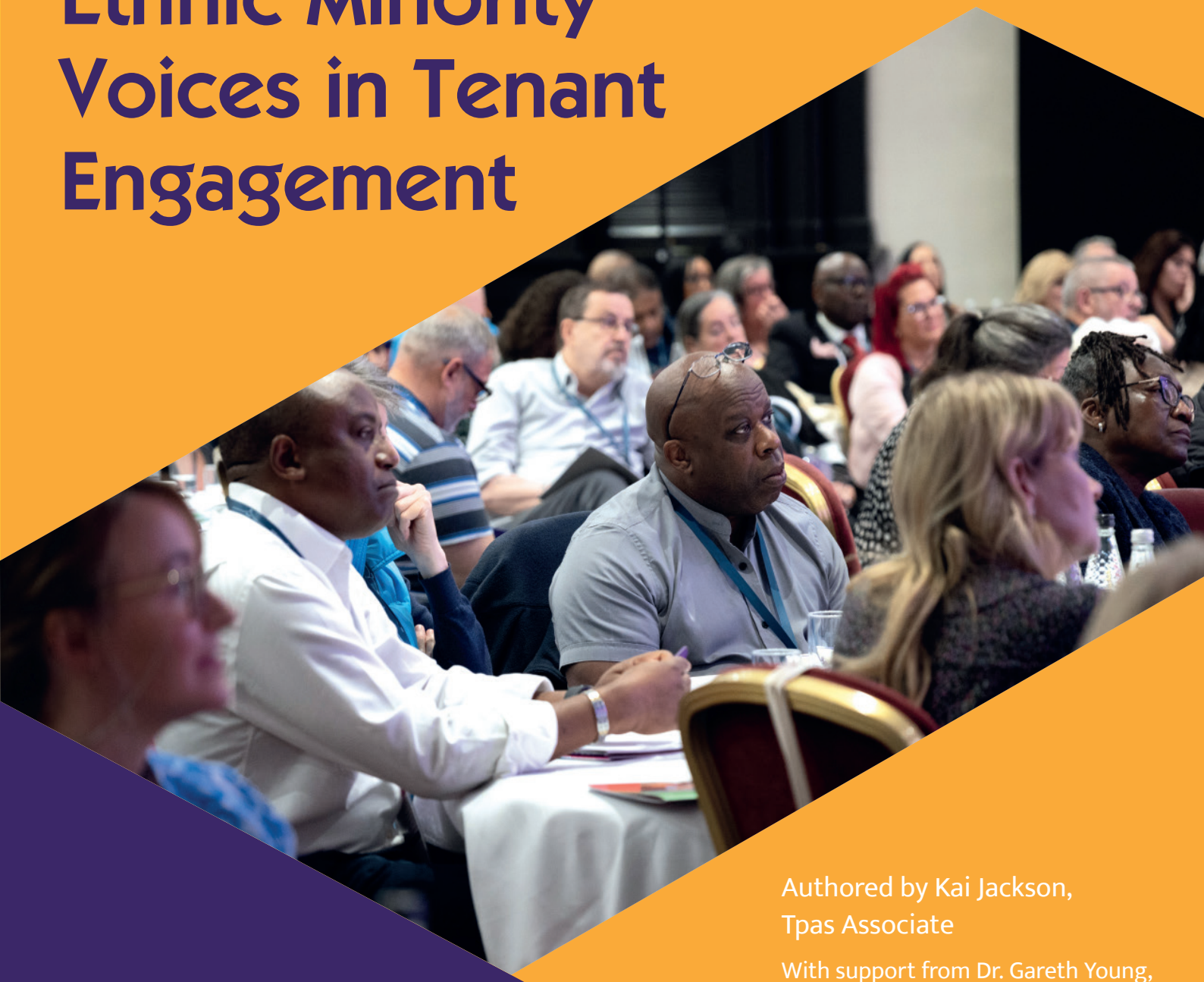
TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS tpas

Is There a Seat at the Table?

Ethnic Minority Voices in Tenant Engagement



Authored by Kai Jackson, Tpas Associate

With support from Dr. Gareth Young, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, and Louise Holt, Tpas

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1. Acknowledgements

This research project was sponsored by Tpas and included a research team of Kai Jackson, Tpas Associate, Louise Holt (Tpas), and Dr. Gareth Young (UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, CaCHE). The report is authored by Kai Jackson.

We would like to thank everyone who completed the survey, attended the focus groups, and shared their experiences with us. Without your valuable insight and input, this report would not be possible. We also thank those who distributed and promoted the project, as well as TLF for their survey management and analysis.

Authored by

Kai Jackson

Research team

Louise Holt Dr. Gareth Young

2. Preface

Following the completion of my BSc (Honours) Psychology and Counselling degree, I was voted chair of my scrutiny panel in 2021, a role I have immersed myself in and do wholeheartedly. I have attended sector meetings, conferences, and events, and I would look around and see very few, if not only myself, as a tenant of colour. The more events I attended, the more it became apparent that this wasn't an isolated occurrence. I learned more about tenant engagement and how it could impact people's lives, for example: homes, services provided, and communities. I thought the sector was missing out on a perspective of lived experience that is valuable to making fundamental changes for all tenants.

As an ethnic minority tenant and someone who has experienced discrimination within the sector, I know how powerless a person can feel when you don't know how to access the help and support that is available to you, but to add additional barriers due to discrimination is unacceptable.

The importance of this project is to promote fair, equitable services offered to all tenants under the supported framework of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, which needs to be more than just strategic planning with the purpose of implementation and embedded in the landlord's culture. Although many protected characteristics exist (Equality Act 2010), and the housing sector is working on supporting them, my project is aimed at communities from ethnic minority backgrounds. Still, it is not meant to divide or treat one demographic more favourably than others. This project seeks to explore and understand an area with no available data and support those who may find it difficult to.

3. Foreword

Understanding and amplifying the lived experiences of ethnic minority tenants in social housing is essential for shaping policies and strategies that truly reflect the diversity of our communities. These voices not only enrich decision-making but also ensure that services meet the needs of all tenants, equitably and effectively.

Yet, as we at Tpas have observed, significant barriers still prevent many ethnic minority tenants from fully participating in formal engagement activities. These obstacles, whether systemic, cultural, or practical, hinder the potential for inclusive collaboration and meaningful representation in the social housing sector.

So, when Kai approached us with her proposal to investigate these barriers and explore practical solutions to overcome them, we were excited to support and commission this vital research.

Kai's dedication to fostering inclusivity in tenant engagement is evident in every aspect of this report. Her findings offer not just a diagnosis of the issues but also actionable recommendations that can embed fairness and equity into the very fabric of organisational culture. Her vision challenges us to move beyond box-ticking exercises and embrace inclusive practices as a genuine, transformative part of how we engage and operate.

We hope this report inspires action and drives meaningful change across the sector.

Louise Holt
Tpas England

I was delighted to be asked to offer some thoughts and input into this project, and it has been a pleasure to work with Kai and Tpas on this really important project.

Kai's enthusiasm and dedication to this work is awe-inspiring, and her energy to drive this project forward has been a joy. Within the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, I am keen that we broaden and diversify our partnerships and that we get involved and support work that is exploring the inequity in housing at all levels. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, I have been acutely aware of the disadvantages in our housing system and the lack of evidence and data that exists across the sector and academia. During the course of this project we have heard from lots of people in social housing that has really highlighted how people are feeling, and how those from minoritised ethnic communities are still feeling like they do not have a voice in engagement processes. The racist violence in England over the summer of 2024 is just another example of why work like this is not just interesting and important, but essential, and that while we might feel there has been progress made in terms of better awareness of why equality, diversity and inclusion within housing, there is still so far to go, and we need to make sure action is taken.

I am delighted to have participated in this project, and offered a little in the way of support and guidance. But the work itself is credit to Kai and her incredible passion and energy. Through this work, I have built a strong working relationship with Kai, and I look forward to continuing to learn from her going forward.

Dr. Gareth Young,
UK Collaborative Centre
for Housing Evidence

4. Executive Summary

This report, Is There a Seat at the Table? Ethnic Minority Voices in Tenant Engagement, explores the underrepresentation of ethnic minority tenants in formal tenant engagement structures within the UK social housing sector.

The study, led by Kai Jackson, in collaboration with Dr. Gareth Young and Louise Holt, aims to uncover the barriers ethnic minority tenants face and offer recommendations for promoting a more inclusive and diverse tenant engagement framework.

4.1 Background

Ethnic minority tenants play a vital role in shaping the housing services they rely on, yet they are significantly underrepresented in formal engagement activities such as scrutiny panels and tenant boards. The research examines why ethnic minority tenants are less engaged and explores what can be done to create a more equitable and inclusive environment.

4.2 Methodology

The research combined qualitative and quantitative approaches:

- **Website Audit:** An analysis of 25 registered providers' websites, assessing the representation of ethnic minorities in engagement activities.
- **Surveys:** Two surveys, one for tenants and one for staff, were conducted, resulting in responses from 178 tenants and 175 staff.
- **Focus Groups:** Three 90-minute focus group sessions were held to delve into the experiences of both tenants and staff.

4.3 Key Findings

1. Targeted Communication and Outreach

Develop a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy to ensure tenants are well-informed about engagement opportunities. Efforts should prioritise accessibility through multilingual and culturally sensitive materials, using a combination of digital, physical, and community-based channels. Direct outreach methods, such as door-to-door engagement, welfare calls, and community events, will further increase visibility and participation.

2. Building Trust and Respect

Foster genuine, action-oriented engagement to address concerns about being ignored or disrespected. Demonstrate accountability by visibly acting on tenant feedback. Diversify tenant panels to ensure fair representation and provide staff with cultural competence training to facilitate inclusive and respectful interactions.

3. Addressing Systemic Barriers

Conduct a review to identify and eliminate barriers to ethnic minority tenant participation. Expand flexible and informal engagement opportunities, including virtual and evening meetings, and use community events to encourage feedback and relationship-building.

4. Enhancing Staff Competency

Invest in training to improve staff cultural competence and provide resources for effective communication with diverse communities. Encourage proactive community outreach to better understand tenant needs and foster stronger connections.

5. Strengthening Data Systems

Implement robust data collection and analysis systems to track tenant demographics and engagement challenges. Use this data to tailor services and strategies to the needs of ethnic minorities.

6. Allocating Resources and Funding

Secure external funding or partnerships to support targeted engagement activities. Allocate resources towards training, outreach, and tenant-led initiatives that focus on ethnic minority engagement for more meaningful outcomes.

7. Community-Led Initiatives

Empower tenants to co-creation engagement efforts and lead focus groups or cultural activities. Support peer-led advocacy groups and organise inclusive events to foster trust and connectivity between tenants and housing providers.

9. Implementing the T.A.B.L.E. Principles

Adopt the T.A.B.L.E. framework to guide tenant engagement:

- **T:** Tailored Training.
- **A:** Actively Engaging Communities.
- **B:** Bringing Everyone into the Conversation.
- **L:** Listening to Voices.
- **E:** Ethnic Minorities.

These recommendations aim to create a more inclusive, respectful, and effective approach to tenant engagement, ensuring all voices are valued and represented in decision-making processes.

5. Introduction and Background

Social housing has been at the forefront of many public topics of concern for decades.

Social housing has been at the forefront of many public topics of concern for decades. Social housing was first introduced in 1919 with Lloyd George's "Homes Fit for Heroes" campaign, later followed by The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 (The Addison Act). This was implemented to help returning soldiers secure housing and to provide affordable homes for a war-torn country striving to rebuild. More recently, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), including semi-independent and not-for-profit housing associations, have played a larger role in providing quality, affordable homes.

Over time there has been an increased stigmatisation of those living in social housing, as the people living within social housing are often lower-income, from ethnic minoritised communities and often more likely to be living with a disability. Increasingly, the social housing sector, and those living in social housing, were increasingly associated as a feckless underclass, and estates were considered synonymous with social ills such as anti-social behaviour (ASB). The objective of this project is to find out the root cause of lack of participation from ethnic minorities in social housing by asking the base question of why do tenants choose to get involved in formal engagement activities, (such as scrutiny panels, committees) with their registered provider or what are the reasons for not doing so. As there is no current research looking at the low representation of ethnic minority tenants, this

research seeks to address this concern and seeks to highlight best practice and ways to reduce barriers. This project will take an objective approach in collecting and reporting the data outcomes as to give fair insight into the perspectives of ethnic minority tenants. To enhance and support learning in a sector where equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) needs to be strengthened.

