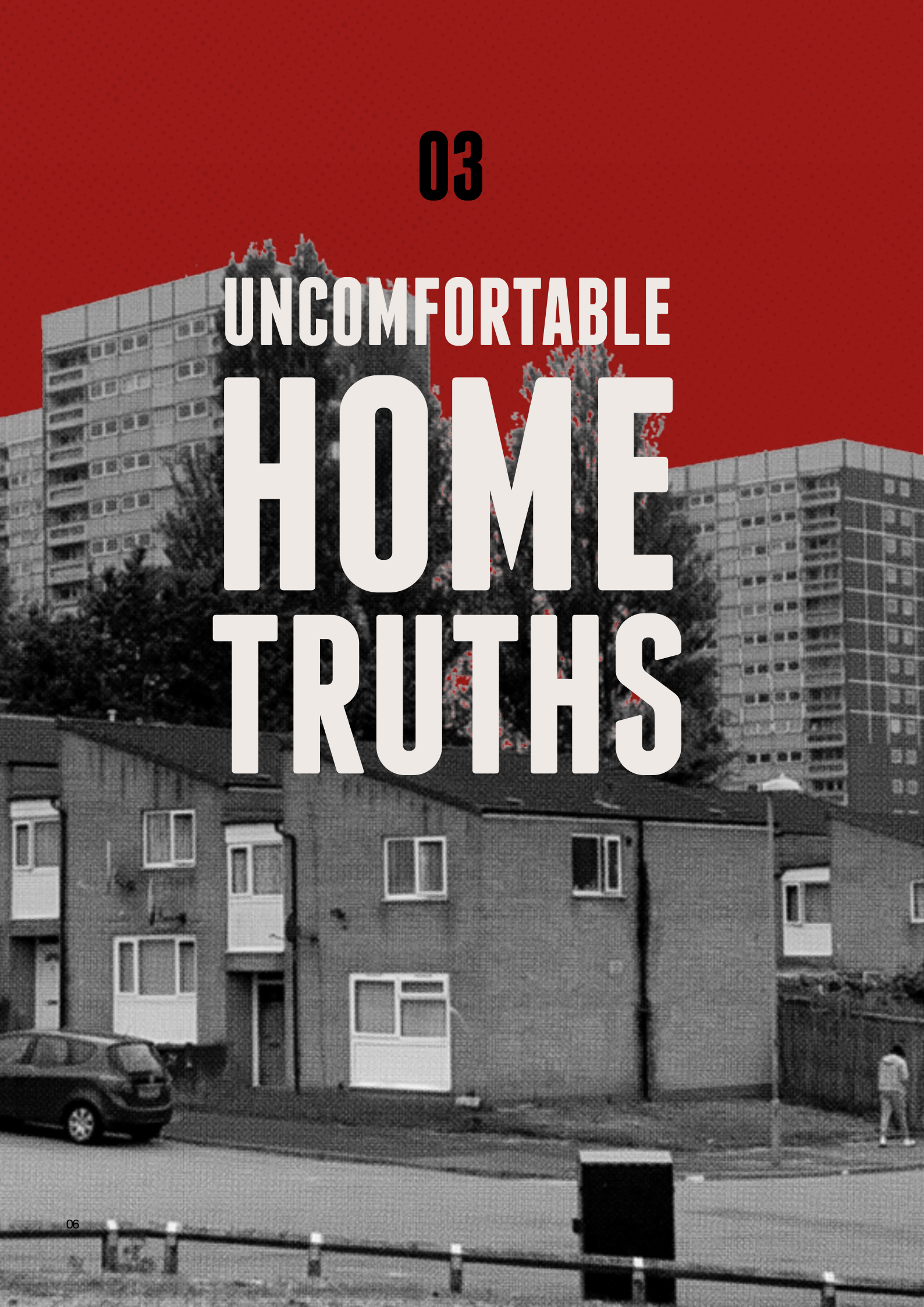
<sup>3</sup> Exempt supported housing refers to ‘a category of supported housing in which landlords are required to provide only loosely defined ‘care, support or supervision’ to residents but can still charge significantly higher rents than for mainstream social housing, paid by housing benefit’. [www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/council-launches-rights-and-standards-charter-for-exempt-accommodation-residents-69996](http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/council-launches-rights-and-standards-charter-for-exempt-accommodation-residents-69996)

<sup>4</sup> Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, mid-year 2019, ONS

<sup>5</sup> Household projections, local authorities and higher administrative areas within England, mid-2001 to mid-2043, ONS [Mid-year 2019 is quoted figure.

<sup>6-11</sup> MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory Homelessness live tables](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-live-tables), Detailed local authority level tables





03

# UNCOMFORTABLE HOME TRUTHS

Whilst statistics reveal the extent of the housing emergency in Birmingham, they do little to convey the impact and damage it is having on people's lives. That's why Shelter Birmingham launched 'Home Truths' listening campaign.

Through 1-2-1 meetings, focus groups, telephone conversations and an online survey, Shelter Birmingham invited people in our city to tell them about their housing problems, the impact it was having on their lives and what they believed was the solution to fixing their problems. In addition, they asked people to rank the housing issues which they would like politicians and decision makers to prioritise.

In total, 340 people from Birmingham took part in 'Home Truths' listening campaign.

## TENURE OF HOUSEHOLDS IN BIRMINGHAM<sup>12</sup>

**56%**  
are owner-occupiers

**23%**  
are social renters (renting from Birmingham City Council or a registered social landlord e.g. housing association)

**21%**  
rent from private landlords

**1%**  
No answer

## WHO TOOK PART IN 'HOME TRUTHS'?

**32%**  
Renting from a private  
landlord/agent

**24%**  
Renting from council  
or housing association

**23%**  
Homeowners

**20%**  
Homeless  
and other\*

\* This category includes people; in temporary accommodation; staying informally with family or friends ('sofa surfing'); vulnerably housed (exempt/supported housing, NASS) or at risk of becoming homeless.

<sup>12</sup> [www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/data\\_finder](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/data_finder) and [www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-housing-survey](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-housing-survey). Local level figures are estimates modelled by operating 2011 census results by regional change 11/12 – 18/19 From EHS

# I. BIRMINGHAM’S HOUSING PROBLEMS

## WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

Overall, amongst all the different housing tenures, poor conditions and disrepair was the most commonly experienced housing problem which people spoke out about. This was followed by people saying they were struggling to afford the cost of their housing. And the third most common problem was overcrowding.

However, whilst there was some similarity of experiences between people living in different types of housing, there were also some differences.

For example:

- Renters in both private properties and in social rented properties were more likely than others to mention that their properties were in poor conditions and disrepair.
- People who were private renting and those that were homeless and other were more likely than others to mention problems concerning housing affordability and money.
- Overcrowding is a much bigger problem among the social renters and homeless and other groups than it was for private renters or homeowners.

Other common problems mentioned included long waiting lists for social rent housing, anti-social behaviour & crime and also housing insecurity.

In the next section, we take a closer look at the ‘uncomfortable home truths’ revealed by people and the impact on their lives.



# II. POOR CONDITIONS AND DISREPAIR

## WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

Overall, the most common housing problem Shelter Birmingham heard about related to poor conditions and disrepair in housing.

