Waverley Borough Council Scrutiny Review

Council Housing: Pride or Prejudice

A Review Report of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

February 2019

Task and Finish Group Members:

Councillor Liz Townsend (Chairman)
Councillor Richard Seaborne
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Adrian Waller (part) (Tenants' Panel)
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Chairman's Foreword

My heartfelt thanks to elected members from the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, officers and members of our Tenants' Panel who formed the 'Pride or Prejudice' task and finish group. They have all contributed to this report with commitment, enthusiasm and sensitivity and with the clear intent that this piece of work should be a springboard for change.

The Grenfell Tower disaster on 14 June 2017 resulting in the tragic loss of 72 lives, affecting countless numbers of people, rightly drew the focus of the nation firmly to the condition of social housing, how housing providers serve their tenants, and the prejudice social housing tenants face.

Following this national awakening, the Green Paper 'A new deal for social housing' was published and presented to Waverley's Housing Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee in September 2018.

As a housing provider to nearly 5,000 tenants, the Committee felt that it was crucial that the Council's response to the Green Paper consultation should be informed by the voices of our tenants.

We set out to establish the extent and causes of prejudice towards tenants in the borough, and to also discover if there were areas which our tenants were proud of. The Council Housing: Pride or Prejudice task and finish group was formed.

Our research has concentrated on the insights and experiences of our tenants and compared these to the opinion of non-tenant groups, including staff, Council members, contractors and other residents of the borough.

From these studies, the group has put forward recommendations with the aim of improving and developing our services in order to mitigate the effects of stigma and to communicate and educate residents of Waverley about the vital role and value of social housing.

As the Chairman of this Group I am delighted that we have grasped the opportunity to really investigate and tackle this underlying issue and sincerely hope that the recommendations we have proposed are taken forward to develop the services our tenants receive and improve public understanding of social housing.

Councillor Liz Townsend
Chairman of the 'Council Housing: Pride or Prejudice Task and Finish Group'

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the study

To identify if there was any existing prejudice against social housing within the borough and to understand how tenants view their homes in order to develop services to both promote pride, and tackle causes of any stigma. Additionally, a further aim of the study was to identify barriers to accessing social housing which may result from, or reinforce, prejudice or stigma.

Main findings

Despite the data gathered being significantly skewed towards respondents aged over 51, a wide-ranging and useful data set was collected.

The study found that social housing is perceived positively amongst the general population, with its affordability being its most associated attribute. Social housing being a home for life was a common association amongst tenants, likely due to the high proportion of tenants on a secure tenancy.

The data provide an interesting insight into assumptions about social housing tenants. Both tenants and respondents to the public survey (referred to as non-tenants) had preconceptions about who lives in social housing, with the idea that professionals do not live in social housing popular amongst both groups.

The familiar assumption that one can tell if a property is social housing just by its external appearance was brought out in the data. Coupled with the views of some respondents (that social housing is poorly maintained and rundown) the importance of good design and management of properties is very evident.

The belief that social housing is a valuable but diminishing resource that should be allocated to those most in need was held by many respondents. Some respondents recognised the lack of affordability of housing in Waverley and expressed concern that many people could not afford to rent privately or own a home, however they also thought that these same people would not be considered as a priority for a social housing property.

The research highlights some of the misconceptions of respondents around social housing, particularly around eligibility and allocation policy but also about the economic activity of social housing tenants. Most respondents overestimated the proportion of unemployed social housing tenants and household income generally.

Tenant respondents were asked about the things they liked about being a council tenant with 'location [of their property]' being the most selected. They were also asked about what they disliked the most about being a council tenant, with 'poor maintenance of outside areas' the most selected.

This issue have been addressed in the recommendations emanating from this report. It is encouraging to see that there were by comparison many more answers about the positive elements of being a council tenant.

In terms of tenant experience of stigma, over 50 tenants provided examples of when they had been made to feel uncomfortable because of their housing tenure. As well as providing examples of the prejudice of colleagues and friends, some tenants said they had experienced poor or inadequate service from Waverley officers and contractors.

Tenant respondents were asked about their view of how the media portrays social housing tenants. It was clear from the responses that they were more likely to have seen negative stories compared to positive stories. Many of the comments referenced the perpetuation of harmful and false stereotypical images of social housing tenants.

Conclusions

Misconceptions around the allocation policy and eligibility criteria have been identified through the research, highlighting the importance of making social housing more accessible to all eligible groups and communicating this to a wider audience..

The importance of maintaining properties to a high standard has been reinforced by the research undertaken, with poorly maintained homes featuring as a factor in stigma towards social housing.

The skewed age profile of the respondents should be taken into account when drawing conclusions from the data but overall a useful set of data has been collected from this study, providing insight into how social housing is perceived in Waverley and a general picture of how tenants view their homes.

Whilst the research clearly indicates that stigma and prejudice against social housing exists, it also shows that it is a valued resource, the strengths of which are recognised and valued by residents of all tenures across the borough. Additionally, the research identified a strong desire amongst respondents for more social housing to be built in order to address the disparity between supply and demand and help tackle affordability issues.

Recommendations

The Group has made 18 recommendations in order to address the issues raised within the research, ensure the services delivered to tenants continue to improve and all those eligible are able to access social housing.

Introduction

Background

In August 2018, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy of 14 June 2017, the Government published a consultation paper on social housing, 'Green Paper: a new deal for social housing' (the Paper). The Paper was part of a wider national conversation about the huge shortage of housing in the UK and highlighted a much-needed national debate about the condition of social housing and its role within society. It concentrated on five main principles, which are touched upon throughout this report, listed below:

- Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

During 2018 the Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) carried out its own extensive research into the role and purpose of social housing in the UK and launched the 'Rethinking Social Housing' report[1] in June. The report states that 65% of the general public that were surveyed agreed that the negative view of people that live in social housing is unfair and it emphasises the positive contributions social housing makes to society, both socially and economically.

As the landlord of nearly 5,000 homes, Waverley Borough Council (the Council) benefits from an Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee dedicated to scrutinising and developing both its own housing provision and housing of other providers within the borough. After being briefed on the Paper and the CIH report, the Housing O&S Committee set up a task and finish group (the Group) to support the Council's vision of making Waverley 'a place where our residents can take pride in their communities…that is supported by quality public services'[2]. Aligned to this vision and the corporate goals for the Housing service, the Committee wanted to not only recognise the strengths of social housing but also to learn about the issues that affect social housing tenants. The recommendations of this final report are rooted in the findings of research carried out across the borough and align with the corporate goals within the Council's Corporate Strategy.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to identify whether or not there was any existing prejudice against social housing within the borough by understanding how it is viewed by residents. The Group aimed to learn about the factors influencing tenants'

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[1] Chartered Institute for Housing, 'Rethinking Social Housing: Final Report', June 2018. http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Final%20Rethinking%20social%20housing%20report.pdf

[2] Waverley Borough Council, Corporate Strategy 2018 -2023, July 2018. http://www.waverley.gov.uk/downloads/file/6351/waverley_borough_council_corporate_strategy_2018-2023

views of their homes, with the ultimate goal of developing services which promote pride in them and, as a result, tackle causes of any existing prejudice.

An immediate benefit of reducing prejudice, anticipated by the Group, would come from generating a more favourable perception of social housing, in order to help attract applications from essential local workers in key professions who might otherwise be unable to afford to live in good quality housing in the borough. The Waverley Economic Development Strategy[3] identified low levels of affordable housing as a reason for the difficulty in recruiting workers who live in the borough, which in turn inhibits the maintenance or growth of a thriving service economy. Waverley has granted permission for 2070 affordable homes since the beginning of 2014/15 and the impact of this is yet to be measured in terms of economic benefit.

In order to achieve the goals of the review, the study began by conducting research into the perception of social housing and the experience of social housing tenants. A further aim of the study was to identify any barriers to accessing social housing which may result from, or reinforce, any prejudice or stigma. This report compares perceptions of social housing with the experiences of those who live in it. The outcomes of the study are captured within the conclusion and recommendations, which serve to both improve the experience of council tenants and improve the perception of social housing more widely.

Methodology

The Group undertook several surveys and interviews with tenants and residents to both assess whether or not stigma exists in the borough, and to understand how the strengths of social housing are perceived. The questions asked can be found in appendix 1 and appendix 2.

Most importantly the Group needed to find out about tenants' experiences of social housing and whether or not they had experienced stigma or prejudice. To do this, five drop-in sessions were held across the borough at which tenants were asked questions about the positive and negative aspects of being a council tenant, any stigma they may have faced, and the portrayal of social housing tenants in the media. All tenants were personally invited by post and/or email and the events were promoted through a press release and social media to maximise attendance. Those tenants who were unable to attend the drop-in sessions were encouraged to fill out an online survey. The questions were based on those asked of social housing tenants by the Chartered Institute for Housing for its 'Rethinking social housing: the view from the inside' paper[4].

A second more general survey, aimed at residents of the borough, councillors and Council staff and contractors, was also conducted (referred to in this report as the non-tenant survey). This survey was accessible to the public through the Council's

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[3] Waverley Borough Council, Economic Development Strategy 2018 2023, October 2018
https://www.waverley.gov.uk/downloads/file/2240/waverley_economic_development_strategy_2018-2032
[4] Chartered Institute for Housing, 'Rethinking social housing: a view from the inside', 2018
http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/CIH0239%20Rethinking%20social%20housing%20Report%20V3.pdf

website and sent directly to members of Waverley's Citizens' Panel (CP). Over 500 people responded to the survey (including 257 CP members). The purpose of the survey was to understand how social housing and social housing tenants are viewed across the wider population of Waverley. Respondents were asked whether or not they would consider living in social housing and about their perceptions of the socioeconomic status of social housing tenants.

Due to the different purposes of the surveys/interviews conducted, different questions were asked of tenants and the general public (non-tenants). To enable useful comparison, however, some questions were repeated across both groups.

The non-tenant survey was conducted online and through postal submissions, whilst the tenant survey was carried out online and through face to face tenant drop-in sessions. The Group felt that these varying methods of gathering data should be taken into account when drawing conclusions as it was felt that the face to face sessions resulted in more considered answers and fewer 'not selected' values in the data.

Results

Respondent demographics

To enable the Group to identify trends in the data gathered, respondents were asked some basic profiling questions. Respondents of the non-tenant survey were asked about their age (figures 2.1 and 2.2), area in which they live (figure 3) and their housing tenure (figure 4).
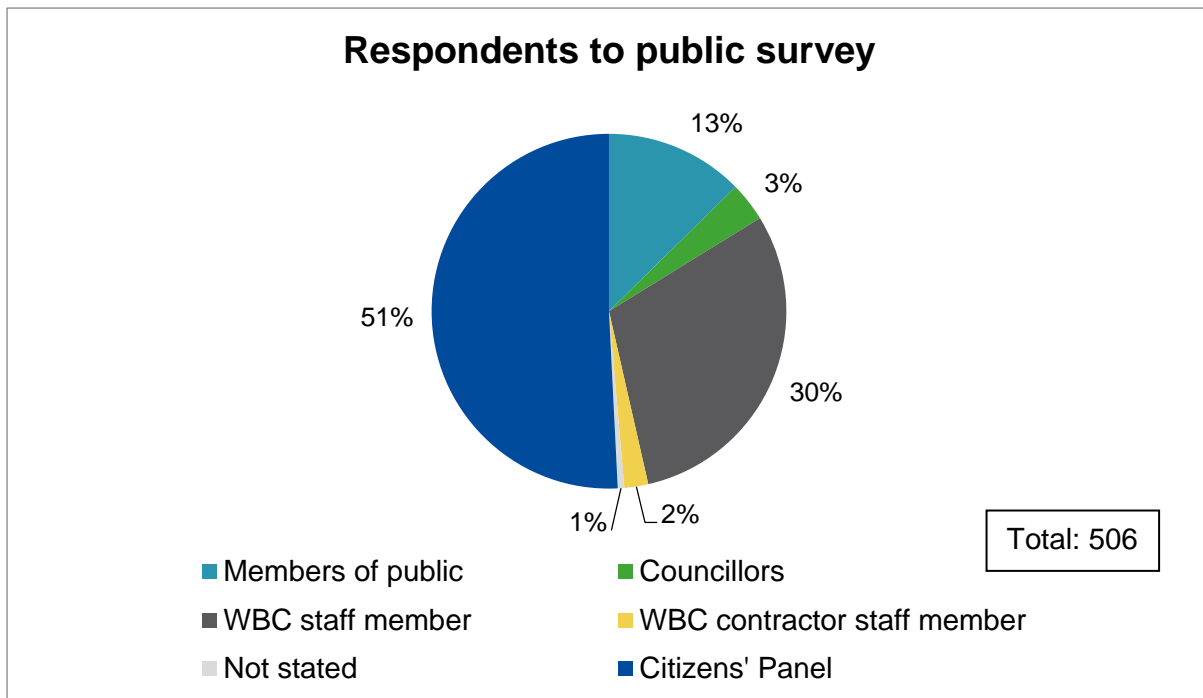

Figure 1

Members of public	64	Councillors	18
WBC staff member	153	WBC contractor staff member	11
Not stated	3	Citizens' Panel (CP)	257

Respondents by age

The following graph (figure 2.1) compares the age distribution of all respondents (total data set) with the population of Waverley and all tenant respondents. Figure 2.2 breaks the total data set down into the types of respondents, showing the ages of respondents by way in which they took part in the survey.
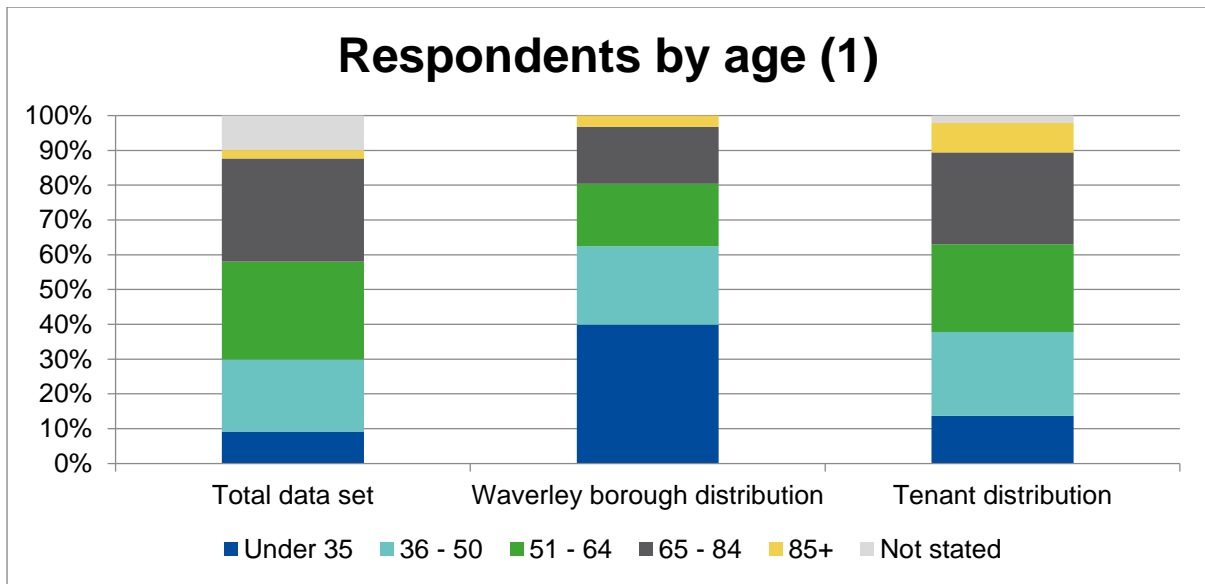
Respondents by age (1)
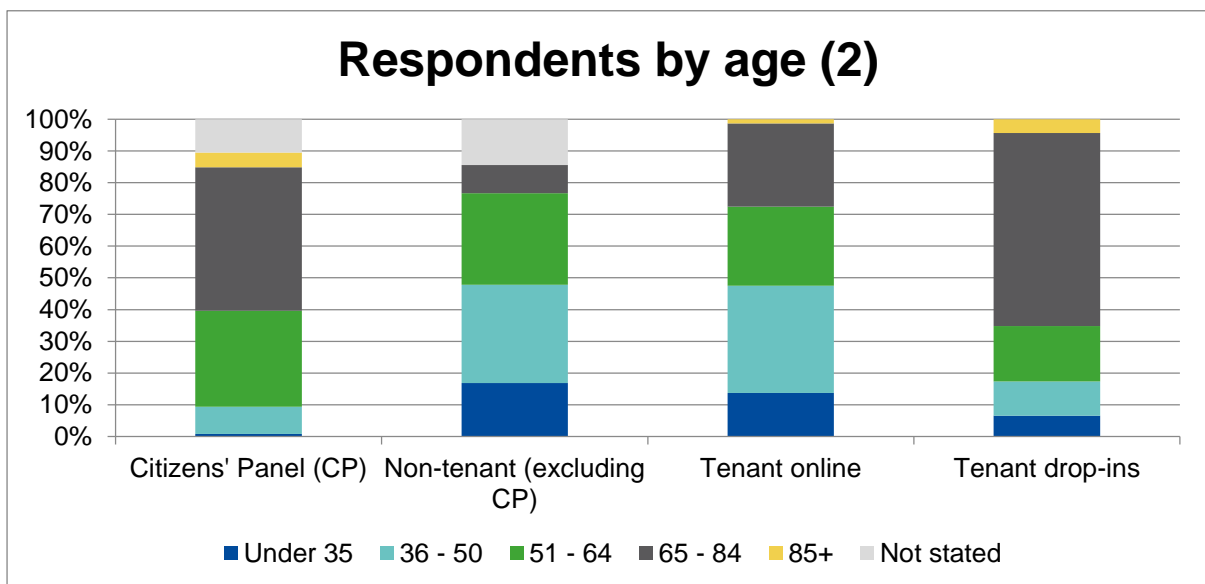