From analysis of the data collection, key themes will be drawn out and this will lead to a number of recommendations and a set of principals which can be implement in the registered providers strategic planning and governance, to support registered providers in developing a more tailored model to enhance engaging ethnic minority tenants.

A note about terminology

People choose to identify themselves based on their family heritage and upbringing, social influences, personality traits, and values. This leads to identifying terminology changing continually This can make it difficult to choose categories to define ourselves. We have based our use of the term **ethnic minority** in this report rather than BAME or BME using the government's Equality Hub guidelines.

Although this project is based around ethnic minorities it is in no way meant to hold one characteristic group above another, it is to highlight where challenges maybe, talk about it and reduce the barriers to create a collaborative space where we learn and have all voices heard and valued.

6. Objectives / Purpose of Research

The research is aimed at understanding why ethnic minority tenants are underrepresented in formal engagement structures. The main objectives are:

- Ascertain the current levels of involvement of ethnic minority tenants.
- Understand the barriers to engagement.
- Examine how registered providers promote and encourage ethnic minority participation.
- Consider improvements to enhance ethnic minority tenant engagement.

7. What We Know Already

The Housing Ombudsman is continuing its work in the area of "Relationships of Equals," breaking down information and identifying themes such as bias, prejudice, and discrimination by landlords.

The Ombudsman identified 192 cases where bias, prejudice, or discrimination by the landlord was recorded as a key issue, finding maladministration in 36% of complaints. The majority of these complaints related to ASB or staff conduct. During the period, over £32,000 in compensation was awarded, with £1,400 of this directly linked to landlord failures to adequately investigate allegations of bias or discrimination

The report underlines the Housing Ombudsman's commitment to addressing discrimination in the sector, emphasising both the seriousness of the issue and its financial implications.

The reporting period for these findings are 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2023, as the Ombudsman calls for more evidence from registered providers, we may see these numbers going up as complaints are increasing and social factors tend to effect attitudes and behaviour, fostering a more inclusive environment.

KEY FINDINGS

Housing Ombudsman Service

People

- Insensitivity
- Dismissive
- Offensive

Processes

- Vulnerablilities
- Reasonable adjustments
- Discrimination
- Contact restrictions
- Contractors
- Investigations
- Complaints
- Service charges

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Learning Culture

- Learn from others
- Complaints process

Fit for the future

- Culture, vision and values
- Vulnerability strategies
- Forecasting

Health, housing and human rights

- Royal Commission
- Duty of cooperation

Housing Ombudsman Service

As organisations look at their complaints to highlight learning, the findings from the 'Relationship of Equals' report should surely give registered providers support in handling complaints and supporting those who have made them.

The first theme to address is the concern of structural racism within the sector. To look forward, we start by looking back to learn how we can move forward. During the rebuilding of the country after World War Two, Immigrants, including those from the West Indies were invited to England. Housing was a concern as many councils and housing associations did not want to rent to those from ethnic minority backgrounds, this is highlighted in the article 'Our Roots' (BME National, 2024). Although social housing became more accessible for ethnic minorities, it has been highlighted that barriers have been put into place to make decent housing still a cause for concern.

This paper highlights points about socio-cultural and socio-economic disparities within the ethnic minority community and then also drills down on disparities among those races, namely the Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. This paper shows an important view on why people from ethnic minority backgrounds are experiencing difficulties when acquiring social housing and how there are systemic obstacles such as, Choice Based Lettings (CBL), which has been argued that it maintains segregated communities due to the low-quality properties which are more likely to be advertised (Manley and Van Ham, 2011) and an eligibility criterion that reduces social mobility.

The UK Collaborative Centre go into further detail about the national and local barriers ethnic minorities face across the housing tenures and the policies used to protect people from discrimination and obtaining race equality in the housing system.

> "Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people in the UK disproportionately lack access to secure, good quality and affordable homes. These disparities are driven by racial inequalities in the labour markets and by hostile immigration policies, and are compounded by the design of the social security system."

Baxter et al, p.2, 2021

> "Housing initiatives, such as gentrification, that marginalise minorities, illustrate that ethnic minorities have limited voice in housing decisions, with policies that in some cases work against ethnic minority communities, dismantle local areas and exclude ethnic minorities from housing in specific areas."

Finney and Shankley, 2020

When it comes to looking at stigma, 'Stigma and Social Housing in England: Feedback on the consultation responses' outlines the concerns of stigmas placed on tenants within the housing sector and that the negative representation portrayed by the media and political figures are harmful to the sectors growth, including tenants' capacity to engage with their landlord in a meaningful and productive way. Although this report doesn't drill down into protected characteristics, it is representative of the tenant population as a whole and what effects tenants.

The Yorkshire and Humberside Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Baseline Survey Report (2021) found that many housing providers were working hard to adopt equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) into their organisation, which meant implementing it into their policies, signing up to EDI training and looking at better data usage. The report also highlighted the concern of how many housing providers have not yet established a proper EDI strategy to support staff and tenants. A well outlined EDI strategy within an organisation makes a big difference, as highlighted by Forbes.com 2021.

Organisations such as the Regulator of Social Housing and the National Housing Federation (NHF) have reported on the importance of quality and accurate data collecting. The NHF has recently launched the 'Knowing our Homes' initiative which is aimed at registered providers knowing the condition of their properties and most importantly, the tenants and families living in those homes. As the sector works towards tailored approaches of gathering data to get to know their tenant base, Dr Absalom's recent paper on 'The hidden emotional effects of home encounters and how social landlords can improve the experience' (2024) shows a very interesting perspective on the emotions tenants face when home visits are carried out. As this is a suggested form of data gathering, this report reminds registered providers to be mindful of the tenant living in the home and the concerns they may experience in anticipation of the visit.

The Aareon White Paper (2021) gives a very detailed outline on the positives and challenges that registered providers can face when capturing, storing and using data to improve services and understanding tenants and their needs. It is important to explain to tenants the GDPR process when collecting data to maintain transparency and build a positive relationship. Lack of knowledge about research processes also leads to a distrust of research and apprehension about participation (Gill et al 2012). This maybe another reason to explain why there is low participation from ethnic minority groups, as it also speaks to a lack of trust.

All the literature provided has helped to find root cause analysis of the systemic barriers that have and still do effect tenants from ethnic minority backgrounds. Further research conducted by this project asked direct questions to those effected by these barriers to get better understanding about the impact it has on tenants lives as seen from tenants' feedback.

8. Research Approach and Methodology

8.1 Website Audit

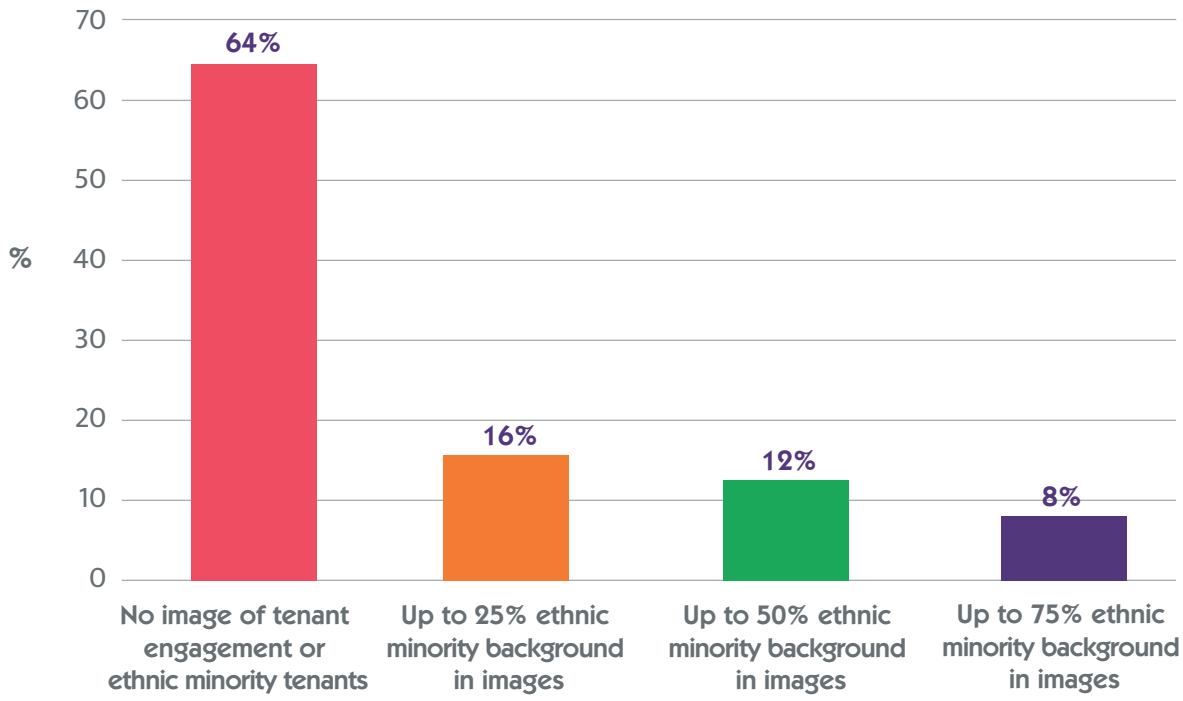
As part of the research a mix of 25 registered providers (housing associations and local authorities) tenant engagement website pages were analysed for ethnic minority images.

The results are below.

It is important to note that there were many organisations who did not have any images of their panels or committees, and in that same respect, the images representing tenants may not have shown tenants of colour. The websites used were from organisations around the country and no isolated geographical location.

What also came out of our findings is the lack of visual representation of ethnic minorities in tenant engagement which highlighted the slogan of 'If you can see it, you can be it.' This is a strong message to diverse tenants and if they are or would feel welcome to be a part of the conversations and a part of their landlords panel or committee.

Representation of Ethnic Minority Tenants on the Engagement Pages of Housing Providers



8.2 Survey

We conducted two surveys to provide baseline data as a foundation for the project: one for tenants and one for staff.

The tenant survey consisted of EDI monitoring and four qualitative questions, which was filled out by **178** tenants.

65% were from housing associations, **23.6%** were from local authorities, **5.1%** from ALMO, **2.8%** from other and **2.8%** don't know, which could mean they are from a co-operative, temporary accommodation, or an organisational change.

The greater tenant response came from Greater London at **12.4%** followed by the West Midlands at **6.7%**. The lowest feedback came from Bedfordshire, Durham (County Durham), Leicestershire, and Merseyside at **2.8%** response rate.

There were **175** staff filled out the staff questionnaire, which consisted of eight qualitative questions, and a few quantitative questions for comparative data. **80%** of those filled out were from housing associations, **10.3%** from local authorities, **5.7%** from ALMO and 4% from other. The highest staff response area was from the West Midlands at **13.7%** followed by Greater London at **11.4%**. The lowest response area were Essex and Tyne and Wear at **2.9%**.

Both surveys had a wide geographical response from around the UK only. All the feedback from the surveys were anonymous in the hope that it would give participant the encouragement to speak freely in their replies, some tenants and staff disclosed their organisation/landlord, but this will remain confidential and GDPR observed. TLF Research were commissioned to script the surveys (see appendix one), capture the data and feedback the findings. The surveys were launched on 5th February 2024 and remained open for three months, The surveys were distributed through LinkedIn, Tpas, Inside Housing, The National Housing Federation (NHF), The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), BME National, Local Authority Building and Maintenance and many more channels including Registered Providers (RP) using a QR code or a link to the questionnaires which was located on the Tpas website.

