

LGBT EXPERIENCES OF HOUSING

A snapshot

July 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As Affinity Sutton celebrates Brighton Pride for the fourth consecutive year we thought it timely to publish LGBT Experiences of Housing – A snapshot.

This snapshot is based on research for Affinity Sutton completed in partnership with the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research at London South Bank University.

Although every care has been taken in preparing this report, no responsibility or liability will be accepted by Affinity Sutton, its employees, agents or advisors for its accuracy or completeness.

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INTRODUCTION

Almost one in five lesbian, gay and bisexual people expect to be treated worse than heterosexual people when applying for social housing.¹ Despite this perceived discrimination, the sector knows very little about the needs of LGBT people.

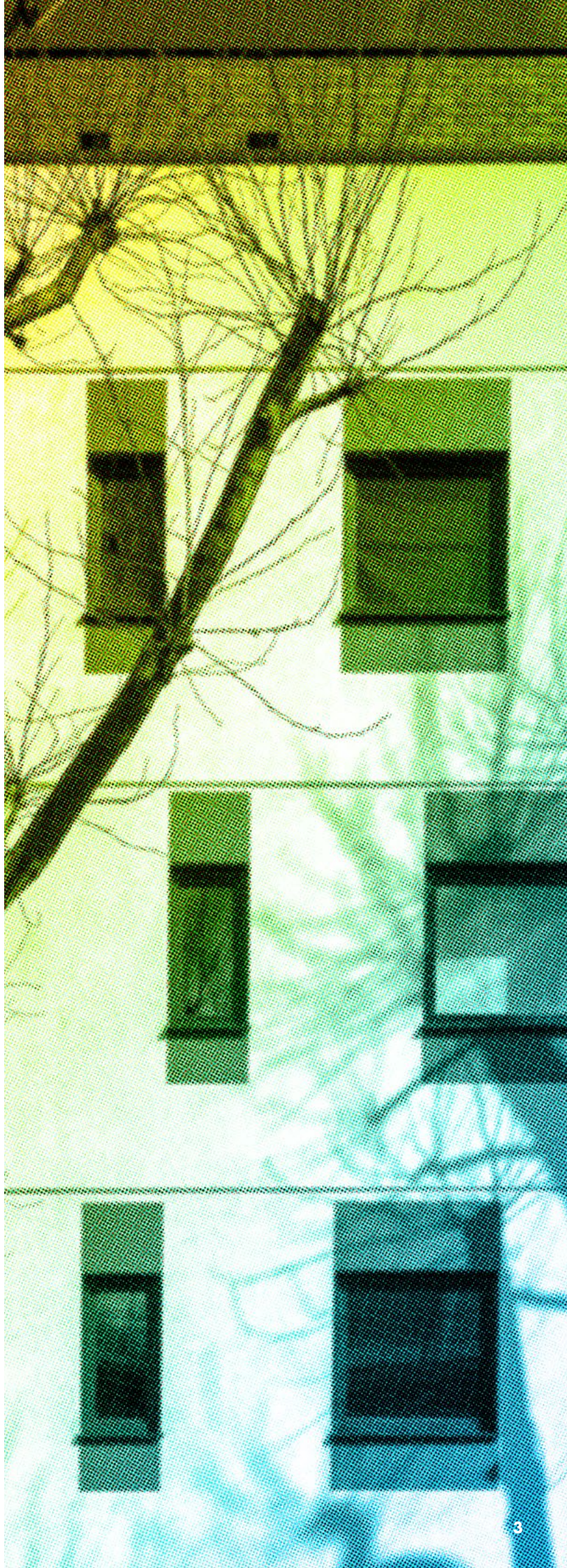
In February 2015, we co-sponsored an event with the Metro Centre (an outreach organisation for LGBT people based in Greenwich, London) and used the opportunity to ask people about their experience of housing. Reflecting the 'be visible' theme of our Diversity Week, the questions centred on visibility and discrimination. Housing Association residents were also asked for their opinion about the services provided by their landlord.

Responses highlight the need for landlords to better communicate their role as diversity champions and to demonstrate how they deal with cases of harassment and discrimination to help residents overcome their fear of being visible.