Figure 2.1

Respondents by age (2)

Figure 2.2

The under 35s are underrepresented in all data sets, and significantly so amongst CP respondents. This is a common issue with comparable surveys and so it could be assumed that rather than the subject lacking relevance or interest, under 35s are a more difficult group to engage than other age groups. The data gathering exercise made no attempt to engage with those in secondary or tertiary education.

People aged 65 – 84 were overrepresented in all data sets, except in the online non-tenant survey. One explanation for the significantly high percentage of 65 – 84s at the drop-in sessions is that four out of five of the tenant drop-in sessions were held in the day-time, meaning those of retirement age were far more likely to be available to attend.

The online survey results indicated that some age groups that were underrepresented at the drop-in sessions were more likely to participate using this method of communication.

The overrepresentation of respondents aged 51 – 84 should be taken into account when drawing conclusions from the results of the study, particularly when looking at answers of CP members and tenant drop-in sessions.
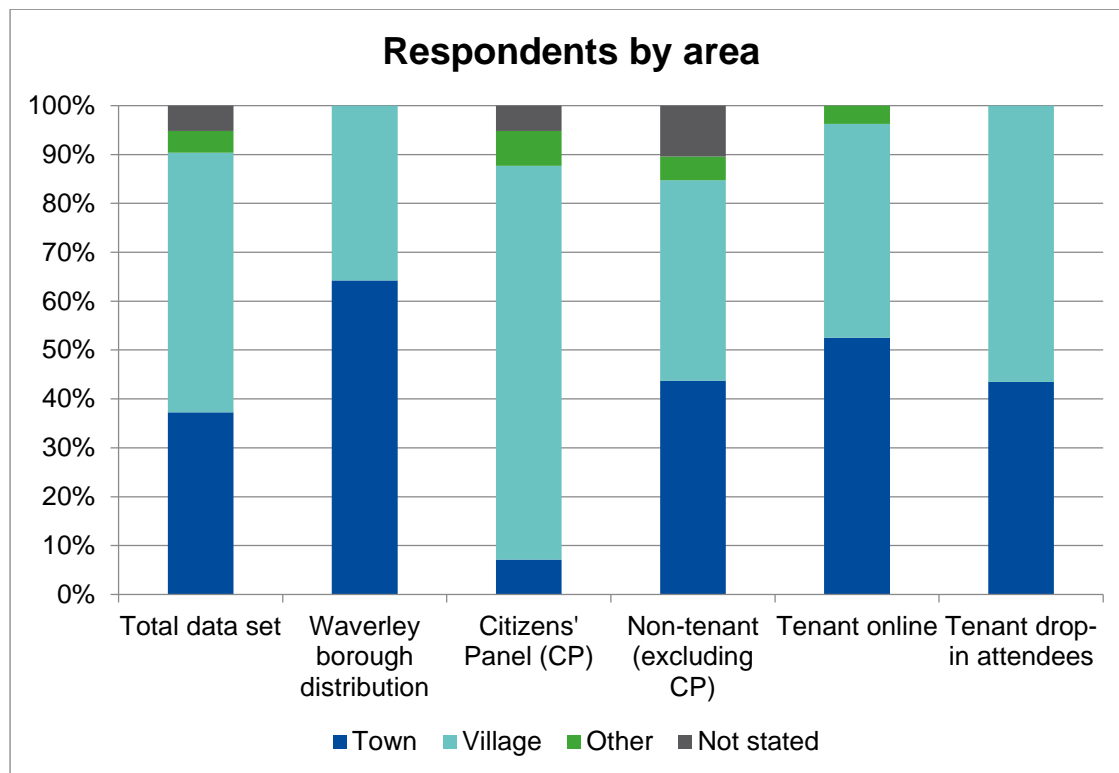
Respondents by area

Figure 3

Respondents were not provided with definitions of towns and villages and so interpretations of these terms may vary.

Waverley borough distribution in figure 3 is based on 2011 census data. It is recognised that as respondents to the survey were free to categorise themselves as living in either a town or a village this may have led to some anomalies, particularly for areas such as Farncombe which is often referred to as both a village and part of the town of Godalming.

This contradiction may go some way to explain why the majority of respondents state that they live in villages rather than towns.

The distribution of the CP across towns and villages, however, is significantly different from the wider Waverley figure with many more living in villages. This should be considered when studying the answers of CP respondents as the difference in size of settlement (and therefore reduced amount of social housing) might mean their experience is more anecdotal.
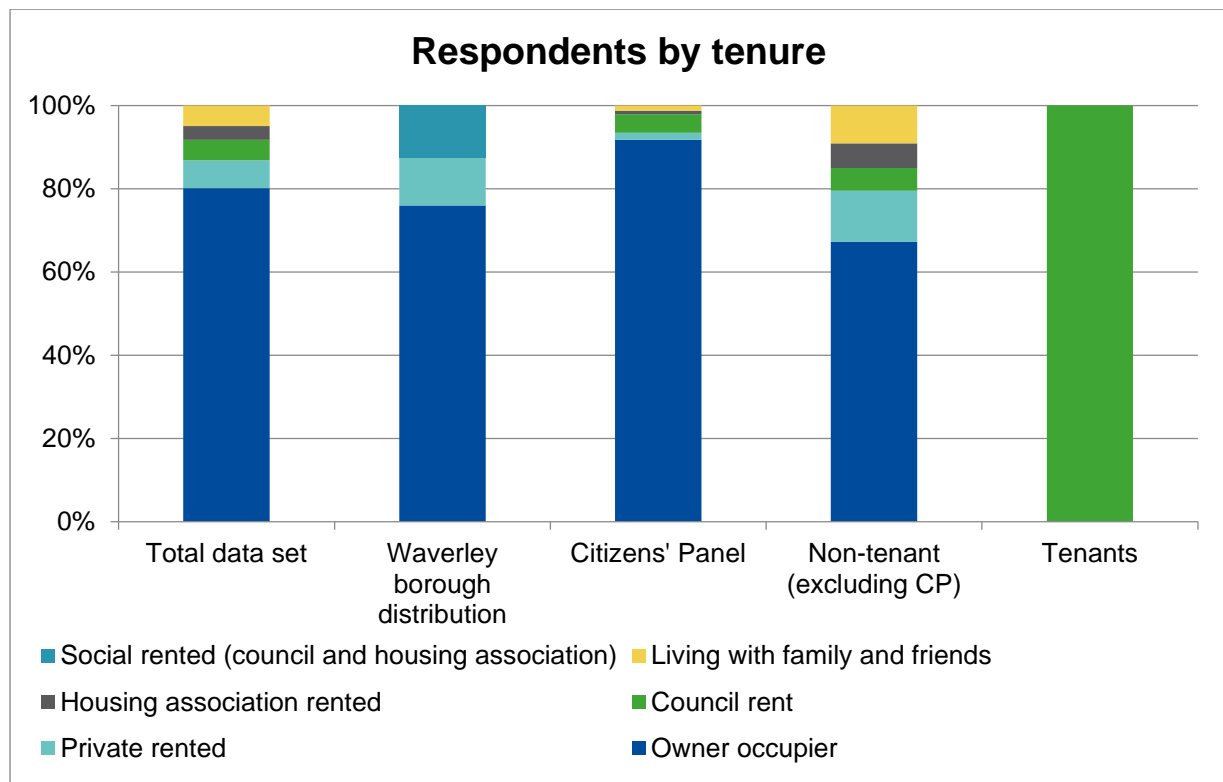
Respondents by tenure

Respondents by tenure

Figure 4

The Waverley tenure distribution figure is based on information from the 2011 census which only provided data by three types of tenure: owner occupier; private rented and social rented.

80% of respondents to our surveys (total data set) were owner occupiers and this was approximately 5% higher than the overall Waverley borough distribution figure.

Over 90% of CP respondents were identified as owner occupiers with very few renting privately or through a housing association. This dominance may be partly explained by the heavily weighted age distribution of CP respondents in the 51+ age groups and their identified area of residence in villages.

The remaining non-tenant (excluding CP) survey respondents were more representative of the under 50 age groups and more likely to identify as living in a town. As a group there were fewer owner occupiers than the CP or the overall borough distribution and although those privately renting were consistent with the overall borough distribution, there were a greater number of respondents in this group living in housing association accommodation or with friends and family.

Non-tenant and tenant answers

Do you associate the below terms with social housing?

Figure 5 compares the responses from the tenant and non-tenant respondents groups on certain aspects that they might associate with social housing.
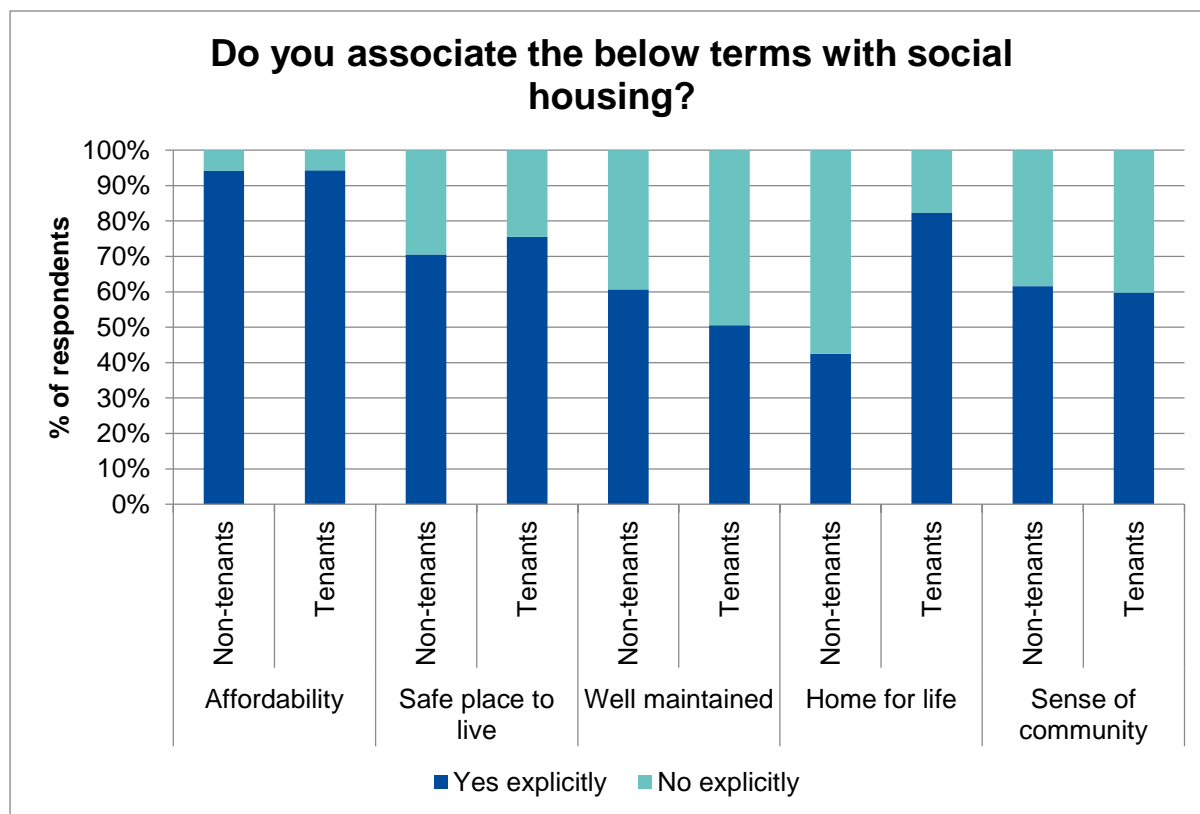

Figure 5

The purpose of this question was to compare how social housing is perceived by the wider general public and by tenants. The respondents were not provided with definitions of these terms.

High proportions of both non-tenant and tenant respondents associate 'affordability' with social housing, suggesting that it is seen as a more affordable alternative to renting privately.

A high percentage of tenant respondents and non-tenants explicitly associated social housing with a 'safe place to live'.

The main variations in the data were between the proportions of non-tenant and tenant respondents associating 'well maintained' and 'home for life' with social housing:

More than 60% of non-tenant respondents linked 'well maintained' to their perception of social housing compared with half of tenant respondents. This relatively low figure from tenants contradicts the tenant satisfaction levels reported to Waverley in the three-yearly survey of tenants and residents (STAR). In 2017 the survey reported that almost 80% of tenants were satisfied with the quality of their home and over

75% were satisfied with repairs and maintenance. 838 tenants took part in the 2017 STAR.

The Group recognises that the term 'well maintained' used in the survey is likely to have been broadly interpreted whereas the STAR questions provide a more detailed and targeted evaluation of tenant opinion. This potentially explains the variation between the two figures.

In addition to STAR, Waverley also measures the satisfaction levels of tenants who have recently had a repair competed in their home, through the Voluntas survey. The data gathered through this survey shows that 89% of tenants who were contacted from October to December 2018 were satisfied with the overall repairs service they had received and 93% were satisfied with the overall quality of work carried out.

Over 80% of tenants associated 'home for life' with social housing. Taking into account the high proportion of tenant respondents aged 51 – 84 who took part in the survey; this strong association could be a reflection of the type of tenancy held by this group of people and their intention to remain in their homes for the foreseeable future.

Pre 2014 all council homes were let on a secure tenancy, granting a home for life, providing all conditions of the tenancy were kept.