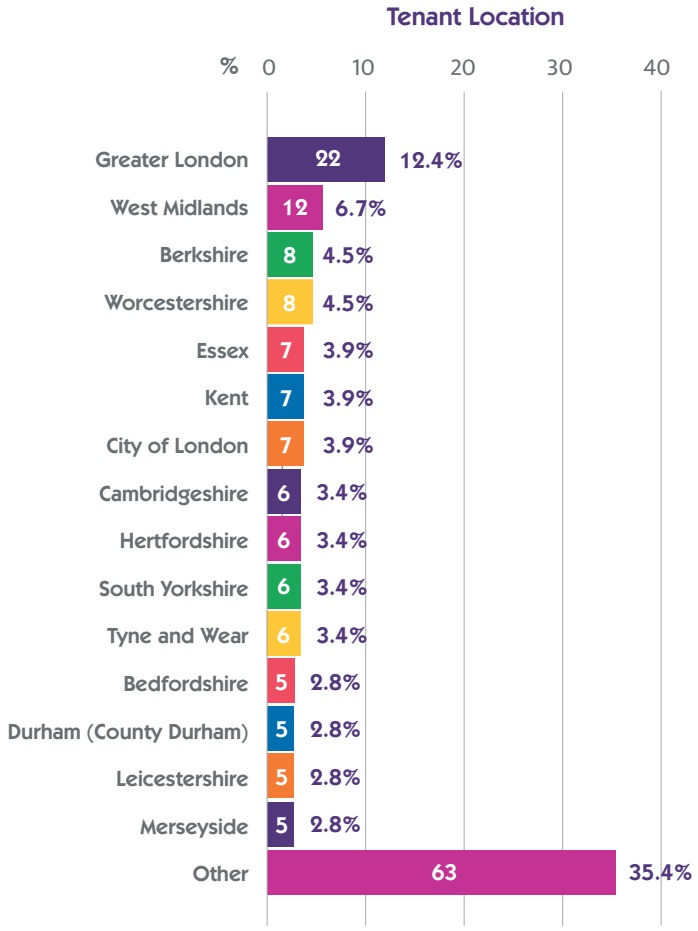
8.3 Focus Groups

Following the surveys, there were three focus group sessions lasting 90 minutes each, which were open to staff and tenants to get a more in-depth analysis of their thoughts and answers. This was done over a three-day period with varied time slots, to provide choice of a suitable time and day for encouraged participation. Two of the focus groups had a mixture of staff and tenants, the final focus group which was on a Friday at 5.30pm had an all tenant turn out, although staff members had booked to attend, all focus groups had an acceptable participation attendance. A running order (See Appendix 2) was planned for each session to keep it consistent, fair, and so it remained in line with the scope of the project to get the most out of the session and for everyone to be able to contribute.

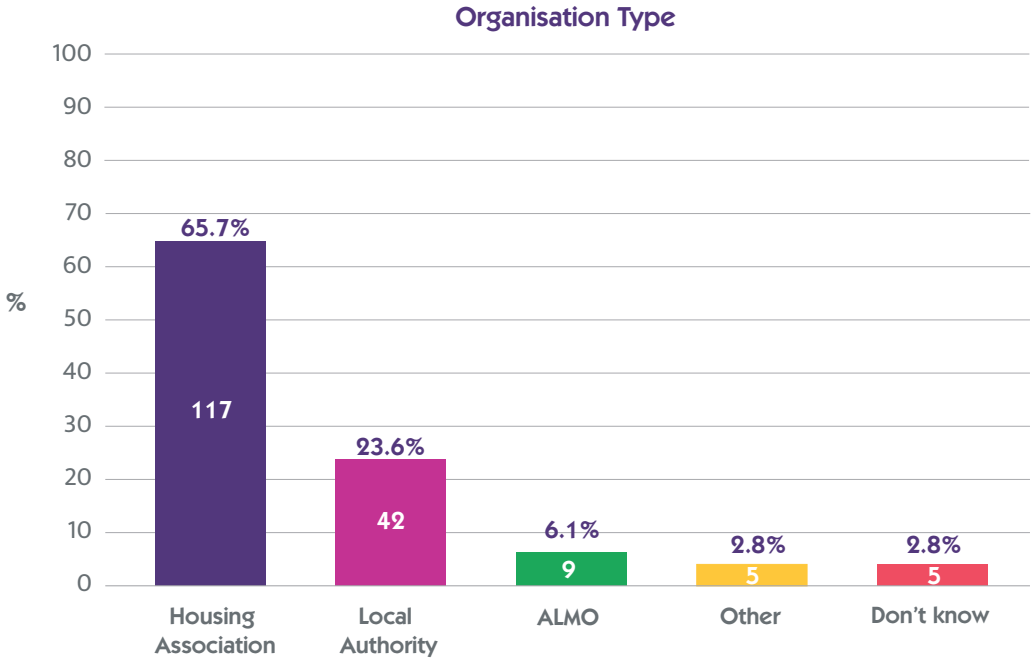
9. Key Findings

This project received an overall survey response of 353 from staff and tenants, with additional feedback received during the three focus group sessions, a black professional's lunch and learn session, additional meetings with landlords and conversations with ethnic minority tenants is all compounded in this report.

There was a good geographical spread of tenants and staff, while majority of those who took part in the project were from housing associations. However the concerns shared by tenants and staff were consistent with both organisational structures.



Tenant Survey



The survey was open from
5th February to 11th May 2024.

178 surveys were completed online.

149 completed and 29 partials.

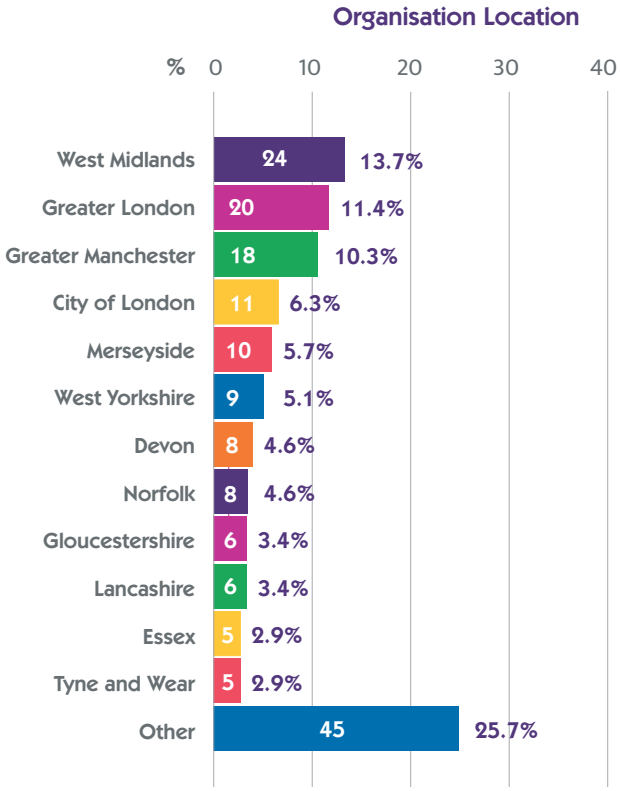
Results are compared to the landlord survey where appropriate.

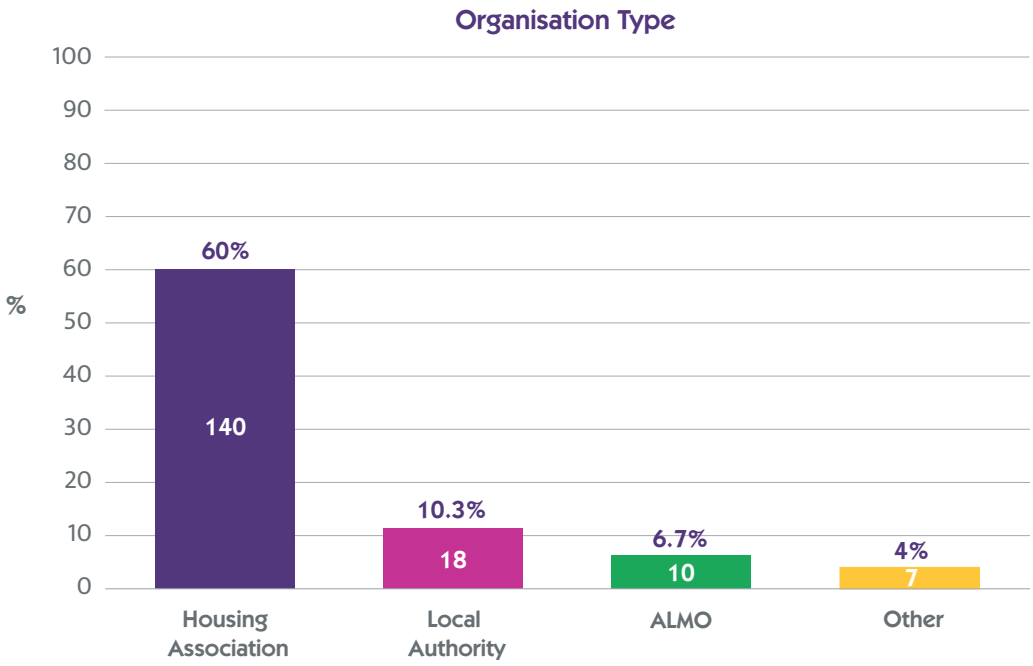
Two in three tenants are
Housing Associations tenants.

There was a good spread of tenants from
different regions.

*28 locations with below 5 responses have been combined to show on the charts

Landlord Survey





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175 surveys were completed online.

107 completed and 68 partials.

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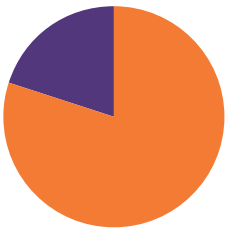


80% of the landlords who participated were Housing Associations.

There was a good spread of landlords from different regions.

*28 locations with below 5 responses have been combined to show on the charts

9.1 Involvement Opportunities and Experiences

Many tenants said they do not participate in formal engagement activities, such as scrutiny panels, committee, board roles or other structured tenant engagement activities for their landlords because they were unaware that opportunities exist or that there are groups, they can get involved in. It was made clear throughout this project that there needs to be better communication, and a more effective marketing and promotional strategy to reach ethnic minorities.

> **"Hold meetings, send out information in other languages, respect the difference of peoples cultures who live in the homes."**

The commitment and time required to get involved and the timing of meetings were also two other practical barriers that tenants highlighted which prevented them from getting involved.

Overall, the continued need for positive communication between tenants and landlords resonated throughout the research as poor communication made tenants feel as though they were being intentionally excluded from having their voices heard, whether through formal engagement or merely speaking to their landlord:

> **"Improve communication, find out what tenants want to get involved in what is important to tenants. We have different needs and different things are important to us. My landlord does some great work in this area however the more we engage the more will be in."**

9.2 Trust and Respect

A number of responses throughout the survey suggested that tenants have tried to get their voices heard by housing providers, but they feel they are not being listened to.

> **"I was previously on the Housing panel via my local council. Due to not being listened to as well as being ignored and my voice being dismissed, I later chose to resign from the panel."**

Many tenants felt that committees and other mechanisms were just a 'tick box exercise' which can lead to tenants feeling a lack of motivation:

> **"I have been [involved] in the past but feel you do not listen to tenants' suggestions or what they have to say. I therefore felt it was a waste of my time."**

Tenants also felt that there was a lack of care and respect afforded to them by their landlords. Feelings of powerlessness: a feeling that nothing changes from these mechanisms:

> **"I don't feel like it would make a change. Tenant panels have been around for some time and nothing changes – in fact it gets worse each year."**

Having a previous negative experience when trying to get involved was also highlighted as a reason for non-engagement.

There is a sense that the way in which tenants are recruited to get involved in these projects can be quite selective on the side of the housing provider, selecting tenants that they know will not provide objections to the work they are wanting to do:

> **"I worked at my housing association for 5 years and know how they like their tenant involvement – over 60's who will agree to anything. They can't handle people challenging."**

> **"Landlords exclude those who may be well informed or reasonably intelligent. Only docile tenants are accepted."**

> **"Micromanaged little groups held [in] the landlord's office and dominated by patronising young housing employees aren't enormously appealing..."**

Trust and respect are one of the most fundamental concerns for both residents and staff. Through years, even decades of an 'us' and 'them' approach to engagement, meaningful collaboration, dialogue, and action has led to some residents receiving poor services and a detachment from their landlord. The importance of building trust amongst residents is a goal all landlords should be working towards. Looking at some of the reasons stated why trust has been broken will give landlords an insight in how they can be more mindful of root causes and perceived behaviours from a resident's perspective.

Residents should also be willing to engage in meaningful, respectful and constructive dialogue with their landlords in the interest of producing quality and efficient services, addressing complaints, decent homes and community cohesion.