**50% of private renters who took part in the listening campaign said they were living in houses which were in a bad condition or needed repairs done.**

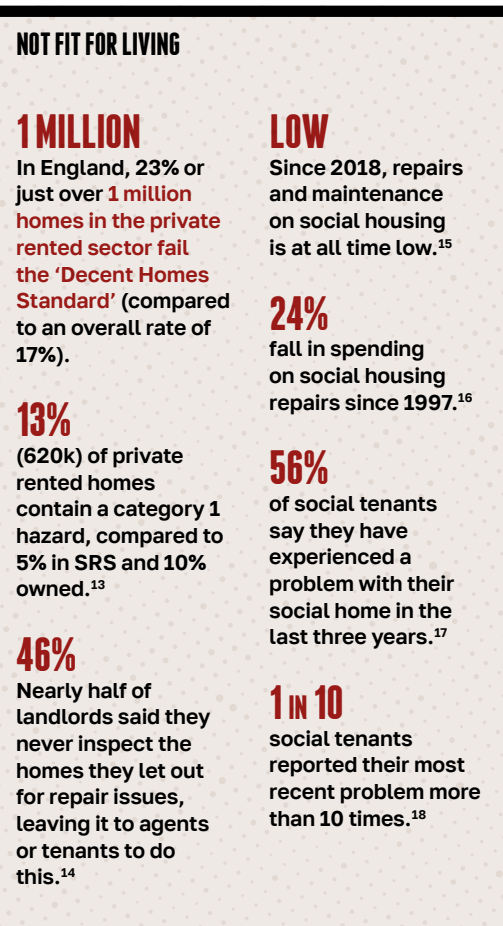
But it’s not only private renters who are living in homes that are in a bad state – **49% of people living in social rent housing (council housing or housing association) also complained about the poor state of their properties** and the length of time it took for the council or housing associations to undertake repairs.

Shelter Birmingham heard story after story of people having to live in houses which had **damp, mould, leaks and vermin**. Many people told them that their **homes were cold due to a lack of insulation, or broken windows or because of inadequate heating**. They also heard from people wanting to share stories of having to live in homes where **boilers, taps and showers were not working**.

Residents living in shared accommodation such as HMOs, supported housing, exempt supported housing and asylum housing also spoke out about having to live in **poor conditions in cramped accommodation, with bathrooms and kitchens which were inadequate or needed repairs**.

**Renters frequently expressed their frustration at the sheer length of time it took landlords and letting agents to undertake repairs** and when they did eventually undertake the repairs they were inadequate and the problems would resurface.

Living in bad housing is damaging renters physical and mental health. Renters said they were suffering from asthma, eczema, stress, anxiety and depression to



their living conditions which was caused by or made worse by their living conditions.

19% of private renters and 13% of renters in social housing said they had trouble communicating with their landlord.

**Some private renters gave “fear of being evicted” as a reason why they hadn’t complained to their landlords**, whilst others said they believed they had been evicted by their landlords in revenge for complaining about the state of disrepair in their homes.

\* ‘Home Truths’ survey of 340 people in Birmingham area, February 2020 to January 2021. Those answering ‘None’, ‘Don’t know’, and a small number giving responses that could not be categorised are not shown.

<sup>13</sup> English Housing Survey: 2019/20.

<sup>14</sup> YouGov survey of 1009 private landlords letting in England, online, 18+, Dec 2019 – Jan 2020.

<sup>16, 15</sup> Inside Housing - News - [Social housing repairs and maintenance work hits 20-year low, study reveals](#)

<sup>17, 18</sup> YouGov survey of 1,077 social tenants in England, online, 18+, May 2019).



## II. POOR CONDITIONS AND DISREPAIR WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

I had a rising damp issue in the bedroom that caused damage and mould to my belongings, such as my clothes going mouldy in the wardrobe. The landlord and agent refused to carry out any work. I eventually had to move out, whilst still paying rent, as their advice was to let it dry out. I've since suffered years of mental health issues due to having no fixed abode for the following 8 months.

**KAREN, PRIVATE TENANT**

I'm in temporary housing. The house is damp, and rat infested. I have asthma and depression. I've complained so many times to the council about the condition of the house. There were no carpets when we moved in. I've got videos of rats in my child's cot. I feel we're living like animals.

**GIMBI, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

Leaking roof, mould in bedrooms, kitchen falling to pieces, rotten windows, poor state of affair.

**JAMAL, PRIVATE TENANT**

Repair the problem until it is fixed. Don't just list the problem without any action. Yes we have shelter, but please, asylum seekers are human beings too!

**CHARLES, NASS ACCOMMODATION**

My landlord takes days to fix major issues. Took 3 days to fix a broken boiler. I was without heat for 24 hours. He's also moved in someone who basically shares the room with like 2 other people.

**MICK, SUPPORTED HOUSING**

It has no sound proofing so there are continual issues with neighbours making noise and no privacy. The boiler keeps breaking down, the walls are damp. There's no security and the rent is expensive. I would like to save to escape but it's impossible.

**ANDREA, PRIVATE RENTING**

Terrible state of repairs that keep manifesting and the council just want to patch up the repairs instead of fixing them properly.

**PATRICJA, COUNCIL TENANT**

I was left 18 days in the coldest winter without hot water or heating.

**RABIA, PRIVATE TENANT**

Contractors not doing the jobs that should've been done before I moved in. Damp windows with constant draughts due to broken vents. They took ten months to fix my heating and it still struggles to heat the living room.

**JONATHAN, HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

Asbestos in the ceilings which are falling apart, delays in repairs.

**ALINA, COUNCIL TENANT**

## II. POOR CONDITIONS AND DISREPAIR WHAT CHANGE DO PEOPLE WANT?

**Poor conditions and disrepair in housing is damaging people's health and well-being in Birmingham.** Renters in private and social rent housing should have the right to live in decent and safe homes in exchange for rent. Birmingham's renters want landlords and letting agents to provide decent and safe homes and they want repairs to be undertaken quickly and thoroughly.

**42% of social renters and 38% of private renters taking part in the listening campaign want more regulation and enforcement of legal standards.** Renters also want landlords and letting agents to be held to account through landlord registration schemes, inspections, blacklisting and fines.

I would create a blacklist of landlords who are repeat offenders and put them in special measures until they improve their service or if they don't, remove the right to rent.

**SALMAN, PRIVATE TENANT**

We need concise advice for renters.

**CHERYL, COUNCIL TENANT**

There should be a decent home standard for all private rentals (in Birmingham and the Midlands) so that's all properties are fit for human habitation – in addition to a regularly updated and monitored list of rogue landlords / agents, of which sadly there are many.

**SHIRLEY, PRIVATE TENANT**

Tougher and random checks on supported accommodation – with no advance warning when they will take place.

**NICK, SUPPORTED HOUSING**

Get housing association landlords to fix the problems quicker.

**MAUREEN, HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANT**

Fine landlords. Ban them from renting their property in the future and force them to sort out issues.

**KWABENA, PRIVATE TENANT**

A database where tenants can report bad practice, which would feed into a referencing system. Tenants have to prove they are worthy to rent a property, landlords should have to undergo a similar process so tenants can make more informed choices. Easier/quicker complaints processes for redress schemes.

**LEE, PRIVATE TENANT**

More regulation of landlords and agencies needs to happen. Tenants need a reliable source to bring issues to. Agencies don't act quick enough and always take the landlord side. Make agencies join a government-controlled set standard.

**JANE, PRIVATE TENANT**

An independent housing Inspectorate.

**CHARLIE, PRIVATE RENTER**

The council should provide experienced work personnel to carry out repairs properly.

**TOMAS, COUNCIL TENANT**

## III. HOUSING AFFORDABILITY WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

The high cost of housing was the second biggest problem people spoke to Shelter Birmingham about.

**34% of private renters, 33% of people in the 'Homeless and other' category and 26% of homeowners said they were struggling to keep up with their rent or mortgage payments and pay their bills.**

Others told Shelter Birmingham that they were having to top-up their housing benefit because their rents were too high.