Whilst 86% of our existing tenants remain on secure tenancies, since 2014 new tenants have been assigned flexible tenancies to allow for more effective management of Council properties.

The results indicate that the majority of tenants currently feel secure in their tenancies, however this opinion may vary as flexible tenancies become more prevalent.

Almost exactly the same proportions (60%) of non-tenant and tenant respondents associated 'sense of community' with social housing, suggesting that the perception of positive community spirit amongst social housing tenants is a fair representation.

Who do you think lives in social housing? (Public and tenant explicit yes answers)
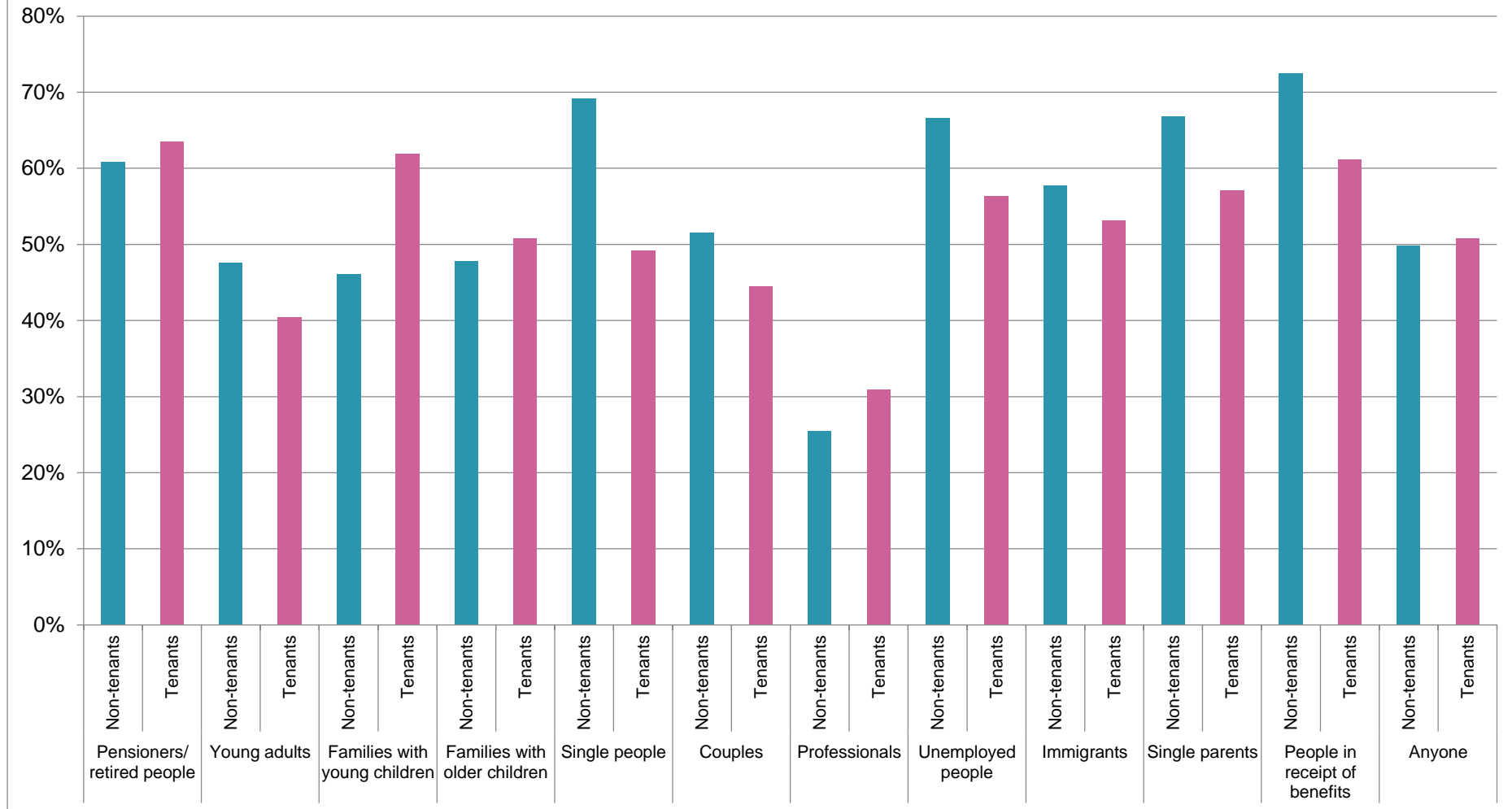

Figure 6

<u>Who do you think lives in social housing?</u>

Figure 6 compares the responses from the tenant and non-tenant respondent groups to the questions of who they think lives in social housing.

The responses to this question suggest both the non-tenants and tenants have preconceived ideas about people who live in social housing. Only half of each respondent group thought 'anyone' lives in social housing and barely one third thought professionals live in social housing.

One of the principles of the Paper, 'A new deal for social housing', concerns tackling stigma and challenging stereotypes. Preconceived ideas about who lives in social housing reinforce the view that not everyone should be able to live in social housing even if they are eligible. The dominant view that professionals do not live in social housing could act to reinforce this perception and ultimately create a barrier thereby discouraging this group from accessing social housing that they would be eligible for and limiting the diversity of our tenant population.

Respondents were given the opportunity to specify other people they think live in social housing. Some respondents did so, specifying 'disabled people' and 'key workers'. Other respondents commented more widely on who they thought lived in social housing:

"Most of the above".
"People getting them now are mainly single parents, families and immigrants – not single people or disabled families".

Some 50% of respondents recognised that social housing is for anyone who needs it and one cited the cost of housing in the South East as a potential reason for "more people"' living in social housing.

"Almost any type of individual here could, people make certain assumptions about what 'types' of people that do."
"It's open to everyone."
"Difficult for young people to get on the housing register and assumption that professionals should be able to afford private. However in this area that might not be true."
"I think limited supply and long waits have restricted the mix of people in social housing more recently."
"In south east more people due to cost of private renting or buying."

These comments highlight the importance of making social housing more accessible to all eligible groups.

Non-tenant answers

Figures 7 to 14 summarise responses from the non-tenant groups to a series of questions.

Can you spot social housing by its external appearance?

Figure 7 shows the responses to the question 'can you spot social housing by its external appearance?'.

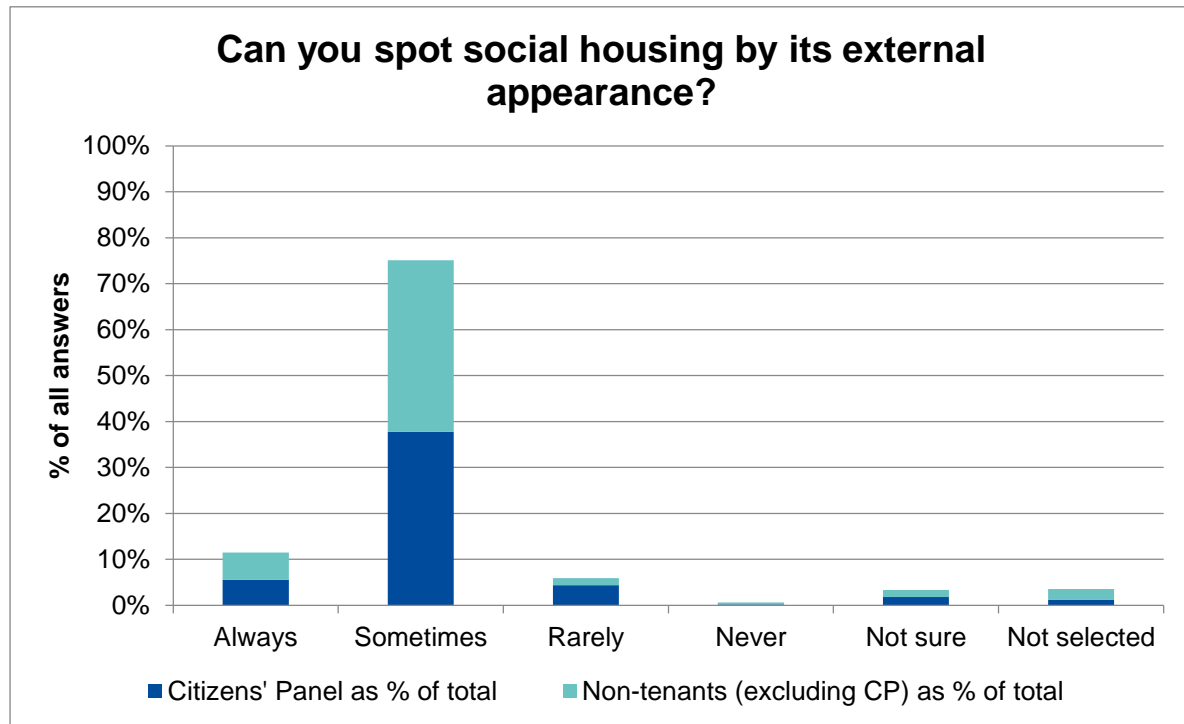**Can you spot social housing by its external appearance?**

Figure 7

Over 85% of non-tenant respondents thought they could identify social housing by its external appearance at least sometimes. With a very small percentage of respondents choosing 'rarely'. 'never' and 'not sure'.

Later in the survey respondents were asked if they would consider living in social housing, and the reason for their answer. Some respondents commented that they would not consider it because they believed the properties had "*poorly maintained gardens/fencing*", were "*rundown*" and that "*there seems to be less pride taken in how the properties and land around them are looked after*". These comments could be viewed as further supporting the opinion that social housing can be identified from its external appearance, albiet that this may not always be overtly negative.

Furthermore, when asked if they had any examples of negative representation of tenants in the media, tenants provided examples reinforcing these exact sentiments. For example they believed the media stories misrepresented social housing by showing "*documentaries showing run down estates and poverty*" with "*council housing on the news not looking very appealing*" and suggesting a "*lack of maintenance*".

Ensuring homes are decent is featured in one of the principles of the Paper and the Prime Minister identified the difference between the external appearance of social and privately owned housing as one of the main causes of stigma attached to social housing. She stated that it should be impossible to tell the difference between the two and social housing should not be "*tucked away out of sight out of mind*"[5], alluding to the importance of tenure blind developments.

Whilst completing the research, the Group was consulted by the Council's Housing Strategy and Enabling team on the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) due to go through the committee process spring of that year in order to secure approval for its consultation. This document recognised and referenced the importance of tenure blind developments and included measures to improve design of affordable housing and mitigate the stereotype of poorly designed and maintained social housing. The Group also requested that the Housing Design Standards (HDS) , drawn up for new Council Homes and approved in July 2018, should be referenced in the SPD.

Would you consider living in social housing?

Figure 8, below, summarises the responses form the non-tenant groups to the question 'would you consider living in social housing?'.
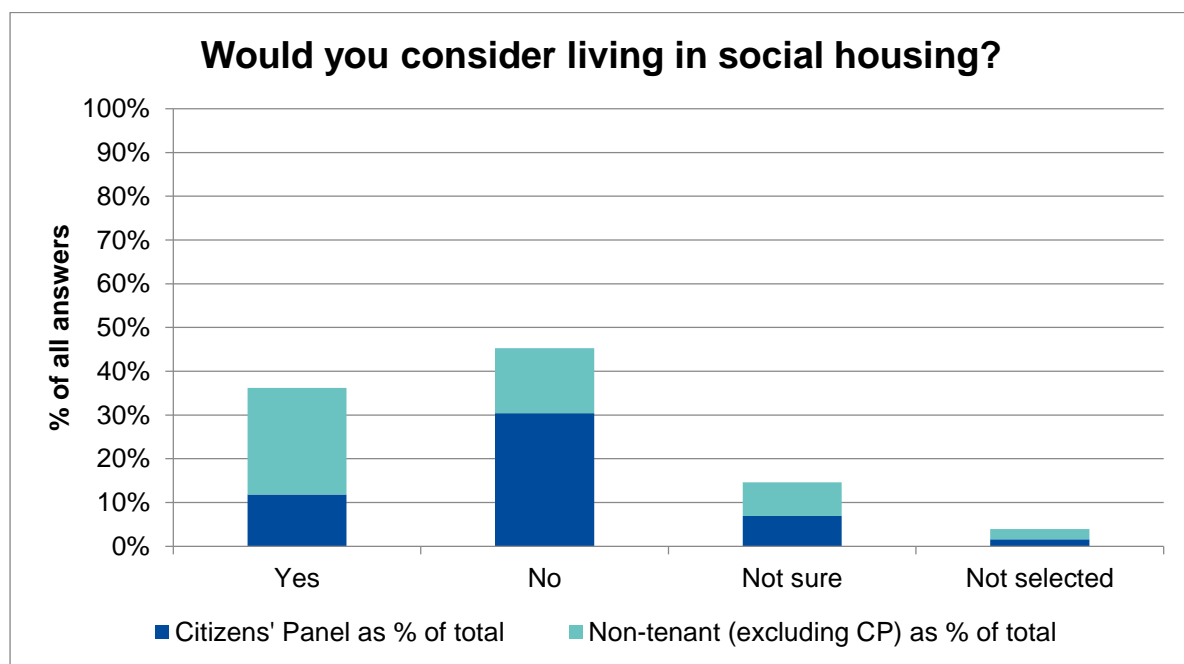
Figure 8

Approximately 60% of respondents answered 'no' or 'not sure' to this question. CP respondents were more likely to say that they would not consider living in social housing than other non-tenant respondents. One possible reason being that CP respondents are more likely to own their property and did not feel they needed to consider living in social housing.

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[5] BBC News website, 'People should be proud of their council house – Theresa May', 19 September 2018. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45569453

Overall respondents to the survey were owner occupiers and this could reasonably be expected to be a significant influencing factor.

Why would you consider living in social housing?

Figure 9, below, summarises the reasons given as to why members of the non-tenant group would consider living in social housing.
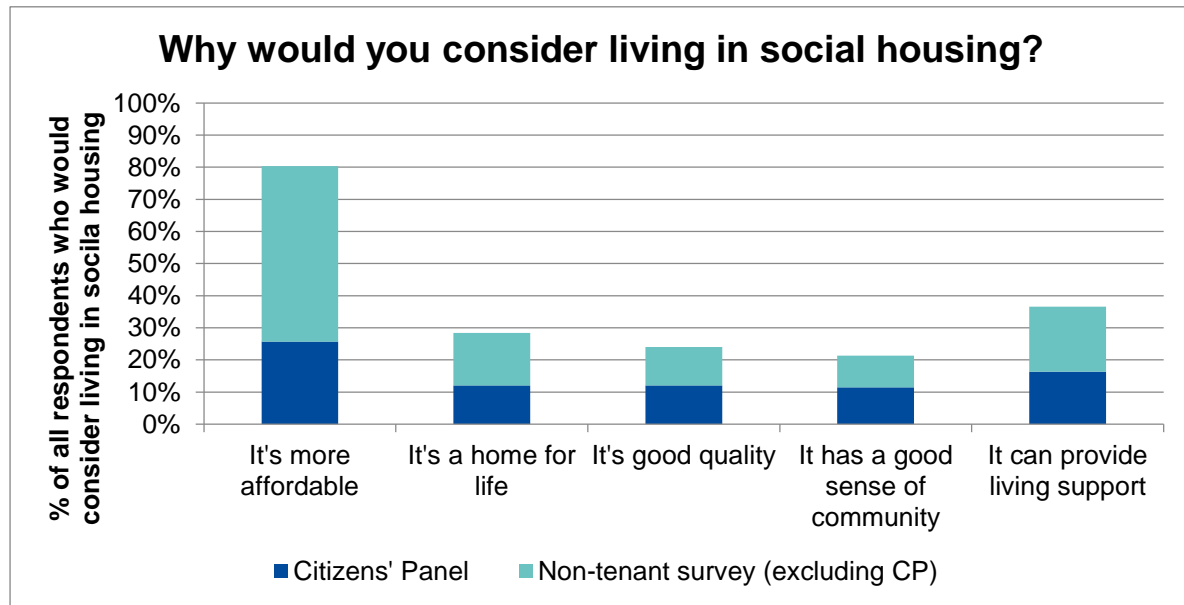

Figure 9

All respondents who said 'yes' they would consider living in social housing were then asked to select from a list of choices their reason/s for this response, they could also specify a reason. As explained in figure 8, CP respondents were less likely to consider living in social housing and therefore this explains the disparity between this group and other non-tenant responses.