9.3 Staff Knowledge and Understanding

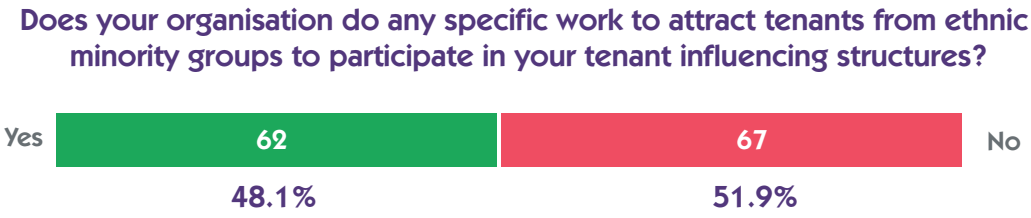
There was concern amongst some staff on how to approach and engage ethnic minority tenants. In some cases, registered providers knew they had to start from the ground up:

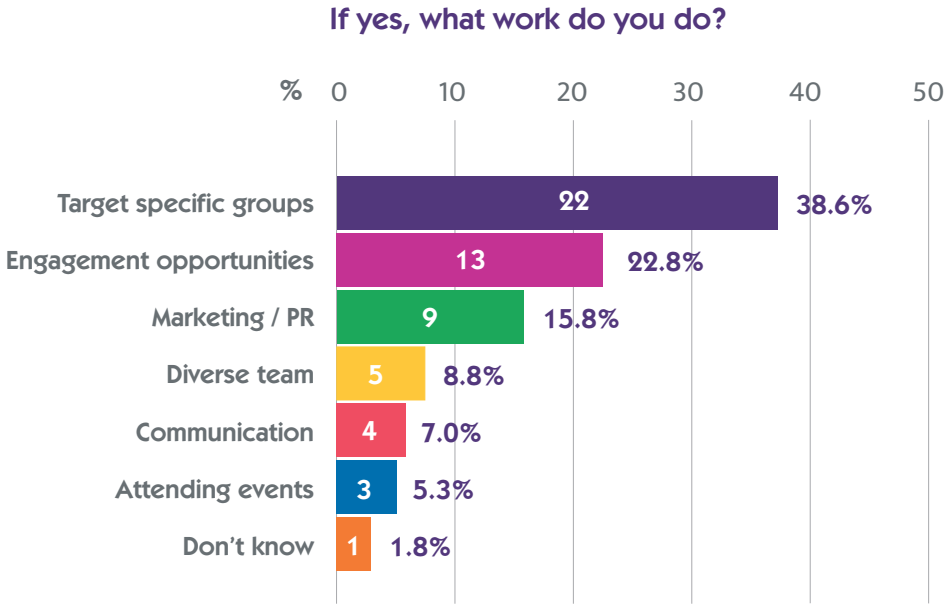
> "First, we need to be clear on our community make up - who and where are our minority communities and tenants. From there, we can build a plan and structure that would ensure that any underrepresented group could be engaged with and supported to become involved."

While others were less sure:

> "I think we can do more targeted work to attract members of ethnic minority communities - however I think we struggle to know how this could be framed & where to start with this. It will be interesting to see if any practical ideas/recommendations come out of this research which can help organisations increase this representation."

> "I have no idea, which is why we are struggling to attract people."





Examples of specific work carried out:

> “Actively seeking volunteers from ethnic minority backgrounds to join the participation groups; circulating this survey among tenants and staff to highlight the issues.”

> “We ensure that the engagement structure we use has enough customer members from ethnic minority groups to represent the groups that make up our tenant base. We do this through targeted recruitment.”

> “We try to offer our engagement opportunities through many channels and have introduced videos and other materials. We also look at where we can collaborate with organisations who may have the reach we don’t currently have.”

9.4 Finance and Resources

With the increase in interest rates, services costs, material costs, and an uptake of services which were originally provided by external agencies, but are no longer available due to reduced funding and budget cuts. Registered providers have adapted additional roles and services for tenants which require funding for training and consultations, amongst other things. Concerns were raised about the finance costs to organisations to reach ethnic minority tenants through targeted work.

> **"Think out of the box. To do this requires more finance which is tight. Could also let the residents lead on recruitment do the recruiting."**
>
> **"I think we could do so much more. But funding for more campaigns, focus groups and events is hard when we are all having to pull back spending. This means most organisations are struggling to have the staff or resources to be putting out targeted recruitment campaigns. I do think that with more staff it would allow us to do more focus groups in specific communities which can then be easily actioned. Going out and asking these communities is vital to then change the way we do things. However, funding is going to be a massive factor at the moment."**

This is an understandable concern, but tenants are asking for more visibility from their landlord in the form of door knocking, making welfare calls, knowing who their housing officer is and feedback time responses. Also, getting to know the tenants living in the property will lead to better tailored services, less financial waste, better use of staff time and resources. The grassroots approach on an authentic scale, rather than a large approach which seems disingenuous was a shared concern from tenants during the focus group sessions.

9.5 Insight and Strategy

61.5% of staff felt their tenant influencing structure was not representative of their overall population. This has a distinct link to data collection which 7.7% of staff feel is of poor quality. Many staff members felt as though stronger data collection could support in shaping service for tenants from ethnic minority backgrounds.

> **"Make connections with local community groups who represent ethnic minority groups and use the EDI data collected from our residents to understand who our tenants are."**
>
> **"We need to have better resident profile data so we can understand where our areas of focus should be and enable us to target and support groups more effectively."**

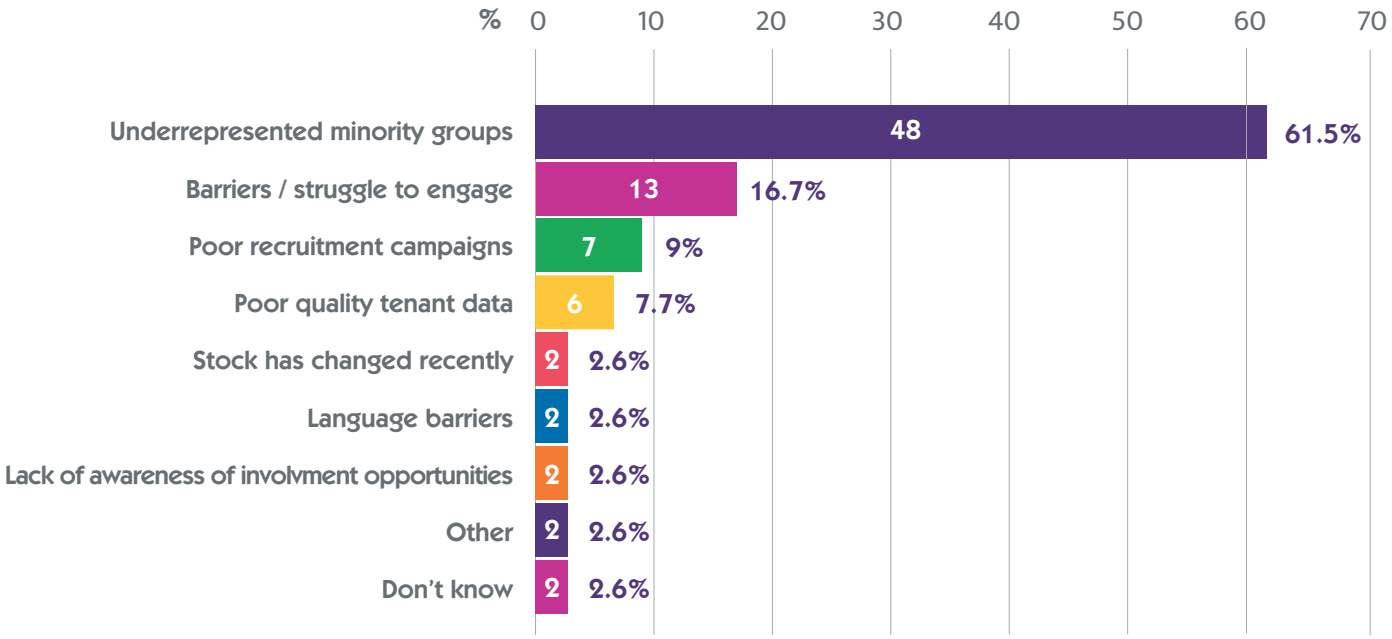
The benefits of strong and accurate data collection means that tenants can correctly identify themselves (Caribbean, Ghanaian, Bangladeshi, Turkish, etc), their needs and those living within the home. This will also identify barriers such as language, literacy, communication preferences, and health issues, to name a few. It is important to have a good data management system that can cross reference tenant needs and information to the relevant people in the organisation and to also carry out regular data checks on tenants as their needs will change as their life changes and societal events may also influence changes to tenants' lives (e.g. cost of living, race riots, changes in government).

If your tenant influencing panel has a diverse representation that does reflect your overall tenant population, there is a better chance of increased tenant feedback, improved services that takes account of diverse tenant needs which will support housing providers to reduce complaints and help to build a stronger tenant base of cohesion.

Over half of organisation say their tenant influencing structure isn't reflective of overall population

Do you consider your organisation's tenant influencing structures are reflective of the ethnic makeup of the overall tenant base?

If no, why do you think it isn't reflective?



*78 comments have been coded into categories

Examples of why their tenant influencing structure isn't reflective of the overall population:

"The demographics of the scrutiny group do not reflect the demographics of the tenant population."

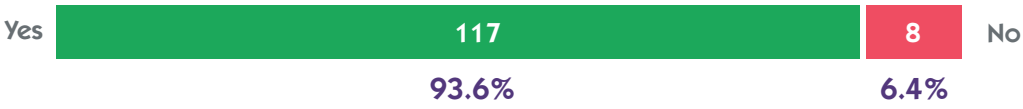
"There are too many barriers present. It takes the organisation too long to develop a strategy and then even longer to carry it out. By that time the make up of tenants change and new barriers develop."

"We have a very small number of ethnically diverse tenants and whilst our Resident's Voice group reflects a wider level of protected characteristics, it would be good to have more ethnic diversity."

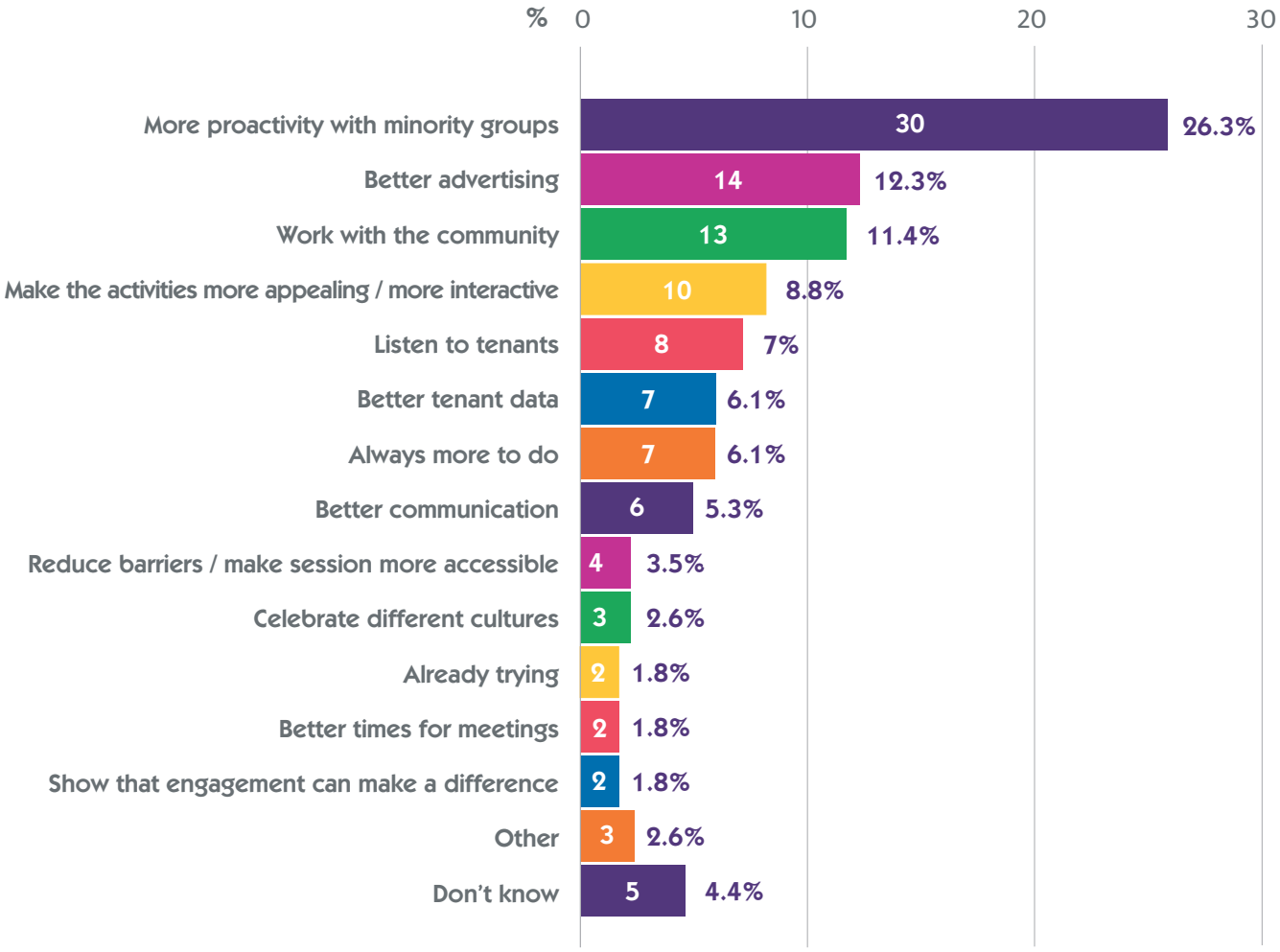
"Lack of representation and lack of diverse recruitment. Lack of senior staff with lack of experience supporting racially minoritised groups / speakers of other languages without proficiency in English. Old style of engagement."