SAMPLE

We commissioned a researcher from the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research at London South Bank University to undertake the interviews on our behalf. The researcher was able to interview 47 people across a range of different tenures:

- About half of those questioned lived in social housing; 15 of the respondents lived in a home owned and managed by a housing association (HA), including four Affinity Sutton residents.
- Our sample covered an age range from 18 to 74. The median age band was 35 to 44. Younger respondents tended to rent privately; live rent free or rent from housing associations. Middle aged and older people tended to be owner occupiers, or rented from local authorities.
- Of the 36 people who reported their gender, 23 were male and ten were 10 female. Three respondents used other terms that they felt more comfortable with, including "gender queer".
- Of the 34 people who reported their sexual orientation, 22 identified as gay; five identified as queer; three as lesbian and three as bisexual.
- Respondents mainly identified as white British (23 out of 36), other ethnicities included black British (3); mixed (2); Chinese and gypsy traveller.



¹ April Guasp, Gay in Britain (Stonewall, 2013).

QUESTIONS TO HOUSING ASSOCIATION RESIDENTS

Housing association (HA) residents were asked a number of questions about the services provided by their landlord. Of the 15 housing association residents sampled, 12 told us more about themselves.

The sample was quite evenly spread in terms of age – three respondents were aged 18 to 24; two aged 25 to 34; three aged 35 to 44; three aged 45 to 54; one respondent was aged 55 to 64. Seven out of the 12 respondents were male; three female and two defined themselves in other ways.

Most of the respondents identified as white British; one as black British and one as white European. Ten of the twelve respondents defined themselves as LGBTQ.

HOW DO HA LGBT RESIDENTS REGARD THEIR LANDLORD?

Housing association residents were asked if they felt they were treated fairly by their landlord and if they were able to speak to their landlord about their needs. On average, respondents agreed that they were treated fairly by their landlord:

Respondents also felt that they were able to speak to their landlord about their needs, but this was less pronounced. Three out of the fifteen respondents said that they felt they were treated unfairly by their landlord and four out of the fifteen respondents said that they felt unable to speak to their landlord about their needs:

Figure 1

I feel that I am treated fairly by my landlord

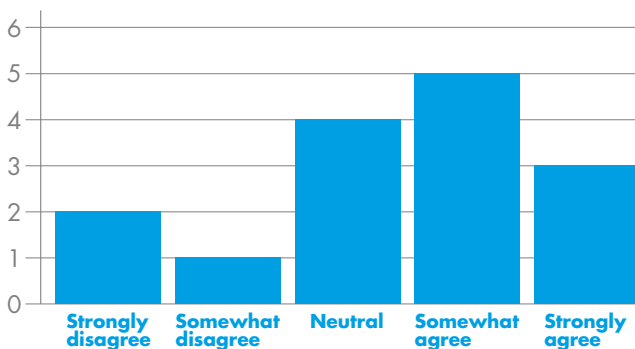
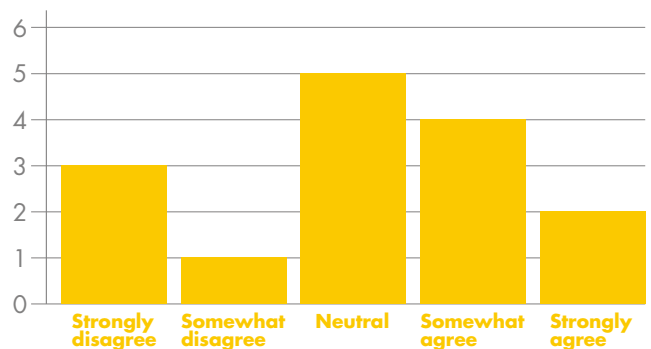


Figure 2

I feel that I am able to speak to my landlord about my needs



The most common need identified by respondents was help for residents if they suffered harassment. Other needs identified included guidance for joint tenancies (perhaps more prominent following legal recognition for same-sex marriages) and extra support needs for LGBT residents experiencing isolation, mental health and alcohol and drugs issues (one respondent claimed was more prevalent in the LGBT community).

HOW WELL DO HA LGBT RESIDENTS FEEL THEY ARE SERVED BY THEIR LANDLORD?

Responses indicated a level of happiness with the services provided by HAs. However, respondents were less convinced that their landlord supports LGBT residents. Perceptions of landlord support for LGBT residents were weighted down by the strong negative views of some residents. In particular, respondents expressed concern about possible homophobia from landlords:

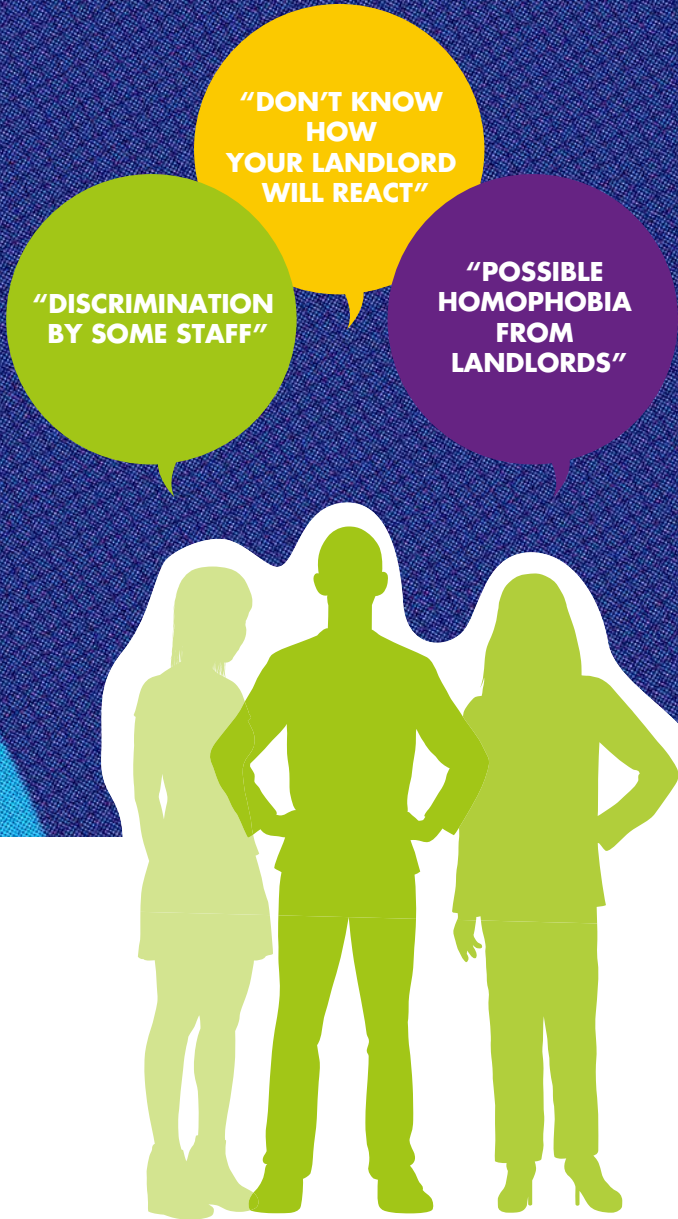


Figure 3
I am happy with the services provided by my landlord

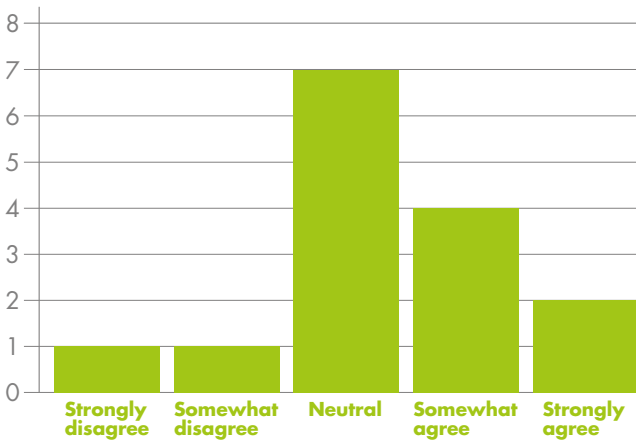
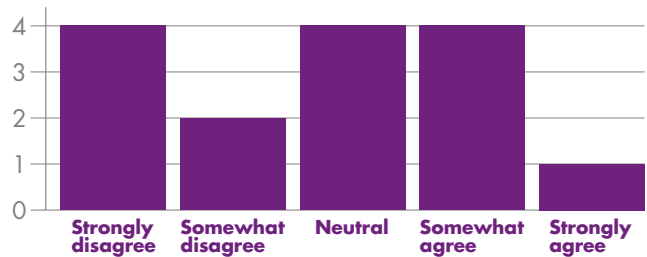


Figure 4
My landlord visibly supports its LGBT residents



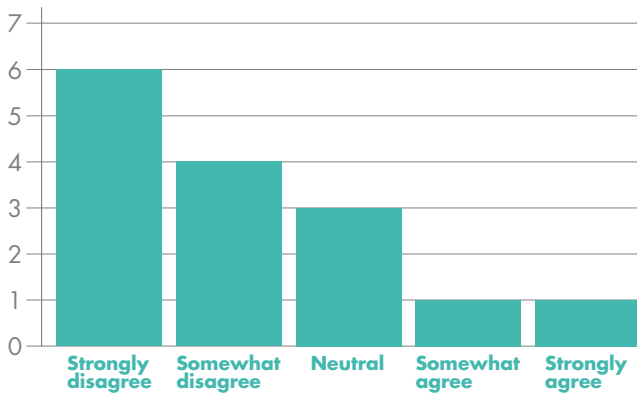
HOW EASY IS IT FOR HA RESIDENTS TO ACCESS INFORMATION ON LGBT SERVICES?