The overwhelming reason respondents gave for considering living in social housing was because 'it's more affordable'.

Nearly 40% of respondents said they would consider living there because it 'can provide living support'. As with all of the terms, the definition of this was left to respondents' own interpretation; some may have seen this as referring to the landlord's responsibilities to maintain the property, and others might have thought of historical sheltered housing support, which may be unsurprising given the age demographic of respondents with over 40% over the age of 65.

Several comments were provided by respondents with 2 saying social housing is the "*only affordable way to live*". Almost half of the respondents who left comments said it would be out of necessity: "*if I lost my home*"; "*I have no other options*"; and "'*I might not have any other choice*". Other comments recognised the benefit of having the council as a landlord with reasons such as "*good quality landlord*" and "*stability*".

Two respondents said they would consider social housing because it would enable them to purchase a property through Right to Buy (RTB).

This response could be seen to support the perception that social housing is viewed as housing of last resort for tenants with lower incomes and from more disadvantaged households.

Why wouldn't you consider social housing?

In contrast to figure 9 above, figure 10 below summarises the responses from the non-tenant groups when asked why they would not consider living in social housing.
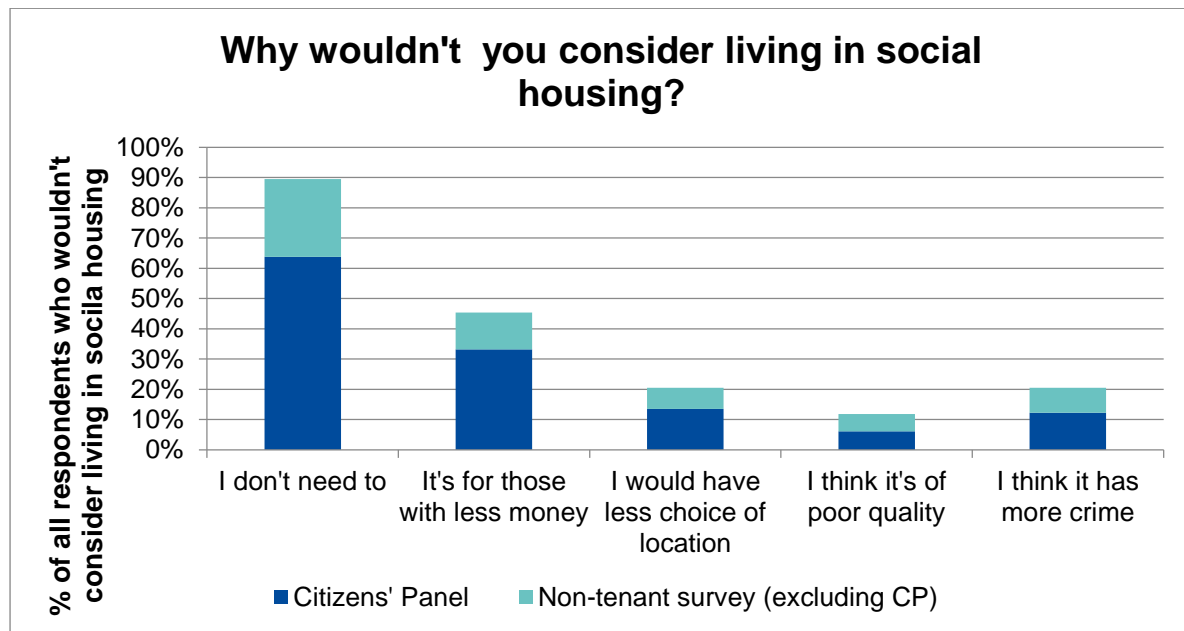

Why wouldn't you consider living in social housing?

Figure 10

The majority of respondents supported comments submitted to the previous question in the survey, 'why would you consider living in social housing'; most people see social housing as fulfilling a need for those unable to rent privately or buy a property. It is unsurprising, that the second most common reason chosen was 'it's for those with less money'. Encouragingly the least selected answer was 'I think it's of poor quality'.

Three respondents stated that they wouldn't consider living in social housing because they believed it had more anti-social behaviour and, as highlighted under the previous question regarding external appearance, two respondents said their perception of the quality of maintenance would stop them considering it. An additional comment was from someone who owned their own property but described social housing as "*exemplary*".

The most common reason respondents put in the comments for why they wouldn't consider living in social housing was about eligibility; they did not think they would qualify. One such comment explained: "*I am not eligible, my household is over the threshold, it is a precious resource which is in huge demand*". In a similar vein, one person provided the reason below for not considering living in social housing:

> *"Integrity. I think social housing should be for the most vulnerable in society. I work full time in a good job but cannot afford to live in the Borough, however, I don't think I should put pressure on those most vulnerable in society by taking up a home they could have."*

This comment illustrates both the lack of affordability of housing in Waverley and the commonly held belief that being on the housing register denies those in more need a home. The combination of these two factors (low supply and allocation according to levels of need), have contributed towards the residualisation of social housing, potentially reinforcing the view that only those most in need, possibly vulnerable, should live there.

One of the five principles included in the Paper is about building more homes and supporting home ownership. The respondents' view that there are people more in need than them relates to this principle as it acknowledges that demand outweighs supply. An increase in social homes would provide more residents with a home and somewhat address the residualisation of social housing as not only tenants in the most immediate need would be allocated a home.

<u>How much income do you think a household has to have to be eligible for a council house?</u>

Figures 11 to 14 detail the perceptions that the non-tenant groups had in relation to various characteristics of council house tenants.
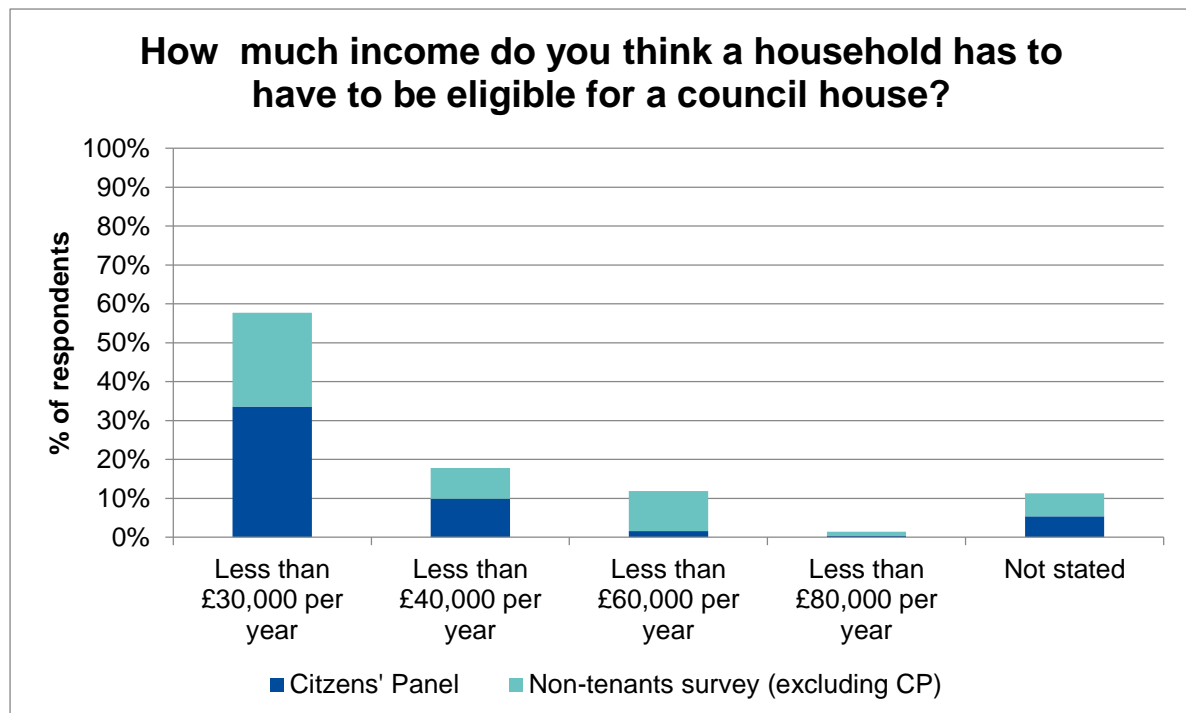

Figure 11

People with a household income of less than £60,000 per year are eligible for a council house in Waverley.

Most respondents who answered this question correctly were part of the non-tenants group (excluding CP), one reason for this might be that 30% of respondents to this question were Waverley staff members and therefore more likely to be aware of the correct answer.

Over 50% of respondents thought households had to have less than £30,000 per year to be eligible for a council house, which broadly reflects the average wage of just over £30,000 for those working in the borough[6].

Overall the majority of respondents thought that you needed to have a household income of £40,000 or less to be eligible for council housing. If representative of the wider population, this suggests that a significant proportion of Waverley residents mistakenly believe they are not eligible for a council property. Given that the workplace wage in Waverley is lower than the Surrey average and that average house prices in Waverley are higher, the importance of providing more social housing and educating residents on eligibility criteria is vital.

The majority of general comments submitted for this question were from respondents stating their uncertainty about the correct threshold, two respondents suggested lower thresholds than the options provided, and four said they were either unaware that there was a threshold or that they did not believe income was relevant.

What is clear is that the criteria for eligibility needs to be more widely communicated to residents including the advantages of a council housing tenancy.

Perception of social housing tenants

The next three questions were asked to form a basic understanding of how social housing tenants were perceived by the general public.

What percentage of social housing tenants nationally, do you think, were unemployed in 2016-17 (not including pensioners)?

A significant majority of respondents believed that social housing tenants are much more likely to be unemployed compared to national average figures, which are currently running at 4%. The probability of social renters being unemployed is actually well below 10%[7].

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[6] Economic Development Strategy 2018 – 2032, Waverley Borough Council, October 2018, p6. http://www.waverley.gov.uk/downloads/file/2240/waverley_economic_development_strategy_2018-2032
[7] FA3101 (S418): demographic and economic characteristics of social and privately renting households, accessed 22/01/2019. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/social-and-private-renters

What percentage of social housing tenants nationally, do you think, were unemployed in 2016-17 (not including pensioners)?
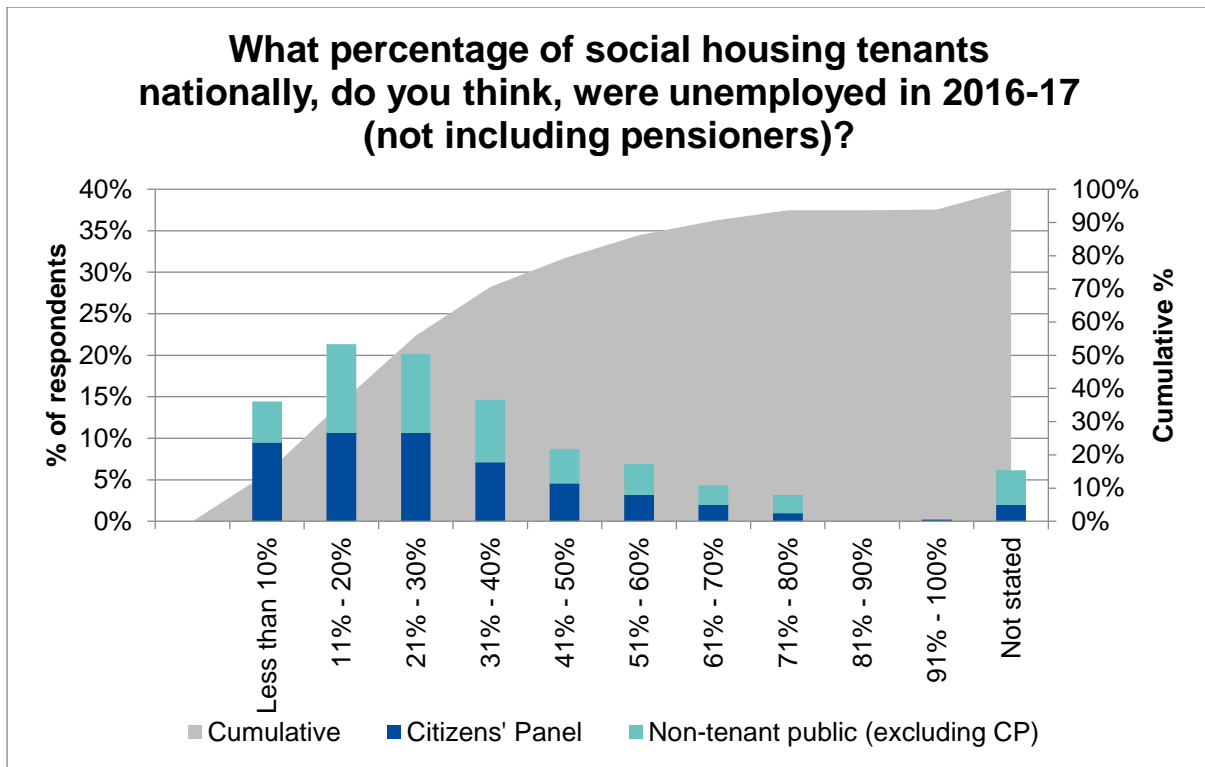
Figure 12

It is difficult to conclude from these responses whether or not people over estimated the number of social tenants who were unemployed because of a negative view or because they were unfamiliar with overall national unemployment figures. Either way, educating the public about unemployment figures amongst social housing tenants would challenge this negative perception and contribute to a reduction in stigma. As figure 16 in this report highlights, a significant proportion of tenants surveyed were in employment, even when taking into account the significant number who were retired.

In general comments about public perceptions of social housing two tenants explained that they feel people assume they are "*unemployed, 3rd of 4th generation on the dole*" with "*nothing to do*". Educating the public about the higher than widely assumed employment levels of social housing tenants will contribute to tackling the stigma surrounding social housing and its tenants.