Almost 100% of tenants think that their organisation could do more to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in tenant influencing structures

Do you think your organisation could do more to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in your tenant influencing structures?



If yes, what do you think they could do?



*114 comments have been coded into categories

Examples of what tenants think their organisation could do more of to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in tenant influencing structures:

> “Ensure tenant groups reflect the tenant base and reach out to any directly to explain we need their help etc.”

> “We need to provide tailored support for ethnic minorities to get involved and provide quality input. Some may have language and cultural barriers which prevent them from providing quality input into engagement activities.”

> “More direct campaigns and promotions. Community focus groups but most importantly improve on our insight data on who lives in our homes. Something we feel all landlords need to work on.”

> “Host more community panels and discussion groups to identify community concerns and where improvements can be made for the services which tenants receive.”

It is clear to see from the results that tenants from ethnic minority groups feel detached from their landlord as they don't feel as though tenant engagement is aimed to include their participation. Staff and tenants have agreed that more can be done, but the main question coming from staff members is, what can we do or what more can we do? This shows that ethnic minority tenants do not trust the intentions of their landlords as systemic barriers have made the divide between the tenant and landlord relationship strained.

Some suggested cohesive activities included, a cultural community potluck, supporting or sponsoring cultural events, wider awareness of what the organisation is doing to work with and support tenants. These suggestions were made by tenants, but it is always safe to keep in mind that there is not a one size fits all model. Additional barriers consist in the form of, the size of the organisation, financial budget, location of housing properties of the organisation, and importantly the tenant and organisation relationship.

Looking at the data on page 25 it is clear to see that both tenants and landlords feel that more can be done to strategically increase the level of participation from ethnic minority tenants. Proactively engaging with tenants allows the organisation to be creative in their role reaching out to tenants, as this is rightly followed by the need for better advertising. Building a stronger line of communication with tenants and imbedding it into the strategic planning of the organisation can make sure that this step is not overlooked and making changes more visible for tenants.

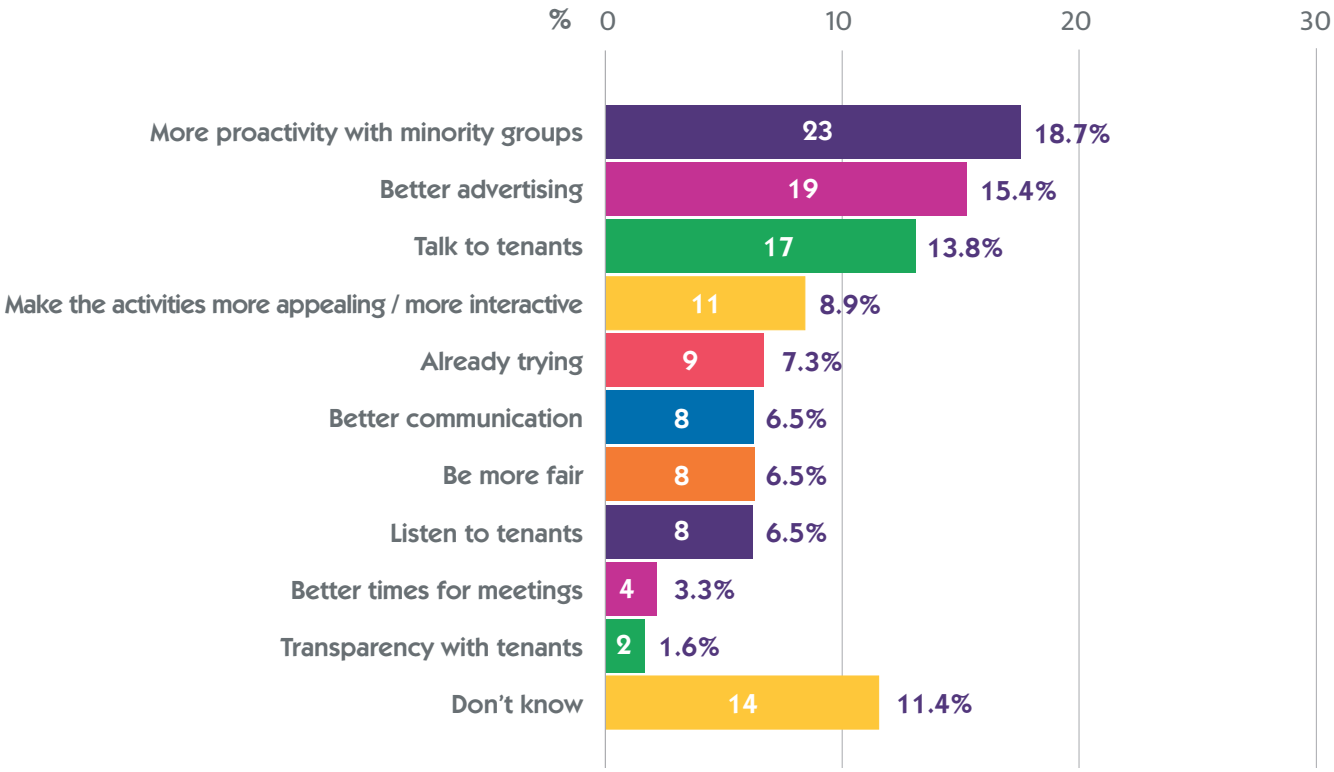
11% of tenants felt they didn't know what their landlord could do to get a more diverse range of tenants involved. This could be that they felt their landlord was doing enough and that it is down to individual choice not to participate, they may feel the relationship with their landlord is so broken it maybe unimaginable how it could be fixed at the moment, or it could be due to a lack of knowledge about the capabilities of what housing providers could do. Hence why better advertising could be a huge benefit to inform tenants and also encourage feedback.

Both tenants and landlords have

Tenants

What do you think your landlord could do to get a more diverse range of tenants involved in tenant participation activities?

If yes, what do you think they could do?

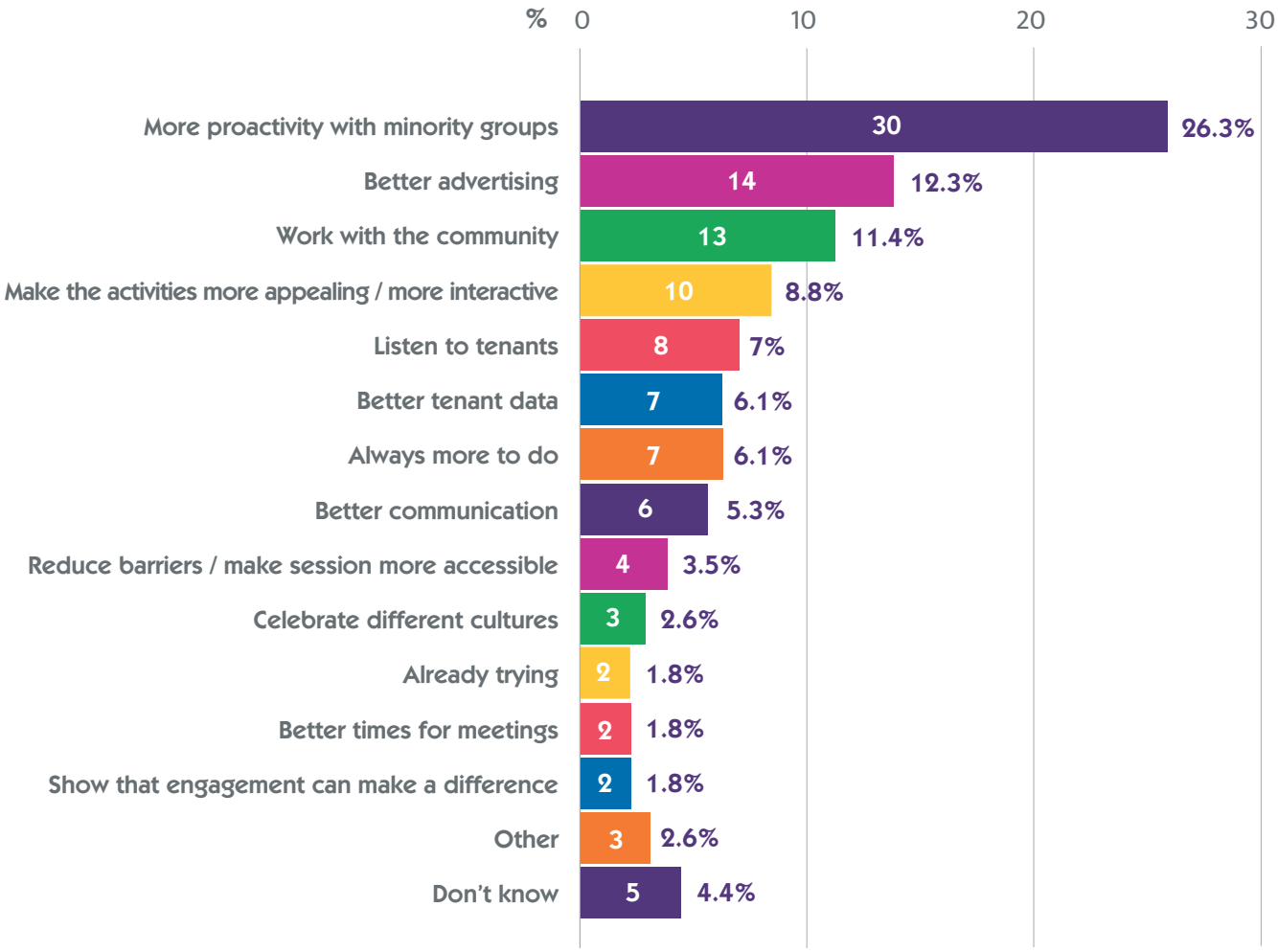


similar ideas for driving participation

Landlords

Do you think your organisation could do more to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in your tenant influencing structures?

If yes, what do you think they could do?



*Comments have been coded into categories

10. Conclusion

The report identifies a lack of up-to-date studies on how systemic barriers affect ethnic minority tenants' participation in formal tenant engagement structures. This research serves as a first step toward understanding these barriers and proposes methods to enhance inclusivity in tenant engagement.

The research shows a need for equitable and measurable changes that needs to happen in the sector. Highlighting and starting conversations on how the sector can be more inclusive and equitable is a start, but that needs to be followed by continuous measurable changes and improvements. Grenfell, Lakanal House and Awaab Ishak, and numerous reports have shown those from ethnic minority backgrounds living in indecent social housing properties. Also, the concern from those working in the sector of what can be done to hear those voices that can be rarely heard.

These concerns have led to The Better Social Housing Review, The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, and Awaab's Law which is to come. The country has seen the need for change, and this can only be encouraged by tenants from ethnic minority backgrounds using their voice to highlight their experiences and perspectives. The outcome of this project is to support social landlords in increasing the number of ethnic minority tenants involved in tenant engagement activities. It is also to help social landlords understand the needs of those from ethnic minority backgrounds and to address the systematic policies and practices in place that negatively and disproportionately affect the

services they receive. This begins by having ALL voices heard including those who have felt suppressed to share their views and lived experiences. For social housing providers to be supported in their role to reach and support tenants from ethnic minority backgrounds and how they can shape their interaction to help build engagement, relationships, and trust.

