

**In this following blog we hear from Rosie Ward, Graduate Tenancy Services Officer at Orbit Living and who is studying Level 3 in Housing and Property Management as part of her Graduate programme.**

**Rosie attended her first CIH event in October 2018. The event was organised by CIH West Midlands Event and was focussed on the Social Housing Green Paper: a new deal for housing? After the event her group then took a visit to the back to back houses in Birmingham. Here's what Rose had to say about her varied day of learning.**

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The event started promptly and we heard from David Pipe, Policy and Practice Officer for CIH, about the key messages of the Green Paper but also where the paper doesn't go far enough to answer the questions needed.

It was revealed that nearly two thirds of people surveyed supported more social housing in their area. The media talks a lot about the housing shortage but usually the objection to houses being built in peoples' 'back garden' and as mentioned throughout the session, social housing tenants tend to be stigmatised. So the support of people having more houses built in their area was a nice surprise for me to learn.

It was pointed out how the paper is looking to improve the standards or upholding the standards of social housing and understanding the tenant's needs. From the survey carried out tenants wanted 3 key things being; affordability, security and quality. We need to continue to strive to achieve this, the houses we are providing need to be up to a desirable standard, and need not be easily identified as a social property, then it can be seen as a housing choice and be more desirable to the general public at large and help with reducing the stigma attached to social housing.

We then heard from Anna Furlong, Head of Regulatory Framework, who talked about the Green Paper from a regulators perspective and what this means for them. I know very little about the regulatory framework and what they do so this was very interesting to find out a bit more about their powers. The possibility of the serious detriment threshold for intervention in consumer matters sparked my interest to find out more about this and again how the company I work for will adapt if this changes and the effect it may have on our visions and priorities as a housing association.

We were lucky enough to hear from an Accord tenant who advised what his thoughts were on the Green Paper and how he would see a difference.

The floor was then open to discussion. This was a great opportunity to hear from professionals in many different jobs and organisations and how they differ to my own. We discussed the league table at length and the implications this has. One thing mentioned that has really stuck out for me is the idea of trying to remove the

stigma from tenants but by introducing a table are we potentially adding stigma to those living in some of the worst housing association properties. Also what can tenants do about this; it is unlikely that they can move based on the league table. Will the introduction of such things actually have a negative impact? Also the idea that what gets measured will get managed and that will be where money gets pumped into. It can't measure everything so other areas may suffer as a result.

There was discussion about stigma and how to overcome it. I personally think the media need to do more but being a professional in this area I don't think I do enough to challenge friends and families opinions about our tenants. This is something I will be more conscious to do now.

Another discussion was the promotion of professional standards within the sector. Although some people can argue that you do not need a qualification to work in housing; it is more than qualifications. Professionalism embodies a mix of qualification, skills and values. The sector is in need of professional standards, and it is a welcomed change. However by asking for a certain level of qualification are you removing diversity within the sector? The benefit of getting a vast range of backgrounds and experiences helps to deal with an array of issues which come up in housing.

We took this opportunity whilst in Birmingham to attend the Back to Back Houses and learnt about the history of housing in Birmingham.

The first house on the back to back site we visited was built in 1802 and costed only £700 to build. This was one of 54,000 back to back houses in Birmingham housing nearly half of Birmingham's population. In 1802 another 2 back to backs were built costing only £92 each. Seeing the progression in the decoration and property conditions was very interesting. Going from the first house with no kitchen, lights or water to the last with electricity and running water.

One of these back to backs which is one room wide, housed over 11 people at one time. 3 or 4 girls shared a bed in the same room as their parents, 4 brothers shared a bed and also had to share their bedroom with 2 lodgers. This is from the influence of society around them. It was at a time when children up to 10 years old had to go to school but parents had to pay for their education. By taking in lodgers they would get a little bit of extra cash even though they had no room to take them in. It highlighted how the wider social pressures can influence living conditions, which will always be a balance our tenants have to manage.

Although not mentioned the links between the housing standards and the death rate is noticeable. In 1870 the death rate of under 5's was 50%.