<u>What percentage of social housing tenants nationally, do you think, are immigrants?</u>

Less than 10% of social housing tenants are immigrants[8].
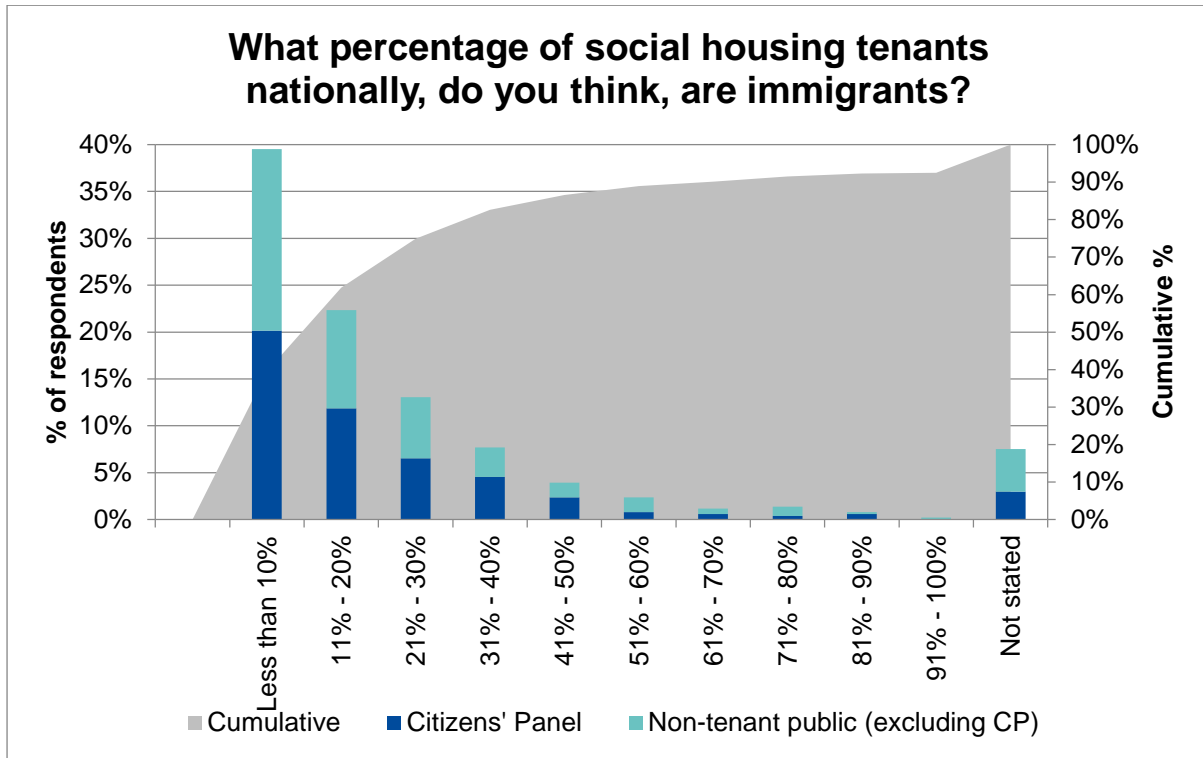
Figure 13

As figure 13 shows, almost 40% of respondents answered this question correctly, which could suggest that the assumption that immigrants are more readily assigned social housing is not prevalent in Waverley. However 60% of respondents overestimated the percentage of social housing tenants who are immigrants. This over-estimation could be attributed to negative media coverage and could also be linked to the higher visibility of immigrants in a borough where the vast majority of residents (89.4%) were born in the UK.

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[8] Who lives in the 4.1m social homes in England and Wales?, The Guardian 18 November 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2015/nov/18/who-lives-41-million-social-housing-homes-england-wales

What percentage of social housing tenants, do you think, were in receipt of housing benefit in 2015-16?

What percentage of social housing tenants nationally, do you think, were in receipt of housing benefit in 2015-16?

Figure 14

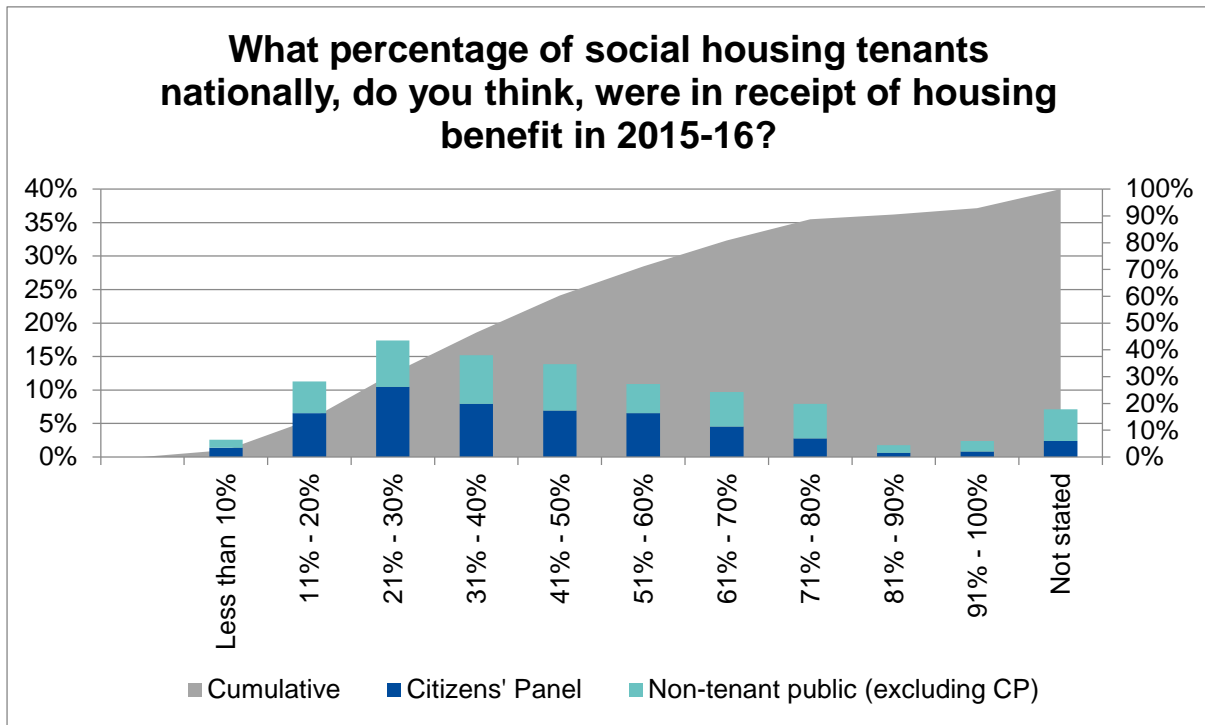Between 51% and 60% of social housing tenants nationally were in receipt of housing benefit in 2015-16. 50% of Waverley tenants are in receipt of housing benefit.

Tenant answers

How long have you been a council tenant?
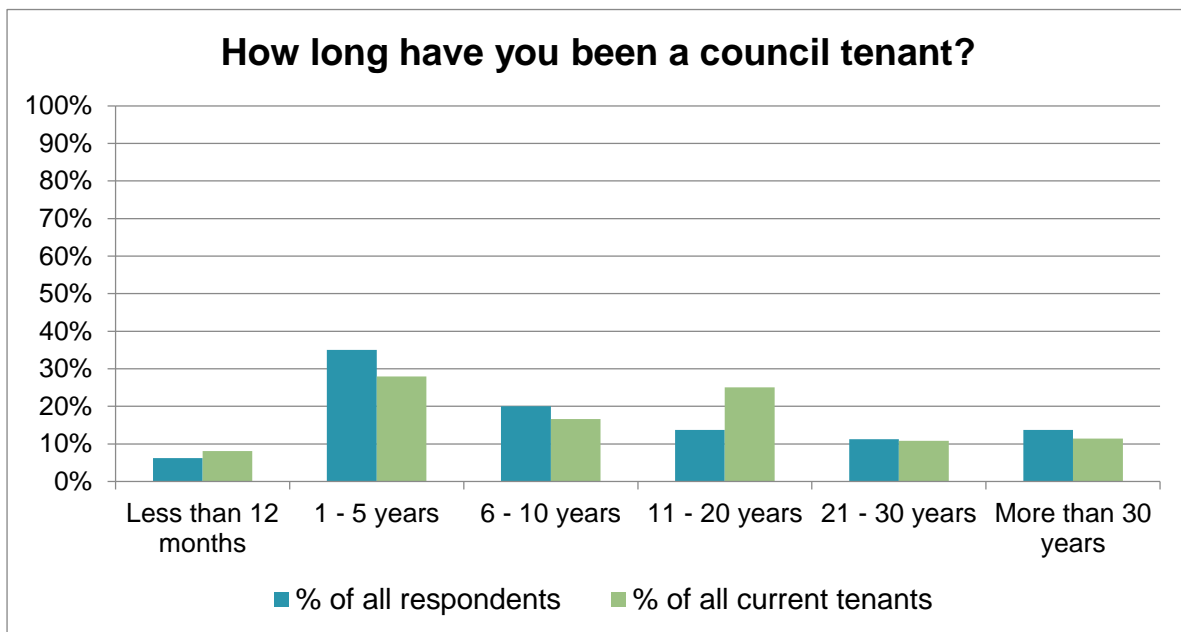

How long have you been a council tenant?

Figure 15

60% of respondents had been tenants for 10 years of less and were broadly representative of the Waverley demographic, with the 11 – 20 years group being the most under-represented. Surveying people who have been council tenants for varying lengths of time results in the data reflecting a wider and more representative range of experiences.

Are you working/in receipt of benefits?
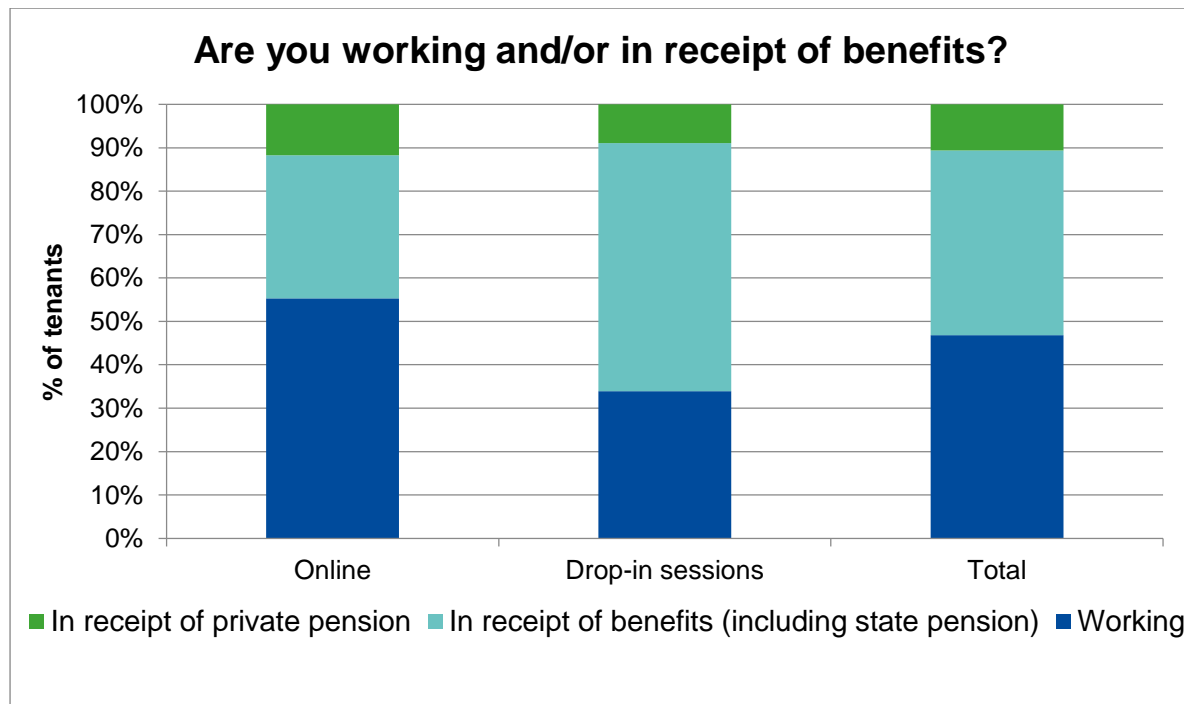
Figure 16

Respondents were free to select more than one answer.

It is important to note that a person 'in receipt of benefits (including state pension)' could also be working.

This question was asked in order to enable comparison between the actual proportion of tenants in work and the public perception.

As figure 2 shows, a disproportionately high percentage of tenant drop-in session attendees were aged over 51 (more than 80%). Coupled with the fact that four out of five tenant drop-in sessions were held in the day-time (when people who are retired are more likely to be able to attend), this could explain the difference between the proportion of respondents stating they were in work, and those stating they were in receipt of benefits (including state pension).

As figure 12 explains, less than 10% of social housing tenants were unemployed in 2016-17 not including pensioners, and if this is equivalent to the Waverley figure it can be assumed that many of the respondents who chose '*in receipt of benefits*' were either pensioners and/or were also working.

It is clear that this data captures a very basic picture of the employment status of tenants and would benefit from further delineation between types of benefits being received.

What are the good things about being a council tenant?
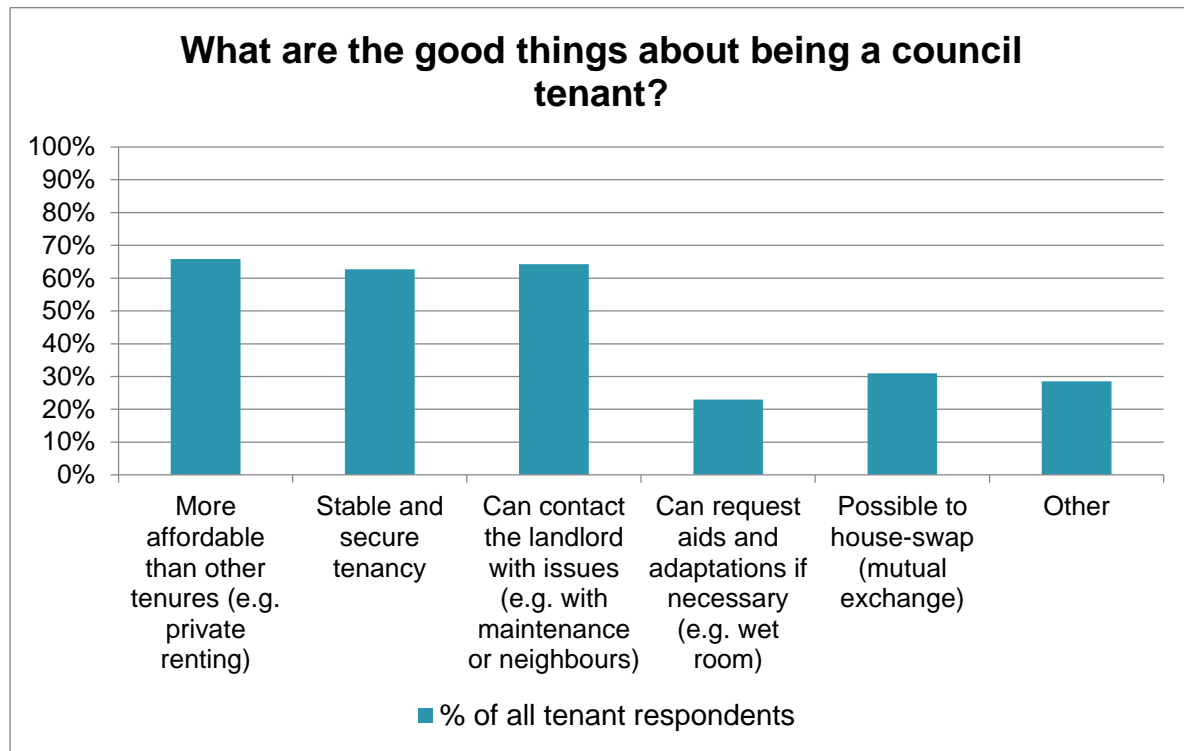
Figure 17

The most common answers from the tenant drop-in sessions formed the basis of the questions for the subsequent tenants online survey. Respondents were allowed to select more than one answer and were able to specify individual answers through the comments section (the 'other' column of the graph above represents these comments).

Over half of respondents said affordability, secure tenancy and the ability to contact the landlord with issues were good things about being a council tenant. Several individual comments were made in response to this question, mostly about living in a "*well maintained property*" with "*quick and reliable responses*" from a "landlord [that] *cares about tenants*". One respondent described Waverley as "*a great council to deal with*" saying that "*some landlords can be difficult – being a council tenant removes the vast majority of these stresses*", suggesting that renting a council property is simpler compared to renting privately.