Numerous leaders in the sector have highlighted the inequalities in the sector. Inside Housing is full of articles by such professionals and those with lived experiences. Ignorance is not an excuse when the evidence and data is available. Change will come through knowledge and action.

So, are we not at the point of action yet as the findings indicate that systemic barriers, such as poor communication, cultural insensitivity, and lack of trust, have left ethnic minority tenants feeling detached from their housing providers. Addressing these issues requires a coordinated effort between landlords, tenants, and the sector as a whole.

11. Recommendations Based on Key Findings

The findings highlight significant barriers to engagement, trust, and inclusivity faced by ethnic minority tenants in social housing. Addressing these challenges will require systemic, strategic, and culturally sensitive approaches that prioritise meaningful involvement and long-term relationship building.

These are the key recommendations to improve engagement, trust, and the quality of services for ethnic minority tenants.

11.1 Improve Communication and Awareness

Recommendation:

- Develop and implement a **targeted marketing and communication strategy** to ensure tenants, especially from ethnic minority backgrounds, are fully aware of formal engagement opportunities such as scrutiny panels, committees, and tenant boards.
- Ensure that communication materials are accessible, including **translations into different languages** and culturally sensitive formats. This may include digital and physical communications, community posters, and information in community spaces.
- **Increase visibility** by engaging in direct outreach such as door knocking, welfare calls, and regular updates about housing services, meetings, and opportunities to get involved.
- Host **regular open meetings and events** to engage tenants who may feel excluded or unaware of opportunities.
- Promote a **two-way feedback loop** where tenants can easily communicate with landlords, and landlords respond in a timely and respectful manner.

11.2 Build Trust and Respect

Recommendation:

- Address tenants' concerns about being ignored or treated disrespectfully by ensuring that all engagement efforts are **genuine, transparent, and action-oriented**.

- Move away from "tick-box" exercises; ensure that tenant feedback is **meaningfully acted upon**. Create visible changes from tenant input to demonstrate that their voices are being heard and respected.
- **Diversify tenant panels** by proactively recruiting tenants from a wide range of backgrounds, including those who may be more likely to challenge the status quo, to ensure a fair representation of the tenant population.
- Foster a **culture of respect** where tenants feel empowered to engage without fear of being marginalized or dismissed. Ensure that staff receive **training on cultural competence** and are equipped to engage with tenants from diverse backgrounds in an inclusive, respectful manner.

11.3 Address Systemic Barriers to Engagement

Recommendation:

- Conduct a **comprehensive review of existing barriers** to ethnic minority tenant participation, focusing on issues like meeting timing, commitment expectations, and lack of outreach.
- **Expand opportunities for flexible engagement** to accommodate tenants with varying time commitments and availability. This could include evening meetings, virtual meetings, and less formal opportunities for engagement.
- Build a **platform for informal engagement** that allows tenants to share feedback in less formal settings, such as community events, cultural gatherings, and social activities, which can also help strengthen relationships and reduce barriers to trust.

11.4 Develop Staff Knowledge and Cultural Competency

Recommendation:

- Invest in **cultural competence training** for all staff to help them better understand and engage with ethnic minority tenants.
- Develop internal resources and guidelines to ensure that staff are equipped with the knowledge to communicate effectively and sensitively with diverse communities.
- Encourage staff to engage in **community outreach** activities, such as attending local cultural events, partnering with community organisations, and proactively meeting with ethnic minority tenants to better understand their unique needs and concerns.

11.5 Strengthen Data Collection and Analysis

Recommendation:

- Implement **better data collection systems** to accurately reflect the diversity of the tenant population. This should include capturing ethnicity, language preferences, cultural needs, and specific challenges faced by tenants.
- Regularly update and **cross-reference data** to ensure that tenants' evolving needs are captured, especially in response to changes like economic shifts, health crises, or community tensions.
- Use this data to create a more **targeted and personalised approach** to tenant engagement and services. Data should inform decisions about where and how to reach out to underrepresented communities and which specific interventions or services are most needed.

11.6 Increase Resources and Funding for Targeted Engagement

Recommendation:

- Address concerns over limited budgets by seeking **external funding** or partnerships to support outreach and engagement activities. Explore collaboration with local community organisations that can help amplify outreach efforts.
- Prioritise **resource allocation** for staff training, outreach campaigns, and targeted engagement initiatives that specifically focus on ethnic minority tenants. These investments can lead to more effective and meaningful engagement with tenants.
- Encourage tenants to **lead recruitment** efforts or co-creation engagement activities, which could increase buy-in and ensure the approach is culturally relevant.

11.7 Implement Community-Led Initiatives

Recommendation:

- Encourage tenants to take a **leading role** in shaping engagement efforts, such as through organising focus groups, cultural events, or tenant panels. This will ensure that engagement strategies are not only inclusive but also community-driven.
- Support **ethnic minority tenant networks** or advocacy groups to facilitate a more authentic and peer-led approach to engagement. These groups can provide valuable insights and act as intermediaries to bridge the gap between tenants and landlords.
- Create **cultural events and community activities** (e.g., potlucks, festivals, or cultural sponsorships) that allow tenants to connect with each other and their housing providers in more informal and positive settings.

11.8 Monitor and Measure Progress

Recommendation:

- Establish **clear metrics** for success in engaging ethnic minority tenants. This could include participation rates in tenant panels, feedback response rates, and improvements in tenant satisfaction.
- **Regularly review** and report on progress in increasing ethnic minority representation in tenant engagement activities. Adjust strategies as needed based on tenant feedback and ongoing analysis of engagement outcomes.

11.9 Establishment of the T.A.B.L.E Principles

Recommendation:

- To provide a structured approach for registered providers to engage ethnic minority tenants more effectively:

T Tailored Training

Equip staff with training to understand and engage with diverse communities.

A Actively Engaging Communities

Encourage direct interaction between housing providers and ethnic minority groups by supporting community initiatives.

B Bringing Everyone into the Conversation

Ensure that engagement activities include the voices of all tenant groups, especially underrepresented ethnic minorities.

L Listening to Voices

Collect and act upon feedback from tenants to ensure their experiences and knowledge shape housing decisions.

E Ethnic Minorities

Recognise the unique needs of ethnic minority groups and ensure their participation in all aspects of tenant engagement.

12. References

1. Aareon (2021).
   The significant role of data in the future of social housing.
2. Absalom, H. (2024).
   The hidden emotional effects of home encounters and how social landlords can improve the experience.
3. Baxter, D., Elliot, J., Rogaly, K. (2021).
   What's causing structural racism in housing. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
4. Preece, J., Robbins, G., Robinson, D. (2022).
   Race Equality in Housing: A Review of the Policy Approach in England, Scotland, and Wales.
5. Yorkshire and Humberside Chief Executives Forum (2021).
   Yorkshire and Humberside Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Baseline Survey Report.

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix One: Tenant and Staff Questions Outline

Landlord Summary

Over half believe that their tenant influencing structures aren't reflective of the ethnic makeup

The majority state underrepresentation of minority groups as the main reason for the structures not being representative.

Landlords believe representative structures enrich decision making

Landlords believe that having tenant influencing structures that are representative of the overall tenant make-up helps to gain a better understanding of tenants' needs which in turn helps to make better decisions.

Two thirds of landlords stated that they collect data on participation in the tenant influencing structures.

Landlords were collecting data on how many ethnic minority tenants participate in the tenant influencing structures.

Under half of landlord's proactively try to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups

Landlord's undertake specific work to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in their tenant influencing structures and do this by targeting specific groups to try and boost uptake and participation.

80% of the landlord's who participated were Housing Associations

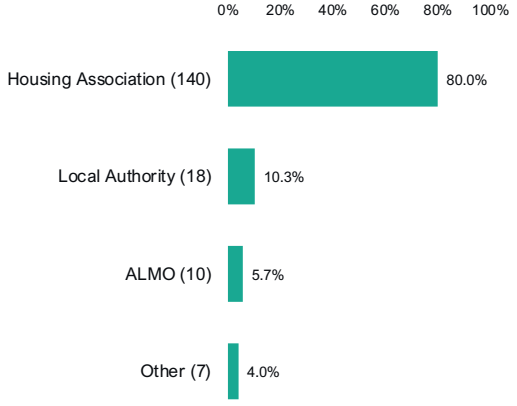
Based on information collected during the survey.

The survey was open from 5th February to 11th May.

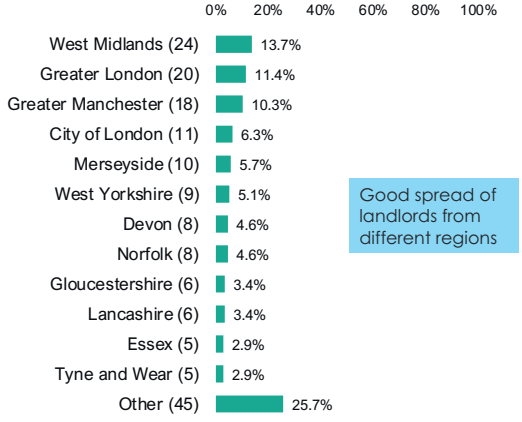
175 surveys were completed online.
107 completed and 68 partials

Results are compared to the tenants survey where appropriate.

Organisation Type



Organisation Location



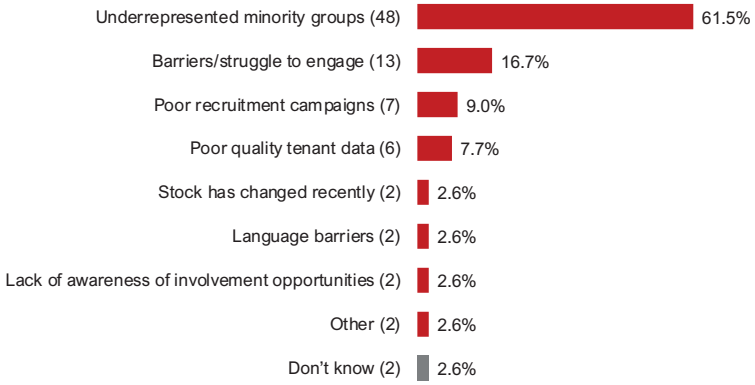
Good spread of landlords from different regions

Sample size shown in (). 24 locations with below five responses have been combined to show on the chart.

Over half of organisations say their tenant influencing structure isn't reflective of overall population

Do you consider your organisation's tenant influencing structures reflective of the ethnic makeup of the overall tenant base?

If no: Why do you think it isn't reflective?



"The demographics of the scrutiny group do not reflect the demographics of the tenant population."

"We have a very small number of ethnically diverse tenants and whilst our Resident's Voice group reflects a wider level of protected characteristics, it would be good to have more ethnic diversity."

"There are too many barriers present. It takes the organisation too long to develop a strategy and then even longer to carry it out. By that time the make up of tenants change and new barriers develop."

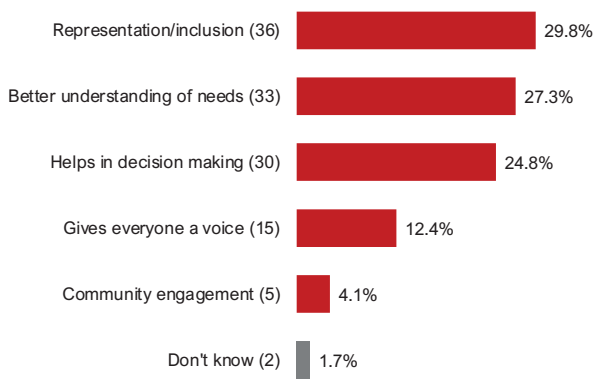
"Lack of representation and lack of recruitment plan to diversify. Lack of senior staff with lack of experience of supporting racially minoritised groups/ speakers of other languages w/o proficiency in English. Old style of engagement."

Sample size shown in (). 78 comments have been coded into categories.

Representation/inclusion and a better understanding of needs are mentioned as the main benefits of having tenant influencing structures that reflect the ethnic makeup of the overall tenant base

Do you collect data on how many ethnic minority tenants participate in your organisations tenant influencing structures?

In your opinion, what are the benefits of having tenant influencing structures that reflect the ethnic makeup of the overall tenant base?