Most HA residents did not feel that it was easy to access information about LGBT services offered by their landlord. This question triggered the most negative response of the survey. Respondents were aware of information offered by specialist providers, including Stonewall Housing and the Albert Kennedy Trust, but were not aware that they could access information through their own landlord:



Figure 5

I feel I can easily access information about LGBT services provided by my landlord



IS IT IMPORTANT FOR LANDLORDS TO KNOW SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

Participants across all tenures were asked if they thought it important for social landlords to know the sexual orientation of residents. Some of the participants had mixed feelings about this question, but the majority responded “no” (19 out of 31). However, interestingly a majority of HA and local authority residents responded “yes” (9 of the 16 respondents). It would be interesting to survey a larger sample to see if these responses reflect wider opinion.

Figure 6

Is it important for social landlords to know the sexual orientation of their residents? (all respondents)

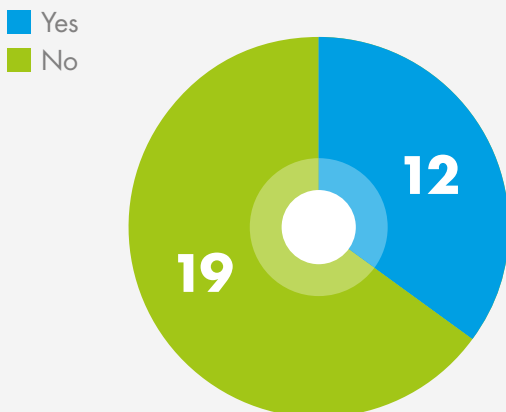
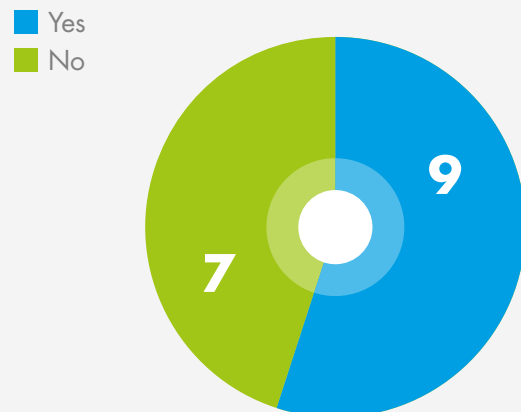


Figure 7

Is it important for social landlords to know the sexual orientation of their residents? (social housing respondents)



WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACED BY LGBT PEOPLE IN HOUSING?

Participants were asked their opinions about the issues faced by LGBT people in social housing. Most comments focused on fears of prejudice, discrimination and homophobia. Some residents feared how landlords would react to finding out about their sexual orientation – *“some landlords may not approve of our apparent lifestyle”*.

Other residents feared the reactions of neighbours and questioned whether HAs are well equipped to deal with harassment sensitively.

CONCLUSIONS

Respondents across all tenures welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the research. Overall, HA residents gave a positive response to the questions posed, but a few of the participants held negative perceptions of their landlord:

- Negative perceptions surfaced most prominently in relation to how well landlords cater for the specific needs of LGBT residents.
- Responses highlight the need for landlords to better communicate their role as diversity champions and to demonstrate how they deal with cases of harassment and discrimination to help residents overcome their fear of being visible.
- Difference in opinion between tenures over the importance of social landlords knowing the sexual orientation of their residents offers an interesting area for further research.

WHAT NEXT FOR AFFINITY SUTTON

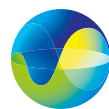
We are proud to be a Stonewall top 100 employer and that 89% of our LGBT staff feel that the workplace culture of Affinity Sutton is inclusive of LGBT people and see this as a springboard to improve our services for LGBT residents.

This research highlights the opportunity to communicate our role as a diversity champion and help residents to overcome any fears they may have about being visible. We are involving our Out and About resident group to promote our services and generate ideas to improve the experience and well being of our LGBT residents.

As founding members of HouseProud, a forum which unites housing association LGBT networks, this insight will also be shared sector wide.

proud to
be Visible...

in our homes.
in our workplace.
in our communities.



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