One respondent did say there "*isn't anything good about being a council tenant*" and that they are only a council tenant due to their "*health circumstances*".

With nearly 5,000 properties it is not surprising that there were a wide variety of opinions provided, however in the main tenants positive comments outweighed the negative.

What are the bad things about being a council tenant?

What are the bad things about being a council tenant?

(bar chart showing "% of all tenant respondents")

- Slow response from landlord to addressing maintenance issues: ~33%
- Unkept outside areas: ~22%
- Anti-social behaviour of neighbours: ~22%
- Not being taken seriously by the landlord when reporting issues: ~24%
- Impersonal service: ~13%
- Other: ~19%

■ % of all tenant respondents

Figure 18

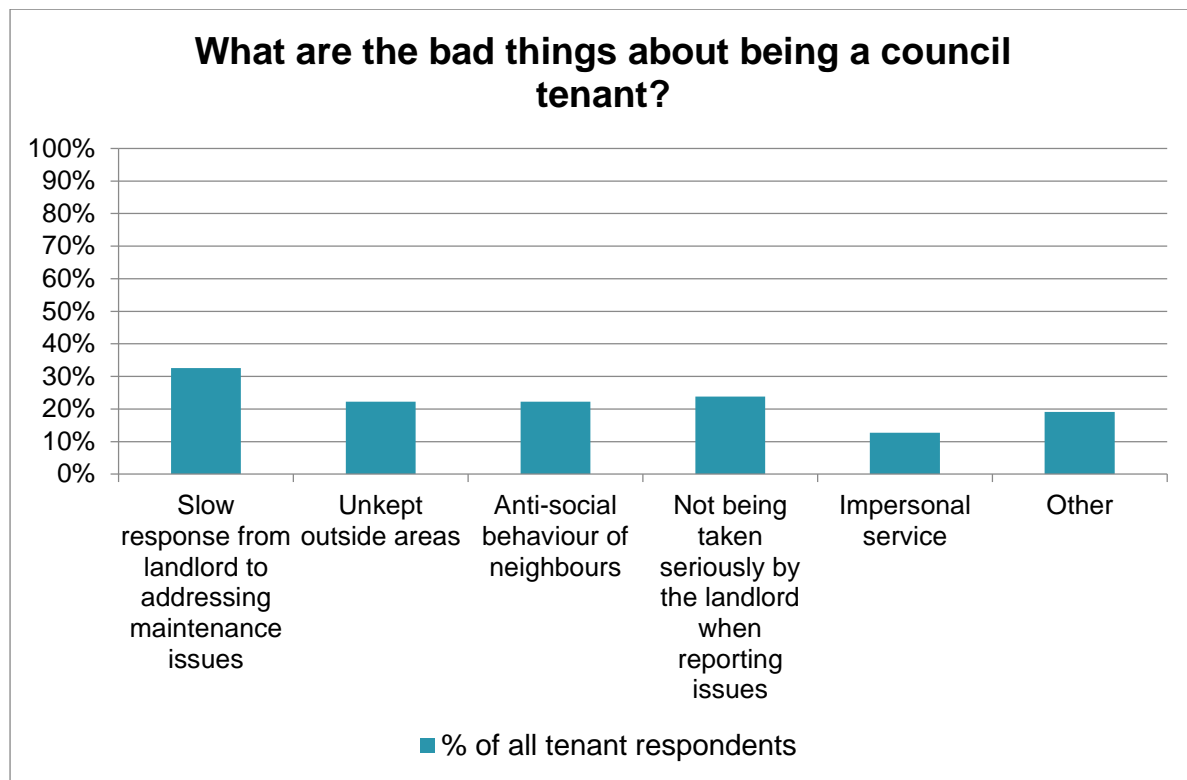As with the previous question regarding good things about being a council tenant, the most common answers from the tenant drop-in sessions formed the basis for the multiple choice questions in the tenant online survey. Respondents were allowed to select more than one answer and were able to specify different answers through comments (the 'other' column of the graph above represents these comments).

It is notable that out of 514 unique responses, 347 were what respondents thought was good about being a council tenant and 167, less than half, were what is bad about being a council tenant.

There were, however, more comments for the question about bad things, (44 compared to 36 good things) with most of these centred around the responsiveness of the Council, both in terms of answering queries and undertaking work to the property.

Some comments were about the physical characteristics of the property that the respondents lived in with some respondents describing their properties as "*small*", "*old fashioned*" in a "*remote location*" with a "*lack of space and parking*".

Other comments referred to the "*maintenance not always* [being] *good qua*lity" and "*poor quality of repairs when they are done*".

Two respondents mentioned difficulty moving and one said that the compensation form after a flood in her property had been too difficult to fill in[9].

Three comments referred directly to stigma against council tenants with others saying "*private tenants/owners make them feel that they are beneath them*" and referring to the "*attitude towards tenants from Waverley officers*".

One of the principles of the Paper referred to empowering residents and ensuring voices are heard and landlords are held to account. The fact that over one fifth of respondents said 'not being taken seriously by landlord when reporting issues' is one of the bad things about being a council tenant is an area for concern and this report contains a recommendation for the level of customer satisfaction with how enquiries are dealt with to be reviewed.

What are the things that make you feel proud about where you live?

Figure 19

As with the questions regarding good and bad things about being a council tenant, the most common answers from the tenant drop-in sessions formed the basis of the multiple choice answers in the tenant online survey. Respondents were allowed to select more than one answer and were able to specify different answers through comments (the 'other' column of the graph above represents these comments).

Some comments referred to how social housing provides a home for people who cannot afford to rent privately or own their own home. One respondent wrote that as they had been in and out of work for a few years and if they "*were private renting* [they] *would have lost* [their] *home*". These comments suggest that tenants recognise the increased security of renting a council home compared to a private property.

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[9] The compensation form has since been simplified.

Three respondents said there was nothing of which they were proud.

The fact that location was the thing that people were most proud of does lend itself to the assumption that the borough is a pleasant place to live.

What are the things that make you feel unhappy about where you live?

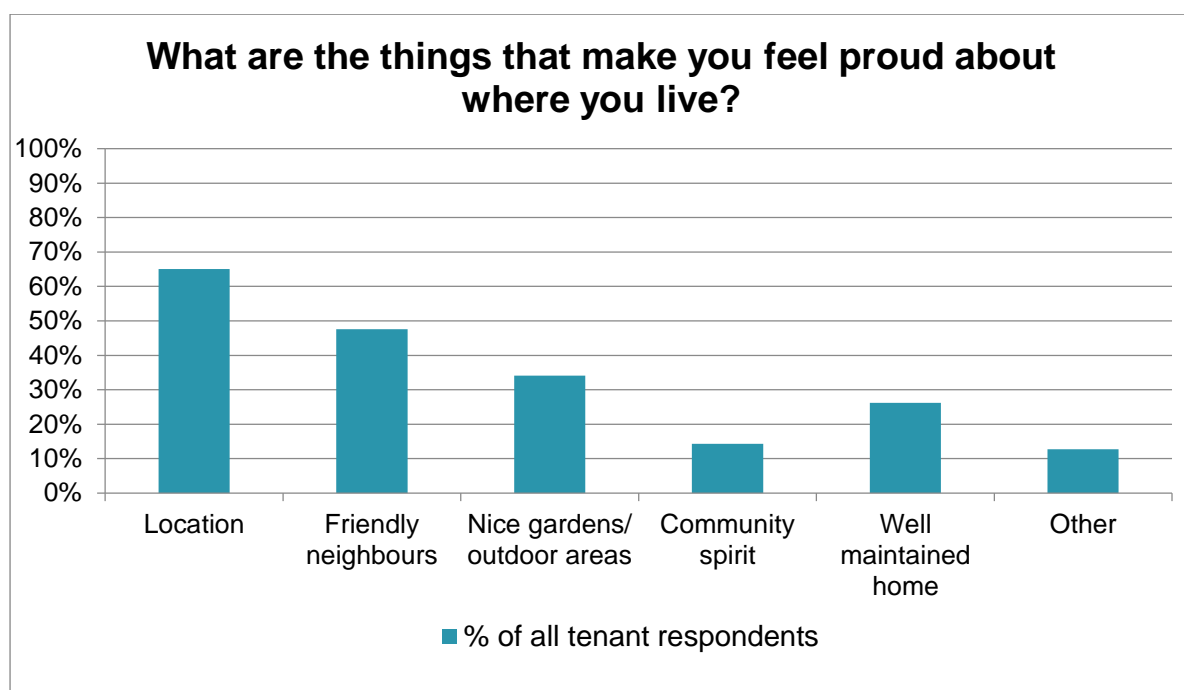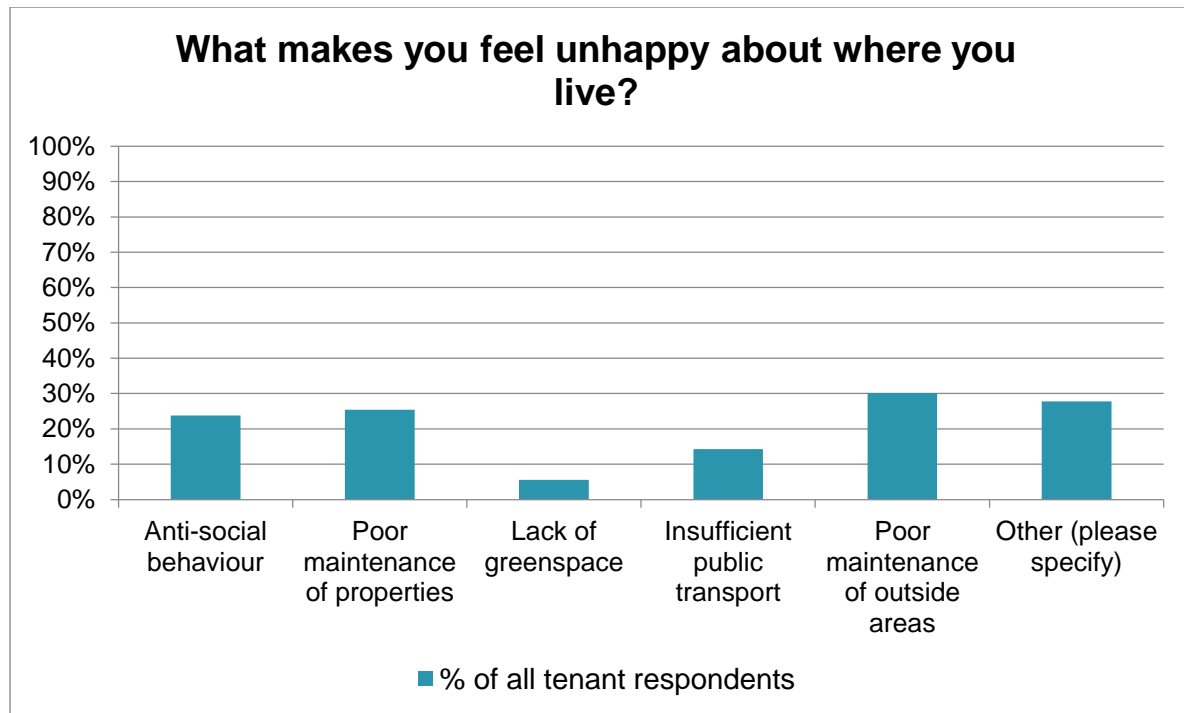**What makes you feel unhappy about where you live?**

Figure 20

As with the questions regarding good and bad things about being a council tenant, the most common answers from the tenant drop-in sessions formed the basis of the multiple choice answers in the tenant online survey. Respondents were allowed to select more than one answer and were able to specify different answers through comments (the 'other' column of the graph above represents these comments).

Poor maintenance of outside areas and properties were the two most common answers to this question, again contradicting the findings of the 2017 STAR where 76% of tenants stated they were satisfied with repairs and maintenance and 79% were satisfied with the quality of their home.

Parking issues were the most common comment for this question.

Some comments for this question related to the individual properties of respondents and outside areas, such as "*standard of kitchen fittings*", "*bathroom in need of upgrade*" or "*not enough dropped kerbs*".

Three respondents referred to stigma or prejudice they had experienced. One respondent said "*poor contractor who comes to do any repairs....they always seems to think that because you live in a council house they can do an awful job... it might be a council house but its our home!*". Another respondent said "*being a council*

tenant means that when people have an issue with you [such as parking, untidiness] they are able to tell tales to the Council, who are then able to sanction you, something home owners do not experience".

Tenants' experiences of stigma

Tenant respondents were asked whether or not they had ever been made to feel uncomfortable about being a council tenant. Online respondents were given a binary choice whilst the nature of the drop-in sessions led to a much more open and unrestricted conversation. This difference in data collection should be considered when drawing conclusions from the results.

Has anyone ever made you or your family feel uncomfortable about being a council tenant?

Yes	23
No	46
Not sure	11
Total	80

Table 1

Out of the 80 tenants who responded to the survey online, over half said they had not been made to feel uncomfortable about being a council tenant. Just over a quarter said they had been made to feel uncomfortable, these respondents were then asked about any examples they may have. As with all of the questions in the surveys, this was not a compulsory question. If drop-in session attendees provided examples these have been captured in the section below.

Who made you feel uncomfortable about being a council tenant?

Colleague	1
Friend	8
WBC officer	5
WBC contractor	3

Table 2

Other answers given were most commonly '*neighbours'* and '*school'*. Other comments highlighted the general social stigma they believed is attached to being a council tenant: "*general assumption some estates are bad*" and "*there is a stigma about having a council property. I think we are lucky to be in a council property and make sure I say so*".

When did they make you feel uncomfortable?

Online tenants were asked this question and the results are shown in table 3:

Less than 12 months ago	3
1 – 5 years ago	13
6 – 10 years ago	4
11 – 20 years ago	0
20 – 30 years ago	0
More than 30 years ago	0

Table 3

How did they make you feel uncomfortable?

Overall nearly 50 comments were submitted in answer to this question.

Most comments highlighted the stigma tenants experienced and the attitudes of people to council housing. The below examples reflect these comments:

"[Neighbours] thought about selling their house knowing new people were moving in (council tenants)"
"There was a heavily intended statement made that I was 'probably in arrears' with my rental payments which has never been the case. Very condescending."
"People think council tenants are lower class, they think they are better."
"[The colleague said] How can you be my boss when you are a council tenant?"
"[They believed that council housing is] for the working class, common as muck."

Some comments referred to the social exclusion they faced because they were council tenants, for example "*parents avoid play dates on council estates*" and "*they don't include you*".

Other respondents had experienced "*shoddy work*" to their properties from officers who "*didn't treat* [their] *house with respect*" and who had "*that'll do, it's only a council house*" attitudes. Compared to the October to December 2018 Voluntas report, this type of experience is relatively rare, with 'satisfaction across the repairs journey [being] highest in relation to the operatives themselves, in particular relation to being polite and respectful and keeping dirt and dust to a minimum'[10]. The report also showed that 93% of tenants were satisfied with the overall quality of work.

One respondent to the non-tenant survey left the below comment:

"There is still a stigma (not just in this area but within this office) regarding social housing – these comments come from anyone and I have overheard hundreds of comments since I've worked here which may have been derogatory towards tenants. We need a positive change on this as absolutely anyone in any circumstance, job, nationality, etc, can live in or may need social housing in the future. It does not define who you are as a person."

And another said: "*I was extremely angry that some councillors dismissed the idea that anyone felt any stigma about social housing. Very pleased the Council is investigating this.*"

When asked about their experiences some tenant respondents said that people assume "*council housing is worse than other types*" and that "*people who live in council housing have to live there because they spend all their money on drugs and alcohol*".