Some private renters said they were having to choose between paying their rent, or bills, or buying food for their families.

Private renters also spoke about the **constant fear of their rents being increased by landlords** and how this left them feeling anxious and insecure about their tenancy.

And private renters living in bad conditions cited 'high rents of other properties' as the reason why they couldn't move to better property.

Many private renters told Shelter Birmingham that they want to get onto the property ladder but because their rent is so high it is **difficult for them to save for a deposit to buy their own home.**

**But it's not just private renters that are struggle with the cost of their housing – homeowners are also struggling to keeping up with mortgage payments, as well as bills.** Older owner-occupiers were more likely to mention having trouble paying for repairs and the upkeep of their homes.

Several people also said that house prices in Birmingham had become unaffordable and this was a reason why they continued to live in their parents' home.

Shelter Birmingham also heard from people who had lost income during the Covid-19 lockdowns and as a result had been plunged into arrears on their rents or mortgages.

### THE SPIRALLING COST OF HAVING A HOME IN BIRMINGHAM

In 2019/20;

**£8,520**

The median annual rent in Birmingham was £8,520. The median gross full-time wage was £27,501. This means that typical rents take up 31% of typical earnings, even before tax. The benchmark for affordability is 30%<sup>19</sup>

**19%**

In the West Midlands, 19% of private renters are behind with or constantly struggle to pay their rent<sup>21</sup>

**6x**

Average house prices in Birmingham are over six times average salaries.<sup>22</sup>

**43%**

Since 2011, rents have risen by 43% in Birmingham while wages have gone up by 23%<sup>20</sup>

### LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE

Housing support fails to cover the cost of a modest one, two or three bedroom home in Birmingham. Discrepancies between local housing allowance and 30% percentile rents are taken from valuation office agency, 'Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates applicable from April 2021 to March 2022'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> VOA, Private Rental Market statistics: April 2018 to March 2019, table 2.7 and ONS, ASHE table 8.7 2019, full-time median wage.

<sup>20</sup> Mean all jobs wage from ASHE, ONS, compared to mean all property rents, VOA, ONS.

<sup>21</sup> YouGov survey of 3995 private renters in England [328 in WM], online, weighted, Aug-Sept 2019.

<sup>22</sup> ONS, House price to residence-based earnings ratio, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2021-to-march-2022>

## III. HOUSING AFFORDABILITY WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

I am in shared ownership and the rent part is too high.

STEPHEN, HOMEOWNER

My rent is too expensive and some weeks I go without food and gas, so that means I have no heating. I have two children.

RUTH, PRIVATE RENTER

Trouble paying rent due to loss of income in the pandemic.

DARREN, PRIVATE RENTER

New developments, very small rooms. Too small for life! Rent is increasing year-on-year, I am worried HS2 will drive people out, people from London with London sized incomes will move in and displace everyone.

LAURA, PRIVATE RENTER

I can't afford the rent. I'm a single mum who works. I had to move back to my parents – it's financially draining.

LIZ, LIVING WITH FAMILY

Additional contribution to cover rent, which reduces the amount of benefits I have to live on. Fear of being evicted.

DANIELA, PRIVATE TENANT

I have to pay extra to cover rent which reduces the amount of benefits I have to live on.

DANIELA, PRIVATE TENANT

Housing is too expensive. Price is too high. Mortgage is too difficult for self-employed.

RAJ, PRIVATE TENANT

I am disabled. I bought my house when I worked (25 years with a charity). My house is falling around me. No hot water, only able to heat one room. The majority of my ESA and PIP are spent on my mortgage which leaves no money for repairs. I want to move but can't because no private rental will accept benefits or a dog and I can't get onto the social housing list. I am happy to sell but there is no equity in the house. My mental health can't improve living like this.

DEREK, HOMEOWNER

I am a leaseholder having bought my flat from the council. The costs of repairs and improvements have been so excessive I have had to rent out the property to pay them. Meanwhile I am living in a caravan. I'm 65 years old and feel the council has forced me out of my home.

BERNADETTE, LEASEHOLDER



### III. HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

#### WHAT CHANGE DO PEOPLE WANT?

**Unaffordable housing in Birmingham is causing stress and insecurity.** People are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Owning and renting a home needs to be affordable. **People want more social rent homes and affordable homeownership in our city.** Private renters want changes to the renting system so that it's easier for them to rent and they want rents to be fair and affordable. **22% of private renters taking part in 'Home Truths' said they wanted more rights for renters and protection from rent hikes. 13% said they wanted financial help, including benefits to be increased, so they could afford the cost of living.**

The whole system of renting needs to be made simpler. I'm trying to find another property but keep being told that the landlord has specified a criteria. Rents needs to be standardised and less biased. They need to be set according to property, not differentiate to what landlords want (greed). It needs to meet the living wage.

SEBASTIAN, PRIVATE RENTER

Rents need controlling. All our money is going towards our rent and this means we have very little money left to put aside for a deposit.

JACK, PRIVATE RENTER

Lower the rent in local areas or raise the LHA for those needing housing support so it's easier to pay the rent for private accommodation.

PAULINE, PRIVATE RENTER

Make sure that new developments are affordable to Brummies. We need more council houses.

LAURA, PRIVATE RENTER

Make housing more affordable by capping prices that private landlords can set as rent.

TAJINDER, PRIVATE RENTER

Ensure that affordable homes are realistically priced for lower salaried workers.

NILOFER, PRIVATE RENTER

Implement changes to make it easier for people to get onto the property ladder without needing a deposit, or with some kind of scheme to pay it off over time, et cetera.

RAJ, LIVING WITH PARENTS

Affordable social housing that's readily available or affordable rent that housing benefit covers. I'm a single mum/carers with disabled child. It seems impossible to get social housing particularly near the children's current schools. We need help!

CHRISTINE, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

### IV. OVERCROWDING

#### WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

During 'Home Truths' listening campaign, overcrowding was the third biggest problem people spoke out about.

**22% of people living in social rent housing said they were living in homes that were unsuitable for their household because of overcrowding.**

19% of people in the 'Homeless and other' category also said overcrowding was a problem they were experiencing. Within this group, people living in emergency and temporary accommodation were more likely to mention overcrowding as a problem.

Many families in our city remain stuck in overcrowded social housing and temporary accommodation for years because of long waiting lists and a shortage of social rent housing to move on to.

**People said not having enough space in their homes was the cause of tension and stress which heightened during the Covid-19 lockdowns when families were forced to 'stay at home' in overcrowded housing conditions.**

During the lockdowns people also said they didn't have enough space in their accommodation or homes to self-isolate and avoid the spread of the virus.

Parents also spoke about their children not having the space to study at home during the school's closures as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns.

The most desperate families speaking out about overcrowding were those living in emergency accommodation, crammed into poor standard B&B and hotel rooms with little or no facilities, or space for their families to eat, study or play, and left in these circumstances for weeks and months on end. Some of our cities grottiest B&Bs and hotels are now being used to house our homeless families.

<sup>24</sup> Shelter analysis of the English Housing Survey publicly accessible data, sourced from the UK data archive. To ensure robust estimates of people in overcrowded housing, shelter used three years of data to improve the sample size for estimates of population size and household sizes overcrowded in social housing.

#### OVERCROWDING ON THE INCREASE

A home is overcrowded when it is too small for the number of people living in it.

The official measure of overcrowding is called the 'bedroom standard' which considers a household is overcrowded if there are too few bedrooms, resulting in inappropriate sharing of bedrooms – for example parents having to share with older children, or children age 10 or over having to share a room if they are different sexes.