"The more representative an influencing structure the better to ensure services work for an organisation's customers. Challenges and barriers faced by diverse groups within the overall tenant base can be unknown where these groups aren't represented and will remain, so where that's the case as an organisation won't have the understanding to tackle them."

"Broader understanding of the issues faced by people in the community which leads to greater understanding and better practice across an organisation."

"Diversity of thought, which helps us to make better informed decisions."

Sample size shown in (). 121 comments have been coded into categories.

Less than half of the organisations do work to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in tenant influencing structures

Does your organisation do any specific work to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in your tenant influencing structures?

If yes: What work do you do?

"Actively seeking volunteers from ethnic minority backgrounds to join the participation groups; circulating this survey among tenants and staff to highlight the issues."

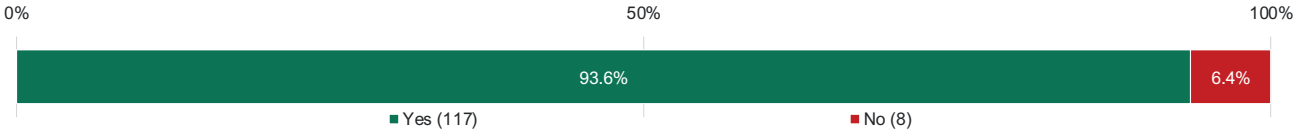
"We ensure that the engagement structure we use has enough customer members from ethnic minority groups to represent the groups that make up our tenant base. We do this through targeted recruitment."

"We try to offer our engagement opportunities through many channels and have introduced videos and other materials. We also look at where we can collaborate with organisations who may have the reach we don't currently have."

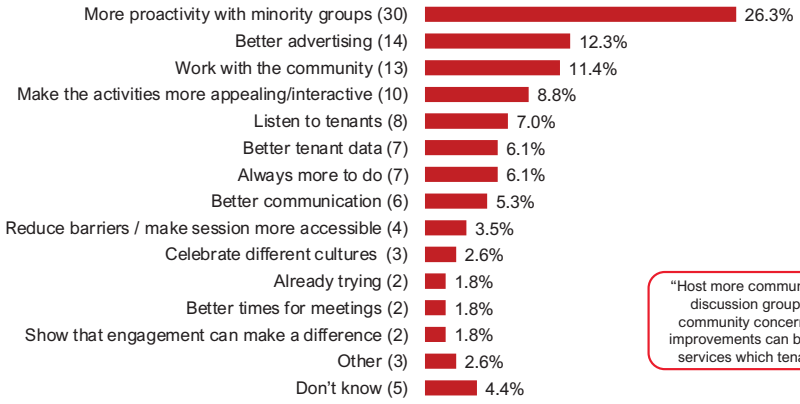
Sample size shown in (). 57 comments have been coded into categories.

Almost 100% of tenants think that their organisation could do more to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in tenant influencing structures

Do you think your organisation could do more to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in your tenant influencing structures?



If yes: What do you think they could do?



"Ensure tenant groups reflect the tenant base and reach out to any directly to explain we need their help etc."

"We need to provide tailored support for ethnic minorities to get involved and provide quality input. Some may have language and cultural barriers which prevent them from providing quality input into engagement activities."

"Host more community panels and discussion groups to identify community concerns and where improvements can be made for the services which tenants receive."

"More direct campaigns and promotions. Community focus groups but most importantly improve on our insight data on who lives in our homes. Something we feel all landlords need to work on."

Sample size shown in (). 114 comments have been coded into categories.

TENANTS

Tenant Summary

Almost three-quarters of tenants participate in activities with the majority participating in customer voice panel, scrutiny panel or tenant committee.

Participation is lower amongst non-white ethnic groups but yet this group of tenants are more likely to believe that landlords should do more to attract a diverse range of tenants.

Just over 1 in 4 do not currently participate
and the main reasons for not getting involved are; a lack of awareness and generally apathy where tenants don't believe that their participation will drive any action.

Both tenants and landlords are aligned
in their view that landlords should proactively try harder to attract more diverse participation

Two in three tenants are Housing Associations tenants

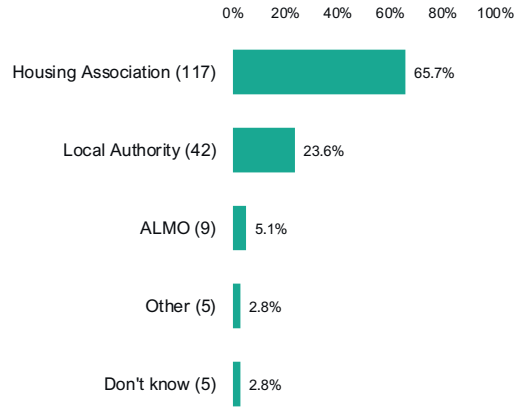
Based on information collected during the survey.

The survey was open from 5th February to 11th May.

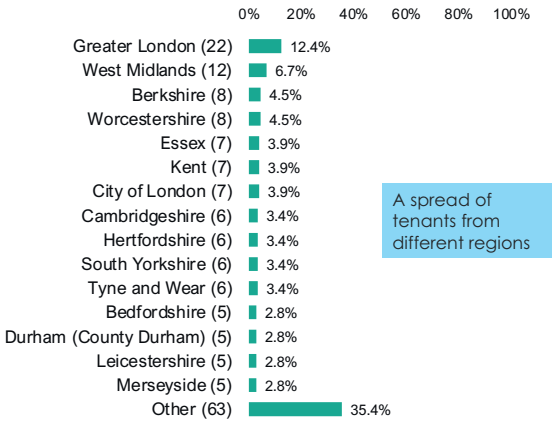
178 surveys were completed online. 149 completed and 29 partials

Results are compared to the landlord survey where appropriate.

Organisation Type



Tenant Location



A spread of tenants from different regions

Sample size shown in (). 28 locations with below five responses have been combined to show on the chart.

The survey captured a diverse sample of tenants

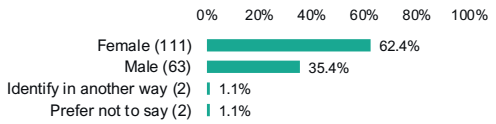
Based on information collected during the survey.

The survey was open from 5TH February to 11th May.

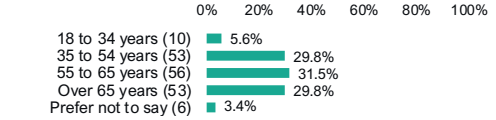
178 surveys were completed online. 149 completed and 29 partials

Results are compared to the landlord survey where appropriate.

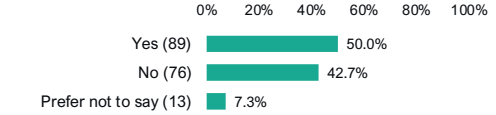
Gender



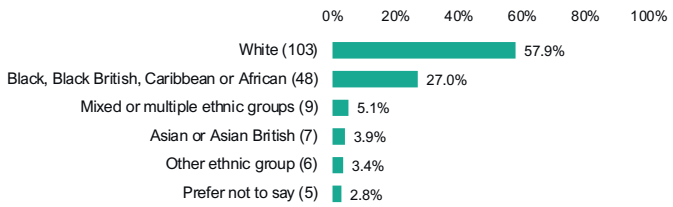
Age



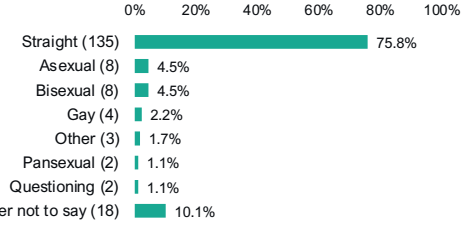
Disability



Ethnicity



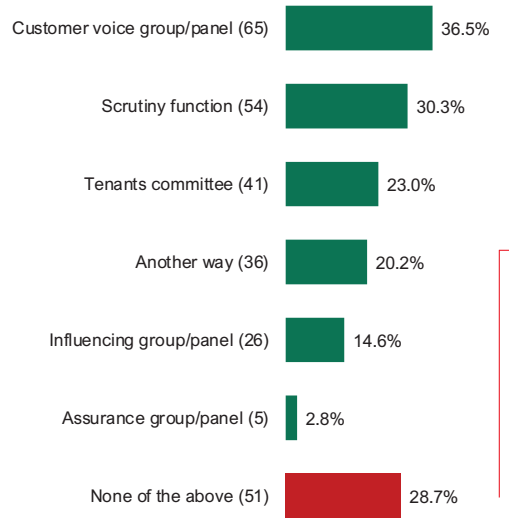
Sexuality



Sample size shown in ().

Almost three-quarters of tenants participate in activities

As a tenant do you participate in any of the different structures or activities?



Another way examples

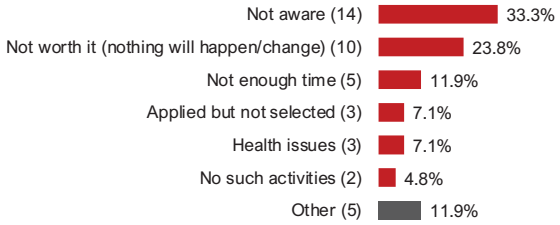
"Campaign Group."

"Recently taken part in a diversity group meeting, in a collaboration between my local housing SLH and Birmingham City University."

"Represent Stroud District Council on the Social Housing Quality Panel for the Government."

"Tenant Member of Council Housing Management Board."

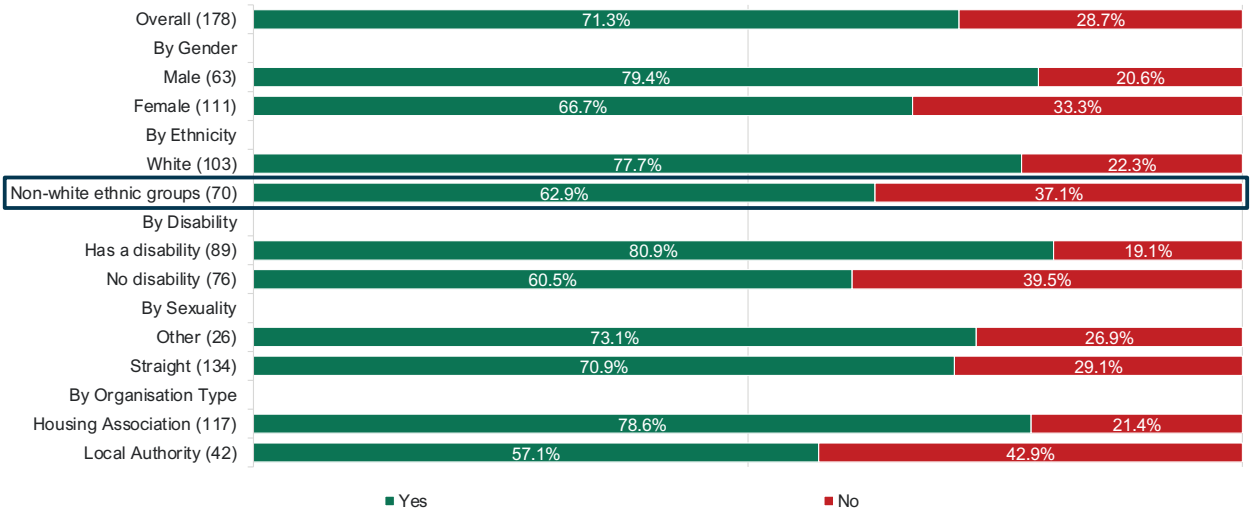
If you don't participate in any of those structures or activities, can you tell us why not?



Sample size shown in (). Tenants could select more than one option so might not add up to 100%.