Eight of the comments referred to poor treatment of council tenants and an overall lack of a sense of ownership enabled by the Council. The comments below illustrate how some tenants feel they lack control over their homes or are treated less favourably because they are a council tenant.

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[10] Voluntas, Waverley Borough Council: Responsive Repairs Satisfaction October – December 2018.

"The way that we were treated...just because it was a council home we had no say in how they did things'"
"WBC stood up for contractors instead of residents, felt like treated differently on some issues."
"There is a tendency for officers to believe that it is acceptable to tell tenants when repairs are to be carried out and don't give the tenant opportunity to discuss. The assumption is that not enough tenants look after their properties when in reality it is a small minority."
"Council didn't deal with ASB because I was a Council tenant."
"That we don't have a right to moan about anything eg parking".

As highlighted previously, empowering residents and ensuring their voices are heard is one of the five principles of the Paper. A lack of a sense of ownership of tenants suggests they do not feel sufficiently empowered when it comes to their property.

A handful of tenant respondents who were surveyed either tried to avoid telling people that they lived in council housing or knew someone who avoided telling people. Whether this is in anticipation of judgement or a result of embarrassment, it can narrow public understanding of council housing and those who live in it, and contribute to the prejudice against council housing. Tenants who are proud to live in council housing can help to educate the wider public on its strengths and assist in reducing stigma.

Media portrayal

The final part of the tenant survey asked about how social housing tenants are portrayed in the media.

Tenants were asked if they had come across positive and negative stories about social housing.

As with all other questions asked in the tenant survey, some respondents took part online and others were interviewed face to face at the drop-in sessions. The respondents who took part online were likely to answer the question in a focused way (opting for 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure') whereas drop-in session respondents were provided with a less constrained approach and consequently in this group there was a higher percentage of 'not selected' corresponding to a blank text box on the interview paper. This discrepancy should be taken into account when viewing the results.

Have you come across any positive or negative stories about social housing?
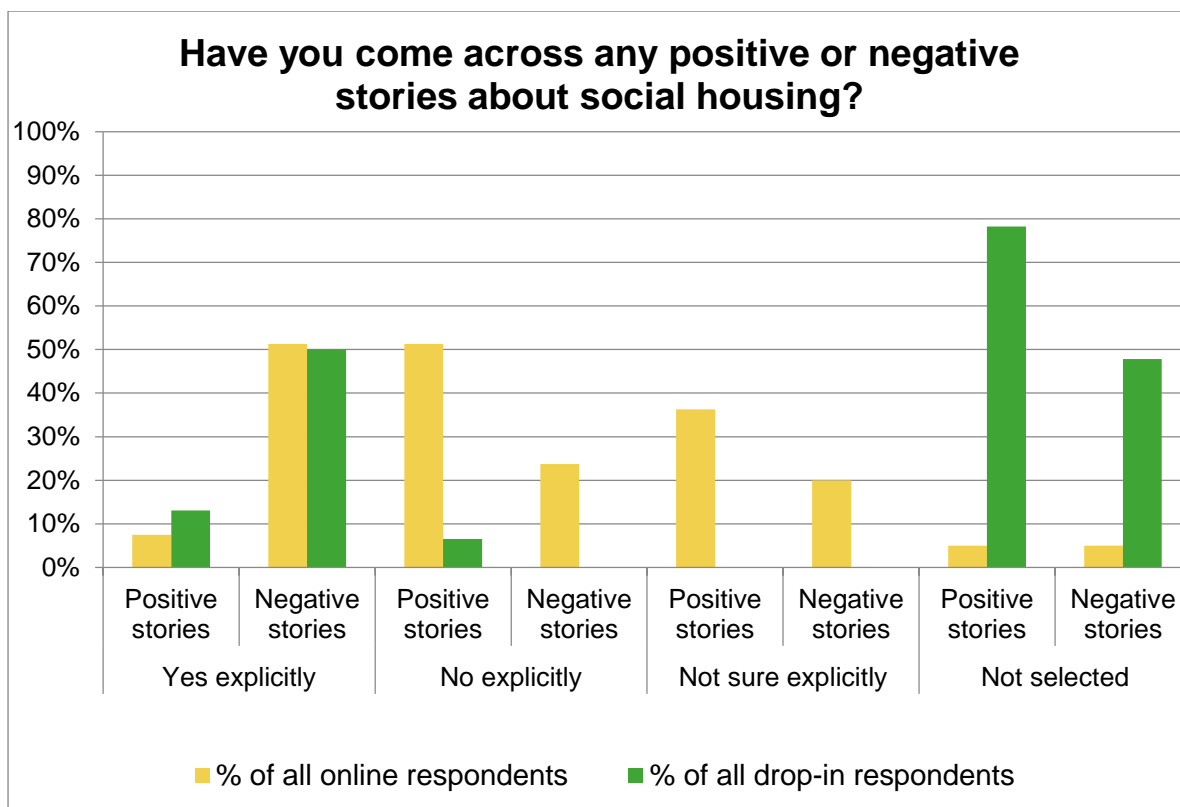
Figure 21

The difference between the proportions of respondents explicitly saying they had come across positive media stories compared to negative media stories is significant. Many more respondents were certain they had seen negative stories about social housing in the media.

Conversely, more residents explicitly said they had not seen any positive news stories compared to those who had not seen negative new stories. There were some respondents, however, who said they had not seen any negative news stories.

Online respondents who explicitly said that they had seen either a positive or negative media story were asked to provide examples. Examples provided by drop-in session respondents are also included in this section.

There were 7 comments provided when asked if the respondents had any examples of positive media stories. Two referred to a sense of community spirit and local activities:

> *"Council make periodic meeting with tenants…local newspapers report activities involved with council especially old people."*
> *"Community spirit when people are burgled or there's a fire."*

One tenant provided the example of how the Grenfell Tower disaster was reported in the news and said they believed tenants had been represented fairly. Another tenant said that they believed TV programmes such as 'Benefits Street' were positive as they highlighted the stigma council tenants face. The remaining comments were

about how "*local newsletters show pride in housing delivery*" and that there is a "*sense of need by all members of the community*".

What examples of negative media stories about council housing are there?

Respondents provided 57 comments in answer to this question. The vast majority referred to stereotypes of council tenants being reinforced in the media:

"That there is a certain 'type' of people who live in council housing – those in receipt of benefits that perhaps aren't warranted, are lazy, uneducated."
"Assuming we are all benefit cheaters."
"Stereotyping, papers draw attention to where they live if the are a council tenant – implication."
"Press suggests council tenants don't work or are drug dealers."
"Stereotyping of families, antisocial behaviour."

Other comments were about the fact the media reports on the lack of social housing, clearly a negative news story but not necessarily one that paints council tenants in a poor light.

How the findings of this report compare to Chartered Institute of Housing – Rethinking Social Housing report

The Chartered Institute of Housing published its 'Rethinking Social Housing' report (the CIH report) in June 2018 after undertaking extensive research, including surveys, interviews, workshops, secondary data analysis and a review of existing literature. The research on which this report (Council Housing: Pride or Prejudice) is based was designed by the Group after taking inspiration from the CIH report. Some of the questions asked in the research of this report were based on those asked by the CIH and therefore allow useful comparison.

Some of the tenant profile information gathered for this study was mirrored in the CIH study. For example, the CIH report stated that 43% of social housing tenants are working, matching the proportion of tenant respondents in employment who took part in this study. Despite the skew in this report's data towards the views of older respondents, these similarities are encouraging indications that the findings are comparable to those of social housing tenants nationally.

The CIH report set out the below 6 headline messages:

- Adopt a common definition and understanding of the role and purpose of social housing.
- Ensure that tenants have a voice.
- Increase the support of genuinely affordable homes.
- Ensure everyone can afford a place to call home.
- Make sure that existing homes and neighbourhoods are of good quality and well managed.
- Challenge the stigma and stereotyping attached to social housing.

Adopt a common definition and understanding of the role and purpose of social housing

Social housing is a broad term that encompasses several different types of housing tenures. Coupled with the legislative changes that social housing and social housing providers have seen over the years, such as large-scale stock transfers, tenancy changes and the development of housing associations, it is not surprising that there is some general confusion about what the term 'social housing' actually means. It could be argued that this general uncertainty around the term has partly contributed to the lack of a commonly understood role/purpose of social housing and eligibility.

One of the main purposes of the Group's research supporting this report was to gauge the attitudes and perceptions of members of the public, covering both tenants and non-tenants, towards social housing. It was for this reason that 'social housing' was not defined to the participants, their responses were based upon whatever their individual perceptions of 'social housing' were. This non-prescriptive approach to terminology was suitable for the purpose of this study but, as the CIH report argues,

'to understand the role and purpose of social housing we need a common definition'[11].

<u>Ensure that tenants have a voice</u>

The CIH report refers to the reprioritisation of spending by social housing providers following the national 1% rent reduction from 2016-2020, imposed on social landlords my the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, and states that 'anecdotally, this has led to reduced resources for tenant involvement in certain cases'[12]. Fortunately Waverley has been able to keep tenant engagement as a priority and maintain a resource to support a range of activities including two active and independent tenant representative bodies, the Tenants' Panel and the Waverley Scrutiny Group. In addition to these formal groups, tenants must be empowered individually in order to feel that their concerns will be heard and addressed. As figures 18 and 20 of this report show, some tenants do not feel their concerns are being taken seriously by the landlord, and others have experienced a poor level of service, attributing this to the officer's attitude towards council housing. This report has highlighted these areas, drawn comparisons with data already obtained by the Council and made recommendations to help address these issues.

<u>Increase the supply of genuinely affordable homes</u>

One of the strongest messages coming out of the research behind this report was that a large number of respondents think more social housing should be built. One respondent said: *"I think there should be more social housing built than is allowed at the moment – there are too many homeless people in the UK at the moment and I think in this day and age this should not be so."* Many respondents had opinions on the Right to Buy scheme with lots of comments on how it has negatively impacted upon the supply of social housing.

The current housing crisis in the UK is a problem recognised by all political parties. It is clear that lack of homes, both social and private, has contributed to the disparity between supply and demand. It seems counter intuitive, then, that the Council's housing register has decreased significantly since 2012. The Localism Act 2011 meant that local authorities had more power than previously over the allocation criteria; they could set their own rules such as requiring a local connection, having an income limit or not allowing homeowners on the register. As the criteria were tightened the number of people on the Council's housing register dropped dramatically. The research undertaken for this study shows that there is a lack of awareness amongst members of the public concerning eligibility for social housing and it can be argued, therefore, that the number of people on the register isn't the only reflection of housing need in the borough, and some people who fit the criteria aren't applying. For example, the West Surrey Strategic Housing Market Assessment uses a variety of indicators to estimate the level of local housing need. This gap in applications is problematic as it makes estimating the true levels and nature of

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[11] Chartered Institute of Housing, 'Rethinking Social Housing: Final report', p6
http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Final%20Rethinking%20social%20housing%20report.pdf
[12] Ibid p20

housing need more difficult, meaning the data needed to support the business case for new homes could be flawed. Encouraging more eligible people to apply would allow a more accurate picture of who is in need. However, whilst there is merit in encouraging this approach, there is also an argument that this can create unrealistic expectations given the shortage of housing supply as well as increased administration costs to the Council.

Ensure everyone can afford a place to call home

In its report the CIH states that 'we need to move towards a policy framework which links rents to local incomes. This would take account of local and regional differences and make sure that no one is priced out of finding a decent place to live'[13]. As the 'purpose' and 'who do you think lives in social housing?' sections of this report highlight, many people who work in the borough of Waverley cannot afford to live here. The CIH report also makes reference to this issue and claims 'travel to work figures show there is still huge demand for social housing closer to low paid employment'[14].

Ascertaining an accurate picture of housing need in the borough is vital to delivering enough suitable homes for those who need them.

Make sure that existing homes and neighbourhoods are of good quality and well managed

The quality of council homes (high, low and in between) is a consistent theme of this report and comments from tenants about the management of homes, both positive and negative, have been an important part of the data gathered on which the report is based. Data from the STAR and Voluntas survey show that tenants are generally happy with the quality and management of their homes. However it is clear that this is an area which requires ongoing monitoring to ensure that standards are maintained and where possible improved.

Challenge the stigma and stereotyping attached to social housing

The commitment of councillors and officers to carry out the research and produce this report shows an active desire to tackle any stigma and stereotyping attached to social housing. The study underlying this report found both pride in and stigma against social housing and has produced a number of recommendations in order to ensure the services delivered to the Council's tenants continue to be improved.

Terms associated with social housing

Much of the findings of the research underlying this report resonate with those contained within the CIH report. When asked about their understanding of social housing, 'affordability' came up in 80% of responses to the research the CIH did.

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[13] Chartered Institute of Housing, 'Rethinking Social Housing: Final report', p6
http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Final%20Rethinking%20social%20housing%20report.pdf
[14] Ibid p11
[14] Ibid

This compares very closely to the over 90% of respondents to the survey undertaken for this report who associated 'affordability' with social housing.

As discussed earlier in this report, the term 'home for life' is one many tenants also associate with social housing. Security of a permanent home came up frequently in the responses to the study carried out by the CIH, showing clear similarities between the findings of the studies and highlighting the importance of this perception.

Who lives in social housing?

The opinion that social housing is for 'anyone' was shared by roughly 50% of respondents to this study and many of the comments in response to the question had the same 'element of pragmatism with recognition that some form of 'rationing' was currently unavoidable'[15] found in the research of the CIH report. Many responses to this study refer to the difference between levels of supply and levels of demand for social housing and some acknowledged the impact this has had on the allocation process and, in turn, the perception of social housing:

"*I think the scarcity of social housing has meant that only those most in need can qualify which has meant a change to the make up of social housing areas and caused some of the perceived difficulties.*"

The fairly low level of respondents who thought 'professionals' lived in social housing also indicates that there is a clear need for an educative process that promotes the Allocation policy.

Stigma surrounding social housing

Negative representations of social housing tenants in the media described by some respondents were also recognised in the CIH report. The CIH report stated that 'social housing tenants are frequently portrayed as choosing to live on social security…committing tenancy and benefit fraud, and perpetuating anti-social behaviour'[16], this is not a true image of social housing tenants and is indicative of a lack of understanding of eligibility criteria, employment status and professions of tenants, as highlighted in the 'See the Person' campaign.

Furthermore, when asked why they wouldn't live in social housing some respondents said they believed that the properties had "*poorly maintained gardens/fencing*", were "*rundown*" and that "*there seems to be less pride taken in how the properties and land around them are looked after*". This image, too, is referenced in the CIH report as it states 'their homes and the surrounding areas are presented as being of poor quality and run-down – yet 30% of privately rented homes fail the decent homes standard (DHS) compared to 13% of social housing'[17]. The fact that the tenants have access to a repair and maintenance service does not appear to be widely acknowledged. The commonalities in findings across this report and the CIH report

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[15] Chartered Institute of Housing, 'Rethinking Social Housing: Final report', p11
http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Final%20Rethinking%20soci
al%20housing%20report.pdf
[16] Ibid p25
[17] Ibid

demonstrate that stigma and prejudice around social housing is prevalent and based on misconceptions which need to be addressed.

Conclusions

It is clear that there is some confusion over the role and purpose of social housing and it would be beneficial for a common definition to be adopted across the Council in order to avoid any misconceptions, to promote eligibility and to assist in addressing stigma.

Although this report is limited to the experience of council housing tenants[18] rather than a broader social housing tenants group, the results are comparable to the findings of the CIH report and can be relied upon, alongside other data sources, to help to develop council services.