The average number of children in an overcrowded social home (in England) is less than the average number of children in a family household.

In England:

**1.5m** people are crammed in overcrowded social homes.

**1 in 6** social housing residents are in overcrowded homes <sup>24</sup>

**44%** increase in overcrowding in the last five years.

IV. OVERCROWDING  
WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

I have a 17-year-old and a 6-year-old who can't share rooms due to it not working out with them sharing. I'm currently sleeping on the sofa and have been for 2 years. I suffer with personality disorder and have pancreatitis and emphysema. The council won't move me to a bigger property. I've sent off medical forms and a letter of my psychiatrist saying it's unfit for me to live.

CAROLE, COUNCIL TENANT

There are five of us living with family. We have no space. It's really affecting us. My husband has mental health problems. I have depression and just take to my bed as I feel I can't cope.

ASPANA, SOFA SURFING

I'm on the housing register and the only place I could have got would've been halfway across the city away from my family. My kids are settled in their schools, I am currently living in a one bed flat with my two kids and partner with a third child on the way. This is hardly suitable. I feel like we are nothing but rats in a maze of a high-rise block.

ESTHER, COUNCIL TENANT

I have four children; male 17, female 11, male 8 and female 4, all sharing one bedroom.

JOY, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Three teenagers, one room not enough space, stuffy and all children doing exams, no space to revise.

SAMANTHA, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

I am in a tiny one bed flat at floods. I have a child who is almost 3 years old. She has the bedroom and I sleep on the living room floor. The council's response is 'tough'! You pretty much have no chance of moving. But this affects me and my child majorly. She has no space, I have no space, but no-one cares.

SHIREEN, COUNCIL TENANT

There are seven of us in two rooms in emergency accommodation. How am I meant to cope? How are my children meant to play or do their homework? We feel so trapped. We exist in these two rooms. It's so unbearable.

AMELIA, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

My house is in very poor condition and overcrowded. I live in part of the house which was a storeroom and has been extended into the garden. There's lots of vulnerable people living here.

PAWAL, SUPPORTED HOUSING

IV. OVERCROWDING  
WHAT CHANGE DO PEOPLE WANT?

Overcrowding is harming families in our city. People living in overcrowded housing want Birmingham **to build and make available more social rent housing for families so that they can escape the overcrowded conditions they are living in.** They want the council to fix up empty homes and make them available for social rent housing and they also want homes to be **more affordable to buy so that they can own a home that meets their household's needs.**

More affordable housing is needed on all levels that enables people to move up the ladder. People need stable options so they have a base to work from and can establish jobs and careers, school places for children, etc.

ESTHER, COUNCIL TENANT

A permanent house with enough rooms.

ANYA, EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

Stop spending money on the city centre and start building more social housing on the double!

NYALA, COUNCIL TENANT

The way we are living is no life. They need to build affordable houses for families but all we see is that they are building luxury apartments in the city centre and squeezing families out.

RUTH, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Build new affordable homes and look at doing up empty homes and letting them out.

MATT, HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANT

Change planning policy – no more new builds of 'unaffordable housing' or micro apartments.

ADRIAN, PRIVATE TENANT

I want a council house with two bedrooms. They should build more council houses for families.

MANJOT, COUNCIL TENANT

They should build more houses for families.

YONAS, COUNCIL TENANT

Ensure that more social housing is urgently made available and that the needs of people with inadequate housing is prioritised.

SAMUEL, COUNCIL TENANT

Implement changes to make it easier for people to get onto the property ladder without needing a deposit or with a scheme to pay it off over time.

RAJEESH, PRIVATE RENTER



# V. LONG WAITING LISTS AND A SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

## WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

Long waiting lists and a shortage of social rent housing was flagged as a fundamental cause of Birmingham’s housing crisis. People also told us that they thought the bidding system for a social rent home was complex and unfair.

**19% of people in the ‘Homeless & other’ category and 14% of people living in social rent housing complained about the length of time they had been waiting for a house.**

Within the ‘Homeless and other’ category, people living in emergency and temporary accommodation are most affected by the long waiting list and a shortage of social rent housing in our city and therefore more likely to be affected by overcrowding.

Because of a shortage of social housing, Birmingham City Council is having to use hotel rooms, B&B’s and housing in the private sector to provide emergency and temporary accommodation.

**Shelter Birmingham spoke to families who had been stuck in grotty B&Bs and hotel rooms for weeks and months.** They told how living in these conditions was making them ill. For these families, the lockdowns (due to the pandemic) meant they were confined to just one room – and in this overcrowded space expected to eat, sleep and home school their children.

People are frequently moved from emergency accommodation to temporary accommodation and remain there for years, often living in poor conditions , whilst desperately waiting on the housing waiting list for a more permanent home. The reality is that temporary accommodation has become the new social housing due to a lack of social housing in our city.

During the listening campaign several schoolteachers expressed their concerns about the increasing numbers of schoolchildren who had been placed in emergency or temporary accommodation

### WHY ARE PEOPLE BECOMING HOMELESS IN BIRMINGHAM?<sup>26</sup>

Between January and March 2021, the four main reasons why people lost their last home and were owed a homelessness duty by Birmingham City council were;

- family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
- domestic abuse
- end of a short hold tenancy (AST)
- eviction from supported housing

### BUILDING HOMES IN BIRMINGHAM<sup>27</sup>

In 2019/20, we acquired 3,740 ‘additional homes’ in our city. This figure includes all the new homes built, converted and changed for use.

Of those:	And only;
<b>457</b> were ‘affordable rent’ completions (i.e. for sale or rent up to 80% of the market rate).	<b>163</b> ‘social rent’ completions (rent set by government to track local incomes i.e. for people on the housing waiting list).

### WAITING FOR A HOME <sup>27</sup>

In 2020, there were 14,208 households on the housing waiting list.

miles away from their school, and in some cases having to travel up to two hours to get to school.

**Teachers also expressed their worry about the impact that not having a secure stable home is having, not only on the physical and mental well-being of the children, but also the damage to their educational potential.**

**During the listening campaign some survivors of domestic abuse said concerns about becoming homeless, due to a lack of social rent housing, affecting their decision to leave their abusive relationship.**

<sup>26</sup> MHCLG, live tables on homelessness, statutory homelessness live tables, table A2  
<sup>26-27</sup> MCHLG live tables.

# V. LONG WAITING LISTS AND A SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

## WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

It was only when I became homeless due to domestic abuse that I got on the waiting list for social housing. Birmingham desperately needs more social housing.

HEATHER, COUNCIL TENANT

I’ve been living in temporary accommodation with my one year old since she was born – she’s never had a home. My application for housing still hasn’t been processed.

KATHERINE, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

I can no longer afford my mortgage and I can’t afford private housing as it’s too expensive. I’ve been told by the council I will have to go homeless before I can register, even though I have cancer.

PAUL, HOMEOWNER

Council refuses to put me on waiting list due to arrears. Been put in crap hostel, shared houses, been like this for 18 months but still no joy with being on the list. Mental health is at all-time low.

ANTONI, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Bidding on a property in first position, then moved to the back (without notice) due to people of a higher priority than myself; even though I am a homeless single parent of three, who has been in temporary accommodation for over a year.

ANGELA, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

I am concerned about the council spending a lot of money on b&b accommodation as a result of there not being enough council houses.

SHIRLEY, HOMEOWNER

I’ve been living in 2 rooms in a bad hotel with my seven children. Originally, I was told it was going to be three days, then six weeks and now it’s been over seven months. We have a shared kitchen but it’s so filthy, I just use a microwave. I have to wash my children’s clothes in the bath. The council has accepted that it is unsuitable but say they have nowhere to move me. I’m desperate and not coping.