Ethnicity minority groups are less like to participate in activities

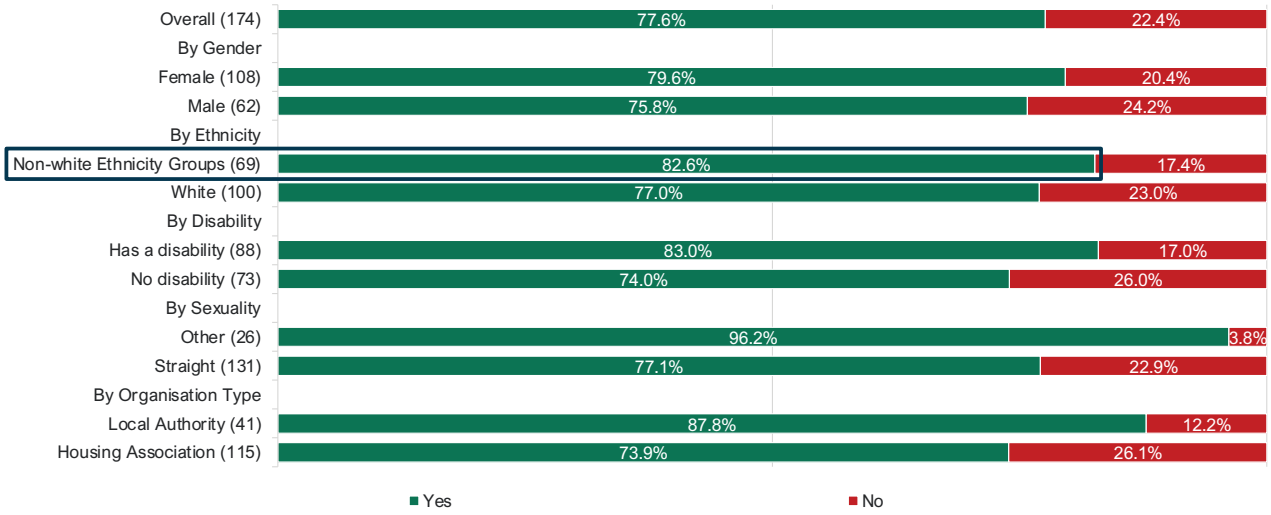
As a tenant do you participate in any of the different structures or activities?



Sample size shown in ()

Over three quarters of tenants think their landlord can do more to attract a diverse range of tenants, and this increases for ethnic minority groups

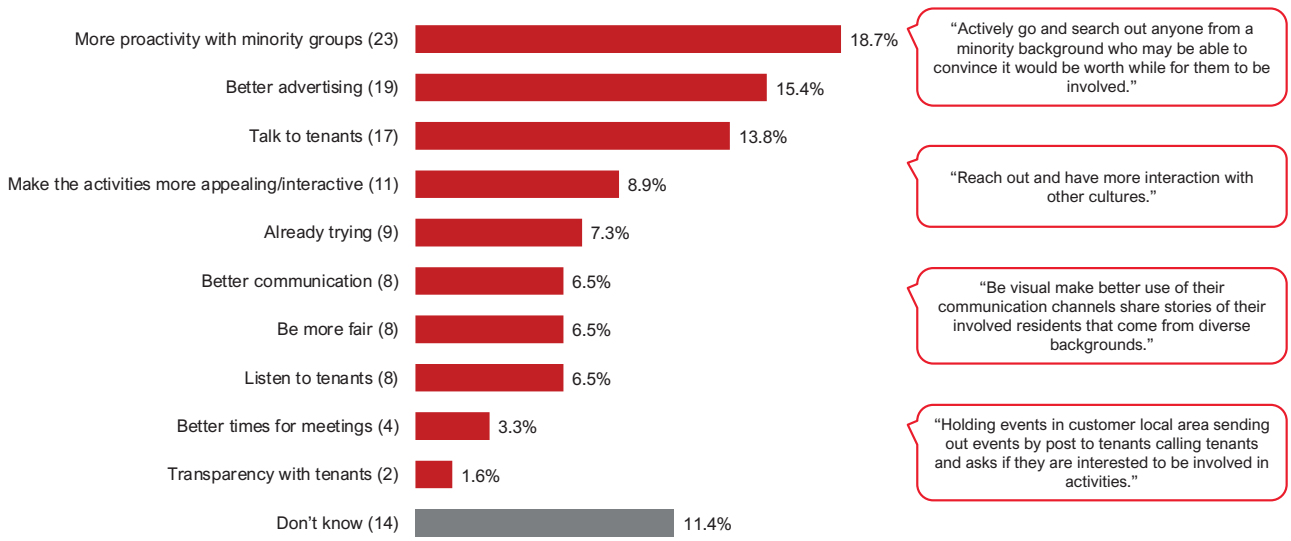
Do you think your landlord should do more to attract a diverse range of tenants such as those from different ethnic backgrounds to participate more in the activities that help to shape their decision?



Sample size shown in ()

Comments suggest that more proactivity with minority groups and better advertising is something that landlords could do to get tenants involved

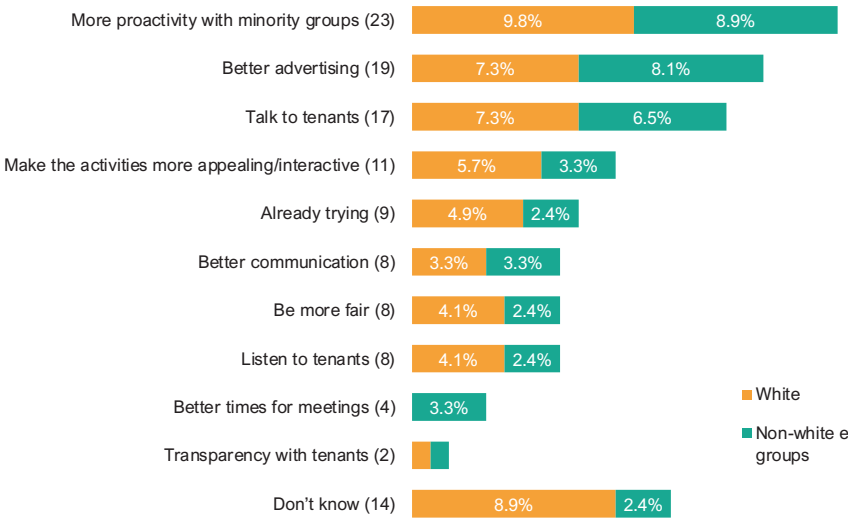
What do you think your landlord could do to get a more diverse range of tenants involved in tenant participation activities?



Sample size shown in (). 123 comments have been coded into categories.

Ideas for encouraging participation remain similar across different ethnic groups

What do you think your landlord could do to get a more diverse range of tenants involved in tenant participation activities?



"Actively go and search out anyone from a minority background who may be able to convince it would be worth while for them to be involved."

"Reach out and have more interaction with other cultures."

"Be visual make better use of their communication channels share stories of their involved residents that come from diverse backgrounds."

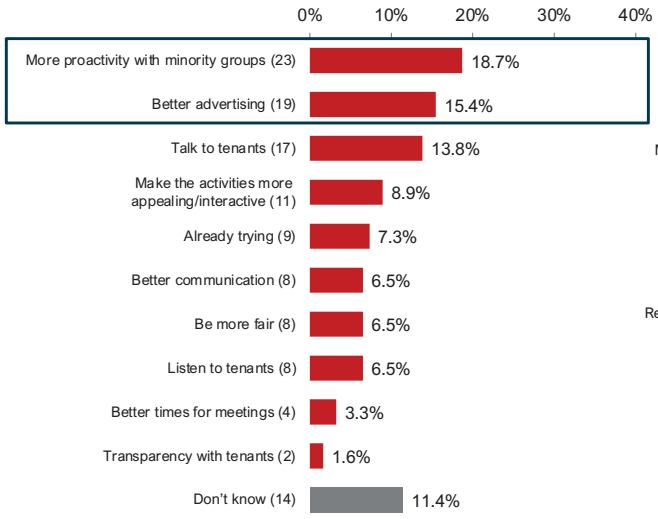
"Holding events in customer local area sending out events by post to tenants calling tenants and asks if they are interested to be involved in activities."

Sample size shown in (). 123 comments have been coded into categories.

Both tenants and landlords have similar ideas for driving participation

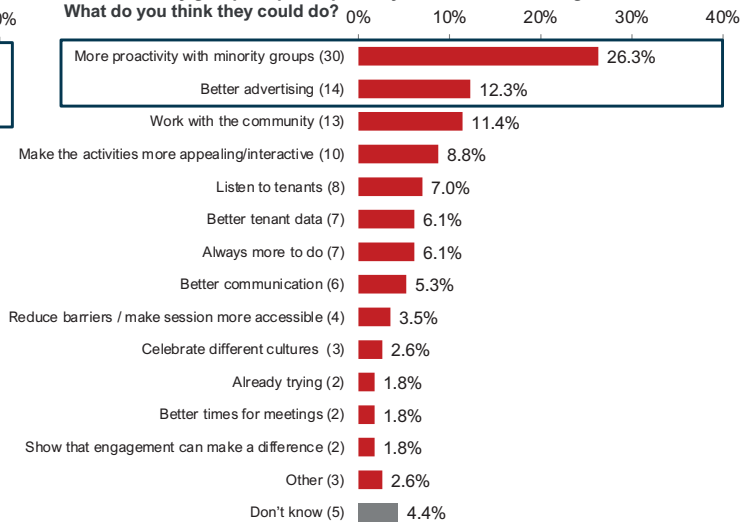
Tenants

What do you think your landlord could do to get a more diverse range of tenants involved in tenant participation activities?



Landlords

Do you think your organisation could do more to attract tenants from ethnic minority groups to participate in your tenant influencing structures? What do you think they could do?



Sample size shown in (). Comments have been coded into categories.

13.2 Appendix Two: Focus Group Running Sheet

Introduction	
Key point	**Content - 15 minutes maximum**
Welcome and Introductions	Welcome the participants to the session and thank them for attending. Introduce yourself and the others in the Research Team: • Moderator Kai who will be asking the Focus Groups Questions • Assistants: Gareth/Louise who will be recording key points and making notes Ask the participants to introduce themselves and say where they are from and why they signed up for this.
Confidentiality and Recording of the session	Explain session will be recorded for research purposes only. The video or transcribe will not be shared or made available to anyone outside the research team. Safe space to speak out – what is said in the group stays within the group. Do not have to say who your organisation/landlord is.
Consent	Remind the group that they don't have to answer anything they are uncomfortable with and can stop at any time.
Ground rules	• Explain ground rules. • Participants to use the chat or hands up function to indicate they want to contribute. • Cameras on always is possible. • No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view. • Only one person speaking at a time. • No interruptions. • You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views.
Any questions???	• Check everyone happy and there are no questions before we get going. Hand over to Kai.

Focus Group Background and Questions	
Key point	**Content - 60 minutes maximum**
Background	• Describe where research idea for project came from. • Poll and Give information about the survey i.e. short key headlines of what we know already. • Explain purpose of Focus groups so dig deeper, listen to peoples' experiences, explore solutions, discuss ideas.
Questions	**Involvement:** • As a member of staff, what have been the challenges you have faced in recruiting more diverse tenants to be part of your formal engagement structures and what would make it easier in your opinion? • As a tenant have you faced any barriers or problems when it comes to getting involved? What would make it easier? **Methods of Engagement** • As a tenant/staff member, what type of methods/ activities would be appealing and encourage you to get involved? **Accountability/embedding activity:** • If you were the CEO or boss what one thing would you do to ensure that engagement is more diverse, inclusive and representative? (What could/should be done to ensure that any recommendations from this work are not considered as just a 'tick box' exercise?)

Concluding	
Key point	**Content - 15 minutes maximum**
Summary of key points	• Provide a summary of the key points you discussed, noting any highlights. **NB:** The moderator may invite the assistants to participate in this part of the discussion.
Final question	• Broad, open-ended question that provides participants the opportunity to raise anything that's been missed in the discussion
Next steps	• Participants can E mail any additional thoughts and comments to us info@tpas.org.uk and and we will include these in our findings. • Clarify the next steps, including when and how you will share the results.
Thank You and Close	

13.3 Appendix Three: Useful reading and signposting

- Action For Trustee Racial Diversity UK. https://atrd.group/
- Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN).
- Denedo, M. and Ejiogu, A. (2022). Stigma and Social Housing in England: Feedback on the consultation responses. Durham University/ Newcastle University.
- Forde. J. (2021), 'Social housing has a black history'. Curo Group. https://www.curo-group.co.uk/news/news-stories/social-housing-has-a-black-history/
- Friends Families and travellers. https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/
- Homelessness Amongst Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities State of the Nation Report. Heriot Watt University, 2022.
- The Rainbow Project. LGBTQIA+ Migrant, POC and Ethnic Minorities Support. https://www.rainbow-project.org/advocacy-service/lgbtqia-migrant-poc-and-ethnic-minorities-support/
- Writing about ethnicity. https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity

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