Whilst the research reached over 600 respondents, it is acknowledged that the findings have limitations and this subject would benefit from further in-depth study. It is clear that the demographics of respondents do not provide an accurate representation of residents in the borough and additional representations across age groups, particularly in the under 35 cohort, are required. It would also be beneficial to be able to make comparisons across social housing providers in the borough.

The data gathered as a result of the research reflects the national picture in terms of experience of stigma and perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of social housing. It is, therefore, encouraging that the Green Paper 'A new deal for social housing', published by the government in 2018, focused on five principles for the improvement and development of social housing nationally.

One of the principles is 'Ensuring homes are safe and decent'. Whilst the study did not find any immediate concerns with the safety of properties, the results did show that only 50% of tenants surveyed associate the term 'well maintained' with social housing. It also found that a significant proportion of non-tenants believe social housing can be identified by its external appearance. This is unlikely to be particular to Waverley housing alone but does go some way to explain how stigma against social housing is reinforced by poor design and poor maintenance, including outside spaces. This is an important point and one which the Council has taken some steps to address through its recently published Housing Design Standards and Affordable Housing SPD. In addition to the wider benefits of good design these documents highlight the value of tenure blind developments and its role in tackling stigma. There are also further recommendations regarding measures to address estate appearance made within this report.

One of the principles in the Paper concerned the 'Effective resolution of complaints' and another referred to 'Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator'. In this study, when asked 'what are the bad things about being a council tenant?' over one fifth of tenants said 'not being taken seriously by the landlord', suggesting that some tenants feel their voices go unheard. Again, this criticism is unlikely to be unique to Waverley and the results of the STAR 2017 indicate that rates of satisfaction were in line with other landlords. This does not mean, however, that attempts to empower tenants have no scope for improvement.

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[18] Except from 13 housing association tenants taking part in the public survey.

One of the principles of the Paper related to 'Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities'. This principle formed a principle part of the background of this study, the aim of which was to learn about the factors influencing tenants' views of their homes, with the goal of tackling the causes of prejudice by developing services which promote pride in tenants' homes and promoting the eligibility criteria for council housing, thereby dispelling common myths.

Some of the misconceptions around social housing and its tenants, including levels of unemployment and eligibility, became evident through the research. For example, over 70% of non-tenant respondents thought a household would need to earn less than £40,000 to be eligible for a council property, when the actual figure is £60,000. This misapprehension has the potential to contribute to stigma through reinforcing barriers to social housing for higher income groups.

A further misunderstanding highlighted by the report is that professionals do not live in social housing. This view could act as a significant deterrent to professional people, who meet the eligibility criteria, from adding their names to the council housing register, thereby reducing their housing choices. Consistent and coordinated efforts to educate the public on eligibility and tenant diversity are vital to dispel myths around social housing.

The subject of preferred housing choice was one that was raised in our non-tenant survey when asking 'would you consider living in social housing?'. Approximately 60% of respondents answered 'no' or 'not sure' to this question. Whilst the supplementary questions asking what informed this response could be reflective of a borough with a high number of owner occupiers, with the predominant answer being 'I don't need to', this may also be indicative of the lack of understanding of eligibility for social housing and a lack of familiarity with modern day council housing

This links with the final principle of the Paper which recognises the need to 'expand supply'. Significant numbers of respondents to the survey agreed with: "*social housing is a valuable option for many members of the community and more should be provided*" and requested: "*build more please*". Whilst the research clearly indicates that stigma and prejudice against social housing exists, it also shows that it is a valued resource, the strengths of which are recognised and valued by residents of all tenures across the borough. We are building high quality new council homes, however numbers are limited, and with a reducing number on our housing register, a campaign to address barriers and promote Waverley Borough Council as a landlord of choice informs this report's recommendations.

This report has succeeded in going some way to answer some of the questions, such as whether stigma exists in the borough, first raised at the Housing O&S Committee meeting of September 2018, however it also highlights the complexity of this subject and the opportunities for additional work to be carried out to create a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of stigma and what can be done to tackle this.

Recommendations

<u>Housing Services</u>

1. A review is undertaken of the Council's Allocation policy, to ensure an easy application process for all eligible residents, including local workers, and more representative demand data is collected.
2. A review is undertaken of the level of customer satisfaction with how enquiries are dealt, comparing existing data with the results of this research, and action taken as necessary.
3. The call for tender and subsequent evaluation of bids for contracts for services that involve entering a tenant's home or engaging with tenants should include focus on the conduct of operatives.

<u>Estate Appearance</u>

4. 'Kerb appeal' and maintenance of outside areas should be included in the 2021 – 2026 Asset Management Strategy.
5. Priority areas for improvement (both by location and type of issue) should be identified with a plan of remedial action created and implemented in order to address areas of external appearance in most need of improvement.
6. Opportunities for the implementation of a maintenance levy applied to right to buy tenants should be investigated in order to secure continued adequate maintenance of outside areas.
7. Tenants' views provided in the responses should be reviewed to see if there is any correlation between them, either positive or negative, and particular areas of Waverley's social housing stock.

<u>Types of tenancies</u>

8. The Council should review whether or not the introduction of flexible tenancies has so far met the original objectives set in 2014.
9. The Council should investigate the development of the range of housing available including shared ownership and other sub-market rent tenures.

<u>Communication and promotion</u>

10. The Council should expand develop its communication on allocation criteria to better educate members of the public on who is eligible for social housing.
11. Following the implementation of recommendations 1, 7 and 8, the Council should undertake a reassessment of housing need to inform the business case for the development of different types of properties and tenures.

<u>Waverley Borough Council Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</u>

12. The Committee supports the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document on its agenda for 26 February 2019.
13. The outcomes of the reviews in recommendations 1, 2, 5 and 8 should be brought before the Housing O&S Committee for scrutiny.

14. The gaps in demographic responses should be filled by approaching schools and those who live in towns with the survey in order to obtain the views of those demographic groups missing from the data

General

15. This report should be used in the induction of all staff and councillors to educate them on any misconceptions or potential unconscious bias around social housing, with the purpose of ultimately ensuring professionalism in service delivery.
16. The Council should consider signing up to the national 'See the Person' campaign.
17. The composition of regular data sources (for example the Citizens' Panel) should be reviewed in terms of overall representativeness with the intention of identifying and recruiting members in those demographic groups that are currently under-represented, and with an overall aim of more closely matching the established demographic composition of the borough.
18. The data gathered should be offered to universities for use in Master degree studies.

Glossary

Affordable housing: housing for eligible people who are unable to afford housing to rent or buy on the open market, meeting definition in National Planning Policy Framework.

Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (the SPD): a supplementary document that adds to the detail of the Local Plan Part 1.

Citizens' Panel: a panel of over 500 residents who have chosen to respond to surveys sent by the Council in order to inform and enhance service delivery

Flexible tenancies: introduced by Waverley Borough Council as standard in 2014, a tenant will progress onto a flexible tenancy following successful completion of the introductory period (12 months). Flexible tenancies usually are for a period of 5 years, at this point the Council carries out an assessment of whether or not the tenant still meets the allocation criteria (for example household income limits).

Essential local workers: public sector employees who provide frontline services in areas including health, education and community safety – such as NHS staff, teachers, police, firefighters and military personnel, social care and childcare workers.

Housing Design Standards document (HDS): a set of standards for new Council Homes informed by a task and finish group of the Housing O&S and approved in July 2018.

Residualisation: the process by which, due to insufficient supply, only those in most immediate housing need are allocated social housing.

'See the Person' campaign: a national campaign sponsored by social housing providers aimed at tackling misrepresentations and negative stereotyping of social housing tenants.

Secure tenancies: the standard tenure for Waverley Borough Council tenants until 2014, secure tenancies provided a permanent home for tenants, providing all conditions were met.

Social housing: an umbrella term for housing provided at a subsidised rate, allocated by need and provided by the state and non-profit organisations.

Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR): a survey of the satisfaction levels of tenants and leaseholders of Waverley Borough Council, conducted every three years.

Stigma: mark of shame or discredit due to a person's circumstance (in the case of this report discredit due to a person's housing tenure).

Tenure blind developments: housing developments designed in such a way that it is not possible to distinguish between properties of different tenures.

Voluntas survey: a survey targeted at tenants who have recently had work undertaken to their property, aimed at gauging satisfaction with the service.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Questions asked in non-tenant survey

1. Do you associate the following terms with social housing?
   (Please tick either yes or no for each)

	Yes	No
Affordability		
Safe place to live		
Well maintained		
Home for life		
Sense of community		

2. Can you spot social housing by its external appearance?
   (Please tick only 1 option)

- ○ Always
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Never
- ○ Not sure

3. Would you consider living in social housing?
- ○ Yes, go to question 4
- ○ No, go to question 5
- ○ Not sure, go to question 6

4. Why would you consider living in social housing?
   (Please select all that apply. After completing this question please skip to question 6)
- ☐ It's more affordable
- ☐ It's a home for life
- ☐ It's good quality
- ☐ It has a good sense of community
- ☐ It can provide living support
- ☐ Other

If you chose other, please give the reason:

5. Why wouldn't you consider living in social housing?
   (Please select all that apply)
- ☐ I don't need to
- ☐ It's for those with less money
- ☐ I would have less choice of location

☐ It's of poor quality
☐ I think it has more crime
☐ Other

If you chose other, please give the reason:

6. Who do you think lives in council housing?
(Please select all that apply)

☐ Pensioners/retired people   ☐ Young adults

☐ Families with young children   ☐ Families with older children

☐ Single people   ☐ Couples

☐ Professionals   ☐ Unemployed people

☐ Immigrants   ☐ Single parents

☐ People in receipt of benefits   ☐ Anyone

☐ Other

Other, please specify:

7. What percentage of social housing tenants nationally, do you think, were unemployed in 2016-17 (not including pensioners)? *(Please tick only one option)*.

○ Less than 10%   ○ Between 51% and 60%

○ Between 11% and 20%   ○ Between 61% and 70%

○ Between 21% and 30%   ○ Between 71% and 80%

○ Between 31% and 40%   ○ Between 81% and 90%

○ Between 41% and 50%   ○ Between 91% 100%

8. What percentage of social housing tenants nationally, do you think, are immigrants? *(Please tick only one option)*.

○ Less than 10%   ○ Between 51% and 60%

○ Between 11% and 20%   ○ Between 61% and 70%

○ Between 21% and 30%   ○ Between 71% and 80%

○ Between 31% and 40%   ○ Between 81% and 90%

○ Between 41% and 50%   ○ Between 91% 100%

9. What percentage of social housing tenants nationally, do you think, received housing benefit in 2015-16? *(Please tick only one option)*.

○ Less than 10%   ○ Between 21% and 30%

○ Between 11% and 20%   ○ Between 31% and 40%

○ Between 41% and 50%   ○ Between 71% and 80%

○ Between 51% and 60%   ○ Between 81% and 90%

○ Between 61% and 70%   ○ Between 91% 100%

10. How much income do you think a household has to have to be eligible for a council house in Waverley? *(Please tick only one option).*

○ Less than £30,000 per year   ○ Less than £60,000 per year

○ Less than £40,000 per year   ○ Less than £80,000 per year

11. Do you have any further comments about social housing?

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12. How old are you?

☐ Under 35   ☐ 65+

☐ 35 – 50   ☐ 85+

☐ 51 – 64   ☐ Prefer not to say

13. Do you live in a:

☐ Town   ☐ Village   ☐ Other

14. What is your postcode?

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15. In which type of property do you live?

☐ House

☐ Flat

☐ Senior living scheme

☐ Other

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Other, please specify:

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16. What is your housing tenure?

☐ Owner occupier   ☐ Living with family and friends

☐ Private rent   ☐ Other

☐ Council rent

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If other please specify:

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Appendix 2: Questions asked in tenant survey

1. How old are you?

☐ Under 35　　　　　　　　　☐ 65+

☐ 35 – 50　　　　　　　　　☐ 85+

☐ 51 – 64　　　　　　　　　☐ Prefer not to say

2. Do you live in a:

☐ Town　　　　　　☐ Village　　　　　　☐ Other

3. How long have you been a council tenant?

☐ Less than 12 months　　　☐ 11 – 20 years

☐ 1 – 5 years　　　　　　　☐ 21 – 30 years

☐ 6 – 10 years　　　　　　☐ More than 30 years

4. Are you (please select all that apply):

☐ Working

☐ In receipt of benefits (including state pension)

☐ In receipt of private pension

Other, please specify:

5. What are the good things about being a council tenant?

☐ More affordable than other tenures (e.g. private renting)

☐ Stable and secure tenancy

☐ Can contact the landlord with issues (e.g. with maintenance or neighbours)

☐ Can request aids and adaptions if necessary (e.g. wet room)

☐ Possible to house-swap (mutual exchange)

Other, please specify:

6. What are the bad things about being a council tenant?

☐ Slow response from landlord to addressing maintenance issues

☐ Unkept outside areas

☐ Anti-social behaviour of neighbours

☐ Not being taken seriously by the landlord when reporting issues

☐ Impersonal service

Other, please specify:

7. What are the things that make you feel proud about where you live (please select all that apply)?

☐ Location
☐ Friendly neighbours
☐ Nice gardens/outdoor areas
☐ Community spirit
☐ Well maintained home

Other, please specify:

8. What are the things that make you feel unhappy about where you live (please select all that apply)?

☐ Anti-social behaviour
☐ Poor maintenance of properties
☐ Insufficient public transport
☐ Poor maintenance of outside areas
☐ Lack of green space

Other, please specify:

9. Has anyone ever made you feel uncomfortable about being a council tenant?
○ Yes
○ No
○ Not sure

10. Who made you feel uncomfortable about being a council tenant)? (Only asked in online survey).

○ Colleague
○ Friend
○ Waverley Borough Council officer
○ Waverley Borough Council contractor

Other, please specify:

11. **When did they make you feel uncomfortable about being a council tenant? (Only asked in online survey).**

   ○ Less than 12 months ago   ○ 11 – 20 years ago
   ○ 1 – 5 years ago   ○ 20 – 30 years ago
   ○ 6 – 10 years ago   ○ More than 30 years ago

12. **How did they make you feel about being a council tenant (e.g. what did they say)? (Only asked in online survey).**

13. **Have you come across any positive media stories (newspaper, TV, social media) about council housing?**

   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   ○ Not sure

14. **What examples of positive media stories about council housing are there?**

15. **Have you come across any negative media stories (newspaper, TV, social media) about council housing?**

   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   ○ Not sure

16. **What examples of positive media stories about council housing are there?**

17. **What is your postcode?**

18. **In which type of property do you live?**
   ☐ House   ☐ Senior living scheme
   ☐ Flat   ☐ Other

   If other please specify:

51

19. Do you associate the following terms with social housing?
   (Please tick either yes or no for each)

	Yes	No
Affordability		
Safe place to live		
Well maintained		
Home for life		
Sense of community		

20. Who do you think lives in council housing?
   (Please select all that apply)

☐ Pensioners/retired people

☐ Families with young children

☐ Single people

☐ Professionals

☐ Immigrants

☐ People in receipt of benefits

☐ Other

☐ Young adults

☐ Families with older children

☐ Couples

☐ Unemployed people

☐ Single parents

☐ Anyone

If you chose other, please specify:

Appendix 3: Housing stock and live applications information

Age of Waverley housing stock (as at 2019)

Age of property	Number of properties
Pre 1945	792
1945-1964	1988
1965-1974	846
1975-1999	1047
Post 1999	134
1964-1974	1
Total	**4808**

Live applications at 09/01/2019

Age of applicant	Number of applications
1 to 35	550
36 to 50	353
51 to 64	213
65 to 83	148
84 plus	29
Total	**1293**