ANDREA, EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

My main problem is myself and 3-year-old twins who are both on the autism spectrum have been in this 1-bedroom flat for nearly 3 years. Being in temporary accommodation you can’t really settle in. No permanent fixtures.... worst thing is being unsettled. How can you plan your future not knowing where you are going to be?

ANUP, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

## V. LONG WAITING LISTS AND A SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

### WHAT CHANGE DO PEOPLE WANT?

**Long waiting lists, a complex bidding system and a lack of social housing is causing anguish and despair.** A home is a basic need and the foundation on which we build our lives yet, tens of thousands of people in our city remain homeless and on the council waiting list because of a lack of social housing. **People in all types of housing ranked building social homes as their overall priority. People also want a fairer and easier system to bid for a social rent home.**

More pressure on local authorities to ensure high quality social housing in the form of a council house guarantee is pledged to all members of the city when private contractors establish new developments.

**BIRGIT, HOMEOWNER**

Invest in more social homes, create a strong portfolio of a variety of properties including homes and apartments for families.

**MARY, HOUSING ASSOCIATION.**

I would lobby the government to fund and allow councils to borrow and build council houses.

**LOCAL COUNCILLOR, HOMEOWNER**

The housing that is currently being built-make half of it available to people on the council waiting list.

**OLLY, SOFA SURFING**

Make sure homes are available to real people. Build more social housing. Create opportunities for first time buyers.

**DANIEL, EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION**

Ensure affordable, good quality housing available to all. A new building programme needs to be established for social and mixed housing.

**MOHAMMED, COUNCIL TENANT.**

Build new homes and look at empty homes that can be done up and let. Bring people off the streets.

**CLAUDIA, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

Change planning policy – no more new builds of ‘unaffordable housing’ or micro apartments.

**ADRIAN, PRIVATE RENTER.**

Stop building private apartments and reinvest in social housing,

**PAUL, PRIVATE RENTER.**

Increase minimum room size in planning, Make sure new developments are affordable to Brummies.

**LAURA, PRIVATE RENTER.**

Build more affordable homes that have space and are eco-friendly’.

**NIGEL, PRIVATE RENTER**



## VI. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR/CRIME

### WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

During ‘Home Truths’ **18% of social renters told Shelter Birmingham they felt unsafe in their homes because they had experienced or were fearful of anti-social behaviour or crime.**

Some respondents said they were having to live with noise from other neighbours or witness drug-taking or other forms of anti-social behaviour.

**People living in poorly-managed HMOs and exempt supported housing also spoke out about not feeling safe and secure in their housing.**

Some of the residents in exempt supported housing said they were having to share their housing with other people who had different complex needs to their own and because the support that was provided was minimal, this led to difficult living conditions.

Shelter Birmingham was also told about support workers in exempt supported housing engaged in criminal activity and selling drugs to residents.

**16% of homeowners also expressed concerns about anti-social behaviour such as littering, fly-tipping, noise, or witnessing street drinking or drug taking.** Some of these homeowners pointed to these problems arising from the increasing numbers of poorly managed HMOs and exempt supported accommodation in their neighbourhoods. People felt that this type of housing was concentrated in less affluent areas of the city where communities were already strained.

#### HOUSE IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO)

A HMO is a building or part of a building where three or more unrelated people live. They often have a separate bedroom but share a kitchen or bathroom.

Larger HMO’s (5 or more people or two households) require a license from Birmingham City Council to operate.

**2,483**

In July 2021 there were 2,483 licensed HMO’s in Birmingham <sup>28</sup>

#### ‘OUT OF CONTROL’ EXEMPT SUPPORTED HOUSING IN BIRMINGHAM

**3,679**

In 2014 there were 3,679 units of exempt supported housing in Birmingham.

**11,000**

By early 2018 this had jumped to 11,000

**22,000**

In 2021 this had doubled to 22,000 units. <sup>29</sup>

The National Housing Federation and the Social Housing Regulator have expressed concerns about the quality of housing and the levels of support and care provided by some exempt supported housing providers to vulnerable people. <sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/4918/public\\_register\\_of\\_approved\\_hmo\\_licences](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/4918/public_register_of_approved_hmo_licences)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/exempt-accommodation-claimants-in-birmingham-double-to-22000-in-three-years-70954>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/comment/comment/as-the-housing-sectors-trade-body-we-are-concerned-about-the-rise-in-exempt-accommodation-providers-72066>

## VI. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR/CRIME

### WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

From my experience of what people have been dealing with in exempt supported housing is not receiving real support. What are support workers actually doing? The living conditions are poor. We’re living with other residents with complex needs and with little support. There’s drug and alcohol issues and a lack of security in the property.

MIRIAM, EXEMPT SUPPORTED HOUSING.

Feeling unsafe in the communal areas due to the huge mix of people living here. I have autism and physical disabilities but there are people with more severe mental health problems like psychosis, drug and alcohol abuse, offending behaviour, etc. I feel unsafe being surrounded by people so unpredictable in nature, when my autism needs a predictable and quiet, calm environment which this couldn’t be further from.

JAMES, EXEMPT SUPPORTED HOUSING.

HMOs many of which are badly managed, and this is destroying community cohesion whilst also doing a disservice to vulnerable residents of HMOs.

VIKRAM, HOMEOWNER

Drug dealer neighbours. Noise coming from them. Missing work as I’ve been kept awake by the noise. People coming into the block of flats smoking weed.

JONAS, COUNCIL TENANT

Unsocial behaviour including violence, machetes and guns. I’ve got a non-molestation order which is coming to an end soon. I’m really scared.

ANNE, COUNCIL TENANT

I am experiencing anti-social behaviour from my neighbour. They keep complaining about me. I think it’s because I’m Romanian. They keep banging on my door and they pushed me. I’ve complained to the police three times, but the police say they are drunks. I’ve also complained to the housing association.

ELENA, HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Support worker smokes illicit drugs during support sessions in his car. Property didn’t meet fire safety regulations and was shut down for two months. We were put in a hotel and then told property was ready to move back in however now all support has been withdrawn and we have no one to help us move on. Exempt housing are not responding to emails or calls, and harassment from the building owner.

DANIEL, EXEMPT SUPPORTED HOUSING

Neighbourhood full of temporary rentals and hmos bringing crime & fly tipping to the area. Why isn’t this type of accommodation spread equally throughout city? Why only in the deprived areas and not into affluent areas?!

GLENN, HOMEOWNER

Supported accommodation is a racket in Birmingham.

ANTHONY, EXEMPT SUPPORTED HOUSING

## VI. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR/CRIME WHAT CHANGE DO PEOPLE WANT?

**Anti-social behaviour and crime is disrupting and ruining people’s lives.** People want to feel safe and secure in their homes and not have to live in fear. Social renters want their **landlords to take responsibility and make their homes safer** by taking action to stop perpetrators. **People who are living in exempt supported housing want legal standards to be enforced and for adequate support to be provided. And homeowners want HMOs and exempt supported housing to be regulated to reduce the negative impact on their neighbourhoods.**

The council needs to properly monitor the impact that any application for ‘change of use’ of housing into a HMO or exempt housing is having on neighbourhoods. It appears to go unchecked at the moment. They need to find practical solutions to ensure the well-being of the tenants and their neighbours.

DEE, HOMEOWNER

A landlord that will take housing benefit without a guarantor and the council helping and not just offering me a HMO which is what I’m in now for another one and half year minimum. I’ve tried to commit suicide twice since I’ve been in these places. I just need my own space again. I need a home again. My mother is terminally ill and has days or weeks to live I need a safe place a home to deal with this as well, and the breakdown of my 9-year relationship.

LOUISE, SUPPORTED HOUSING

Better allocation of housing in supported accommodation to separate those more vulnerable with autism and learning disabilities from those with severely challenging behaviour. It is absurd to combine these groups into a single supported setting. It is not conducive to the well-being of those of us who have autism or learning disabilities and without any severe mental health or substance misuse issues, or offending behaviour.

JAMES, EXEMPT SUPPORTED HOUSING

We need better regulation of HMOs to stop them being concentrated in certain areas of our city.

MOHAMMED, HOME OWNER

More supportive, secure and safe places for the vulnerable and people with drug and alcohol problems and basically build more homes.

STEVE, COUNCIL TENANT

We need better lighting in communal areas and more security. The lifts smell of urine. The council needs to take tougher action.

ESTHER, COUNCIL TENANT

Main thing would be to crack down on landlords and HMOs, especially those in the supported living sector which lack regulation and exploit the most vulnerable tenants and landlords.

LOCAL COUNCILLOR, HOMEOWNER

## VII. HOUSING INSECURITY AND INSTABILITY WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

**Discriminatory practices by landlords and letting agents, low rates of local housing allowance and a lack of renter’s rights is causing people in Birmingham to feel insecure and unstable in their housing.**

**17% of private renters and 12% of people in the ‘Homeless and other’ category said they had experienced housing insecurity and instability.**

Renters on benefits or those without a guarantor said they had been discriminated against by landlords and letting through ‘No DSS’ practices, making it difficult for them to find a place to rent privately.

People also spoke out about other forms of discrimination which they had experienced from landlords or letting agents based on their ethnicity, disability or other protected characteristic, which impacted on their ability to find a home to rent.

Those who were self-employed, on lower incomes or zero hour contracts said they had experienced difficulty finding a home to rent because they struggled to save for a deposit or find a guarantor.

Shelter Birmingham also heard about the widespread use of Section 21 by private landlords to evict tenants in Birmingham and how this was leaving renters to feel insecure about their housing.

Several private renters said that they had been forced to move after being issued with a Section 21 ‘no fault’ eviction by their landlord for simply complaining about repairs which needed to be done to their property.

Other private renters said ‘the fear of being evicted’ was the main reason why they hadn’t complained about not having a tenancy agreement or about repairs which needed to be carried out.

### DISCRIMINATION AND FEAR

**OVER 50%**

of privately renting households now receive benefits to pay their rent in Birmingham <sup>31</sup>

**1 in 5**

Nearly one in five (19%) of private renters in the West Midlands say that they have not complained about a problem with their home due to fear of eviction, in the last five years. <sup>32</sup>

**70%**

Black people are 70% more likely to be impacted by the housing emergency than White people; and Asian people are 50% more likely. <sup>33</sup>

**54%**

of people with a significant disability (1.8m adults) do not have a safe or secure home, compared with 30% of people without a disability. <sup>34</sup>

Renters also said that the low rate of local housing allowance (LHA) made them feel insecure about their housing. Whilst LHA is meant to cover the cheapest 30% of rents in our city, we know in reality it fails to cover the cost of a modest two-bedroom house and therefore many renters have to top up their rent from their benefits or income.

Due to structural racism and discrimination, people from marginalised groups are more likely to be on lower incomes and benefits. Low rates of LHA together with the discriminatory practices of landlords and letting agents, means that it is often single mums, disabled people, gay or bi-sexual people or people of colour who end up in the most unstable housing in our city.

<sup>31</sup> Shelter analysis of DWP stat X-Plore with ONS sub-national tenure estimates.

<sup>32</sup> YouGov survey of 3995 private renters in England [328 in WM], online, weighted, Aug-Sept 2019.

<sup>33</sup> YouGov survey of 13,268 adults (18+) in Great Britain, online, April 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Same as above.



## VII. HOUSING INSECURITY AND INSTABILITY

### WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY?

The agent wanted to know my ethnicity, when I asked why? she said the landlord doesn't want anyone whose cooking has a strong smell.

**PRIYA, PRIVATE RENTER**

Landlord wanted to sell the house so we had to leave, or we would have been evicted anyway.

**JAMIE, PRIVATE TENANT**

As soon as a landlord or agent finds out you're on benefits they don't want to offer you a place to rent. This was the only place that accepted us due to benefits.

**BECKI, PRIVATE RENTER**

As a renter, I have moved so many times. The minute I complain about the property, I get evicted every time. This should be illegal.

**IDRIS, PRIVATE RENTER**

Recently evicted (during Covid-19). Tried to rent a new house and found it had rats. Had to void tenancy and agent transferred money to landlord. Landlord refused to refund the first month's rent. Trading Standards now investigating.

**ANJI, PRIVATE RENTER**

Just because a family pays using housing benefit does not make them any less of a human. The strain families go through losing their homes is traumatic and they need help and support to get back to their normal everyday lives.

**JONATHAN, PRIVATE RENTER**

My landlord of 8 years is selling the property soon. I am not eligible to join any council waiting list until I have been served with a section 21 notice and classed as homeless. Council have advised I will then be put in temporary accommodation anywhere in the country. I have tried private landlords but they are expensive - they either won't accept me as I'm on universal credit or because I have pets and they require a guarantor. I do not have access to anyone who could act as a guarantor for me.

**VICKY, PRIVATE RENTER**

We were served with a section 21 notice because the landlady has decided to sell the house we rent. She asked us to leave on short notice when we asked her to fix things around the house. It's been 2 weeks since we left and I haven't received my deposit and unused money. She promised there would be no delay with the money if I move out on a selected date, which I did. Unfortunately no money received as yet.

**TANYIA, PRIVATE RENTER**

Damp and mould (mould is growing on things inside cupboards)..bathroom taps not working for nearly a year. We worry that if we take action to seek readdress that the landlord will ask us to leave.

**KIM, PRIVATE RENTER**

Landlord has issued section 21 notice because of rent increase.

**NEGASI, PRIVATE TENANT**

## VII. HOUSING INSECURITY AND INSTABILITY

### WHAT CHANGE DO PEOPLE NEED?

**Discrimination and the use of Section 21 'no fault' evictions is causing turmoil in people's lives.** Any form of discrimination against people with 'protected characteristics' is illegal – people shouldn't have to put up with it. And nor should people be denied a home through 'No DSS' practices in our city. **That's why 22% of private renters said they want more rights.** Renters also want Section 21 to be scrapped and for landlords and letting agents to be regulated and held to account.

Make it easier for people on benefits/ disabled people to find somewhere to live.

**CARL, PRIVATE TENANT**

A system which allows tenants to check whether landlords have a black mark against them before renting.

**DAWN, PRIVATE RENTER**

Make private tenants aware of their rights and where they legally stand.

**JESS, PRIVATE TENANT**

Easier/quicker complaints process and readdress schemes for tenants.

**LIA, PRIVATE TENANT**

Fine landlords who don't accept dss tenants.

**GRAHAM, PRIVATE TENANT**

Protect the tenants and put a lot more stringent rules and regulations onto the landlord. Give the council officers more powers to bring legal action against the rogue landlords.

**DAVE, PRIVATE RENTER.**

There needs to be changes to the housing law to give renters more rights and ensure greater clarity from letting agents.

**BECKI, PRIVATE RENTER.**

The renting system needs to be fairer and simpler. Landlords and letting agents should be prosecuted for discriminating and renting out bad properties and they shouldn't be able to use section 21 to make people homeless for complaining. We need more protection.

**ZARA, PRIVATE RENTER**

Stop agents from requiring a guarantor when on maternity leave.

**MIRIUM, SEEKING PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING**

Landlords should be held accountable.

**ABDI, PRIVATE RENTER**

# 04 SUMMARY

**In ‘Uncomfortable Home Truths’ the voices of people affected by the housing crisis in Birmingham have been brought to the fore.**

Through their stories, we hear of a housing system that is broken and damaging people’s lives. We hear peoples wants and desires for change and the actions they want local politicians and decision-makers to take so that people in our city have a home that is affordable, comfortable, safe and secure.

**But it is not enough to want change – we must demand it.**

And that’s why ‘Birmingham Fair Housing Campaign’ was established.

Our campaign brings together people who took part in the ‘Home Truth’ listening campaign, as well people who want fair housing in our city.

We have carved out a ‘People’s Manifesto for Fair Housing’ in Birmingham which we share with you in the next section. The manifesto represents our vision for change and our call to action. From here, we will campaign to make our vision a reality.

**Join us to demand change.**

**BIRMINGHAM FAIR HOUSING CAMPAIGN**

**HOUSING ISSUES PEOPLE WANT LOCAL POLITICIANS AND DECISION MAKERS TO PRIORITISE\*:**

## **SUPPLY**

Build/make accessible more social rent homes and for affordable homeownership.  
(45%)

## **CONDITIONS**

Enforce standards & speed up processes.  
(27%)

## **RENTERS RIGHTS**

Rent controls, accept HB, increase security of tenure.  
(12%)

## **BOOST PEOPLE’S FINANCES**

Increase benefits/financial help/ more jobs.  
(12%)

## **SERVICES**

Better treatment/support for people seeking housing ‘assistance’.  
(7%)

I’ve been an adopted Brummie for 22 years and have taught in a 2 inner city primary schools for 18 years. Right now, Brum is in a housing crisis that is letting down our awesome young people. I know that children as young as 5 years-old in my school live in substandard, not fit for purpose emergency housing made up of hotels, B&Bs and hostels. Dirty shared kitchens, noisy communal areas and living in fear, catching three buses to school because the hotel is placed across the city; children can’t thrive in these places. So, in my most encouraging teacher voice: Birmingham, this is not how I see my Brum; you can do better than this.

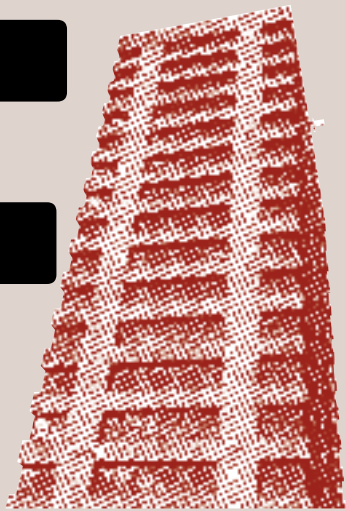
**EMMA, DEPUTY HEADTECHER, BIRMINGHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL  
& MEMBER OF BIRMINGHAM FAIR HOUSING CAMPAIGN**

\*In the ‘Home Truths’ listening campaign Shelter Birmingham asked people to rank, in order of priority, the housing issues they want local politicians and decision-makers to prioritise.



05

# THE PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO FOR FAIR HOUSING IN BIRMINGHAM



Power concedes  
nothing without  
a demand.

– FREDRICK DOUGLAS, SOCIAL JUSTICE CAMPAIGNER, ABOLITIONIST

# THE PEOPLES MANIFESTO FOR FAIR HOUSING

## BACKGROUND

Official statistics show the extent of the housing crisis that besieges our city. The testimonies of our people bears witness to the devastating impact it is having on their lives. **There is no hiding this truth – we are facing a housing crisis in our city.** Each year the situation worsens, and more people fall victim to a housing system that is simply not working for our people.

Thousands of our fellow Brummies are: homeless – stuck in limbo in emergency and temporary accommodation; trapped waiting for a social rent home because there simply aren’t enough; plagued by unsafe housing riddled with mould and damp in both private and socially rented housing; squeezed into poverty by spiralling rents and unaffordable house-prices; discriminated against because of their identity or income levels; exploited instead of supported, by those who seek to profit from housing the most marginalised within our communities.

**It doesn’t have to be this way.**

Birmingham Fair Housing Campaign has carved out a ‘People’s Manifesto for Fair Housing’. Our campaign brings together people directly affected by the housing crisis as well as our allies. This is our vision for change and our call to action.

## OUR VISION

**FOR EVERYONE IN OUR CITY TO HAVE AN AFFORDABLE, SAFE  
AND SECURE HOME AND FOR THIS TO BE A HUMAN RIGHT.**

We demand:

- 1. Our political leaders and decision-makers declare a housing emergency in our city.**

## WE WANT SOCIAL HOUSING

**We want good quality social rent housing, which is eco-friendly, fit for purpose, instils pride, meets the needs of those most affected by the housing crisis, and enables Brummies to thrive. We believe this is the leading solution to the housing emergency in our city.**

For this reason, we demand:

- 2. All our political leaders and decision makers:**
  - a. Take responsibility and urgently respond to the housing crisis by using their powers and influence to increase the supply of social rent housing in Birmingham.
- 3. Our MPs use their power and influence to lobby central government to:**
  - a. Ensure that the planning system serves the interest of people before the interest of private developers.
  - b. Provide the funding needed to build a new generation of social rent housing in our city.
- 4. Our West Midlands Mayor:**
  - a. Wins investment for our city for the delivery of social rent housing.
  - b. Ensures private developers deliver social rent housing.
  - c. Prioritises public land for social rent housing.
- 5. Birmingham City Council:**
  - a. Ensures our planning system places people’s interests before those of private developers by prioritising the delivery of social rent homes and closing all planning-loopholes.
  - b. Establishes an ‘independent community scrutiny panel’ to scrutinise the financial viability of delivering affordable housing for all planning applications.
  - c. Increases and meets the target set by Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust for building social rent housing.
  - d. Ensures all estate regeneration schemes return the same amount or more social rent housing.
  - e. Prioritises public land for social rent housing.
  - f. Steps up action on empty properties and brings them into use for social rent housing.



**6. Property developers in our city:**

- a. Recognise that people in our city desperately need social rent housing and meet section 106 planning obligations.

## **WE WANT RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE IN EMERGENCY AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

**We want a 'Charter of Rights' for people in emergency and temporary accommodation which outlines a set of standards that can be expected from Birmingham City Council and accommodation providers.**

To this end, we demand:

**7. Birmingham City Council introduces and promotes a 'Charter of Rights' which includes the right for residents to:**

- a. In the case of families, only be placed in emergency accommodation for a maximum of six weeks.
- b. Only be offered emergency or temporary accommodation which meets the needs of the household and all legal standards (and which councillors, council officers, landlords and letting agents themselves would be willing to live in).
- c. Prior to moving in, receive an inspection certificate which confirms that the property meets the required legal standards and has adequate and fully functioning cooking facilities and washing machines.
- d. Have a clear commitment to maximum waiting times for 'urgent' and 'non-urgent' repairs in emergency and temporary accommodation. For 'urgent repairs' to be defined 'as those which impact on the health, safety, and security of the residents' and for repairs to be undertaken swiftly and thoroughly.
- e. Have spot checks undertaken on all accommodation providers to ensure compliance with standards.
- f. Receive an effective 'personal housing plan' and where necessary, receive housing-related support.
- g. Be kept informed and given regular updates on their move from emergency to temporary housing or their application for social rent housing.
- h. Have access to a comprehensive local authority complaints procedure to make complaints about emergency and temporary accommodation providers.
- i. Have the 'Charter of Rights' readily available in community languages.

## **WE WANT RIGHTS FOR RENTERS**

**We want a 'Charter of Rights for Renters' which ensures all rented properties meet legal standards for renting and all repairs are undertaken swiftly and thoroughly. We want a national landlord register, and we want to end the insecurity faced by our renters due to spiralling rents and the use of Section 21 'no fault' evictions.**

For this reason, we demand:

**8. All social, registered social and private landlords, as well as letting agents:**

- a. Ensure all properties meet legal standards (which councillors, council officers, landlords and letting agents themselves would be willing to live in).
- b. Ensure all repairs are undertaken swiftly and thoroughly.

**9. All our political leaders lobby national government to:**

- a. Support a Renters' Reform Bill which:
  - i. Protects renters and scraps Section 21 "no fault" evictions.
  - ii. Introduces a national landlord register.
  - iii. Creates a body to regulate letting agents.
  - iv. Provides additional powers and financial resources for local authorities to enforce decent standards and good conditions in the private rented sector.
- b. Develop long-term solutions to make private rents more affordable and give Birmingham City Council more powers to ensure landlords charge fair rents for a good service.
- c. Raise housing benefit so that local people can afford average rents in Birmingham and aren't squeezed out.
- d. Scrap the unfair shared accommodation rate for under 35s.
- e. Support those struggling to pay their rent, for example by increasing funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (and make them more consistent and reliable).
- f. Define reasonable timescales for 'urgent' and 'non-urgent' repairs.

**10. Our West Midlands Mayor:**

- a. Establishes a 'Housing Standards Commissioner' to help drive up conditions in the rented sector (both social and private rented homes).

**11. Birmingham City Council:**

- a. Introduces and promotes a ‘Charter of Rights for Social and Private Renters’ which should include information on:
  - i. The standards which renters can expect in rented properties.
  - ii. How to make complaints to private landlords about bad standards and disrepair.
  - iii. How to challenge unlawful discrimination, including ‘No DSS’ in private renting.
  - iv. How to challenge unfair rents.
  - v. Deposit schemes and disputes.
  - vi. The role of Private Rented Services Team and the level of service which can be expected.
  - vii. The role of the Housing Ombudsman and how to make complaints to them.
- b. Lobby central government for additional funding for the Private Rented Services Team for it to adequately respond to the problems faced by private renters in our city.
- c. Proactively uses existing powers to enforce conditions and repairs in the private rented sector and deal with rogue landlords.
- d. Lobby central government for a national landlord register and introduce a local landlord licensing scheme which requires all private landlords (including landlords of all houses in multiple occupation) to apply every two years and meet the legal requirements for renting for them to receive a license to enable them to rent. This will help improve standards for renters and prevent the over concentration of HMOs in neighbourhoods.

## **WE WANT AN END TO DISCRIMINATION**

**We want Birmingham to be an inclusive city where everyone is treated equally, fairly and with respect. We want tougher action to be taken against landlords and letting agents who unlawfully discriminate against people based on their identity or because they claim benefits.**

For this reason, we demand:

**12. All our political leaders and decision-makers:**

- a. Work towards ending all forms of discrimination in the housing sector, including discrimination towards people on benefits through ‘No DSS’ practices.

**13. Our MPs lobby central government to oppose:**

- a. The ‘Right to Rent’ checks which is leading to discrimination against migrants.
- b. The ‘Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill’ which will criminalise nomadic communities and violate their human rights.

**14. Birmingham City Council:**

- a. Promotes a ‘Charter of Rights’ for private renters which makes it clear that all forms of discrimination in the private rented sector, including ‘No DSS’, is unlawful and how this can be challenged.
- b. Ensures that it does not promote or contract any landlord that advertises ‘No DSS’.
- c. Establishes a process for private tenants to report discriminatory landlords and letting agents.
- d. Monitors and publishes the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payments to ensure fairness and equality.
- e. Locates policies relating to Traveller sites in ‘Housing Policy’ rather than under ‘Anti-social behaviour and neighbour disputes’.
- f. Builds a permanent site for Traveller communities by applying for funding available through the government’s ‘Affordable Homes Programme’.
- g. Provides smaller, well-managed transit sites with adequate facilities.
- h. Introduces a policy of ‘negotiated stopping’ for all road-side encampments.
- i. Employs a Traveller Liaison Officer.

## **WE WANT HOUSING WITH COMPASSION**

**We want people living in supported accommodation to be decently housed and have adequate support. We want providers of exempt supported housing and asylum housing who are failing to provide decent housing and adequate support to residents in our city to be held to account.**

For this reason, we demand:

**15. Exempt and asylum housing providers:**

- a. Ensure all properties meet legal standards for occupancy.
- b. Ensure all repairs are undertaken swiftly and thoroughly.
- c. Ensure residents receive adequate support that is ‘more than minimal’.

**16. Our MPs and West Midlands Mayor lobby central government to:**

- a. Provide Birmingham City Council and the Regulator for Social Housing with the resources and powers of enforcement over rogue exempt supported housing providers.
- b. Ensure all support workers in exempt supported housing are DBS checked.
- c. Ensure that the DWP defines the minimum level of support which should be available in exempt supported housing, for providers to be exempt from LHA rates.



- d. Provide funding and support for local authorities who are asylum dispersal areas so that inspections of asylum accommodation can be properly carried out.
- e. House people seeking asylum with dignity in communities and not in reception centres.

**17. Birmingham City Council:**

- a. Proactively uses its enforcement powers and where necessary takes action for non-compliance, to ensure that providers of supported exempt housing and asylum housing meet legal standards.
- b. Ensures that Birmingham Children's Trust provides an additional 28 days' notice and housing support for children and families who become entitled to homelessness assistance, to allow them time to find suitable accommodation and prevent them from becoming homeless.
- c. Lobbies for greater powers to regulate exempt supported housing providers.

## WE WANT AN END TO HOMELESSNESS

**We want early intervention and support for our fellow Brummies, to prevent them from becoming homeless.**

For this reason, we demand:

**18. Our political leaders lobby central government to:**

- a. Provide funding for Birmingham City Council to fund early intervention work, independent advocacy, and provide adequate support services for people most at risk.

**19. Birmingham City Council:**

- a. Prioritise work which addresses the underlying root causes of why some of our fellow Brummies are becoming homeless, to prevent it.

# JOIN US!

We believe by working together and building on some of the positive work already taking place in our city – we can make our vision a reality.

For this reason, we call on our politicians and decision makers to work in partnership and pledge to take action in support of the 'People's Manifesto for Fair Housing' in Birmingham.

We call upon our faith, union and civic society leaders to endorse our manifesto and stand in solidarity with us.

And we invite our fellow Brummies to join our campaign and support our manifesto – so that together we can win fair housing for Birmingham!

**SUPPORT, SIGN, SHARE OUR  
MANIFESTO HERE:**

**SHELTER.ORG.UK/BFHC**

**JOIN HERE:**

**BFHC@SHELTER.ORG.UK**

**FOLLOW US HERE:**

 **@BHAMFHC**

**BIRMINGHAM  
FAIR HOUSING  
CAMPAIGN**

## THE PEOPLES MANIFESTO FOR FAIR HOUSING IS ENDORSED BY:



BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY  
AND TENANTS UNION



WEST MIDLANDS



Birmingham LGBT



WEST MIDLANDS



To see a full list of supporters, visit: [SHELTER.ORG.UK/BFHC](https://shelter.org.uk/bfhc)



