

Housing

Overview

There were a range of concerns in our report regarding housing. These included barriers faced in accessing social housing - especially for Deaf BSL signers and people with learning disabilities - and overall dissatisfaction with aspects of housing services. People's housing has not always been appropriate either for their present or future needs, and it is often not within reach of the transport and amenities they need. Affordability was a major factor for many people whether renting or purchasing, and there was a recognition that this required national action and could not solely be addressed locally.

Recommendations from the report

Recommendations in the area of housing came through a few key areas:

- The provision of community navigators in a Deaf and disabled-led service who could provide end-to-end support for people accessing these services.
- An Independent Living Strategy 2030, which takes a full-system approach to the barriers Deaf and disabled people face (including housing provision).
- Committing to ensuring that 30% of housing built meets the M4(3)(2)a criteria ('wheelchair adaptable'), rather than the government minimum of M4(2), and that the maximum viable amount for each site meets the M4(3)(2)a criteria.
- Strengthening enforcement against developers who do not meet their conditions with regards to social housing.
- A redesign of the disabled facilities grant process, to create separate forms for different, specific circumstances, and to simplify the process overall.

“

...By the time I get someone to help me to phone up the flat is gone - it is too late, and hearing people beat me to it

”

“

...It is hard to understand how it works, and I need someone to explain it to me.

”

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Evidence and reflections

Deaf BSL signers

Deaf BSL signers had specific difficulties accessing housing due to language barriers. There is a lack of information provision in BSL to explain how to access housing. Furthermore, many Deaf BSL signers are digitally excluded and so struggle to bid online, and are unable to telephone quickly when properties become available.

The provision of a BSL-first service within the Council would allow support for these issues. However, bidding processes for housing should also reflect that the process as currently designed excludes some people from bidding successfully.

People with learning disabilities

Focus groups showed that some people with learning disabilities are very happy with their housing. However, for many people with learning disabilities, the same issues were raised. One respondent said, *"We need more affordable housing"*. Other respondents were more specific in their grievances. As with Deaf BSL signers, a lack of appropriate information meant people struggled with, *"...reading and understanding letters to do with my home."*

Issues with housing and social care were intertwined. A respondent commented, *"...I would move to supported living or something, but there's nowhere to go as far as my family knows."* This suggests that there is both a lack of housing provision, as well as a lack of information about the aforementioned housing provision.



...We need more individual houses, not 'care' homes.




...If you call the housing, there is always the problem of trying to get through to someone. It can be a real difficulty as you have to keep calling and calling and calling



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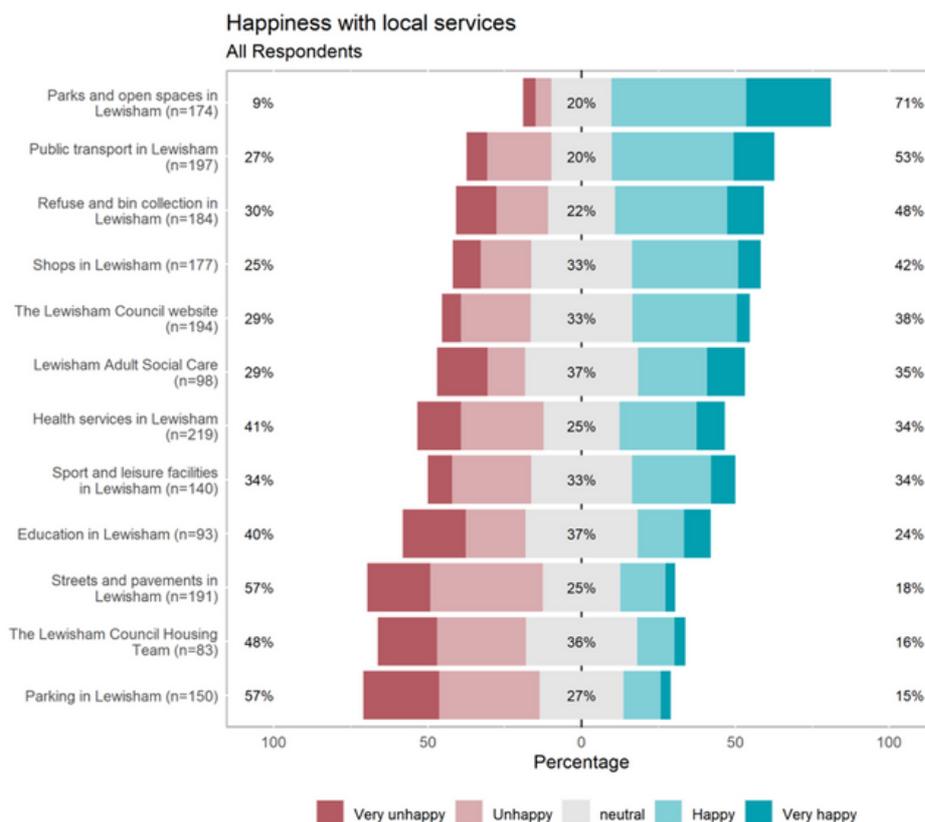
Access to housing through the Council and Housing Associations

Whilst one respondent noted that there is a “...fantastic Housing Assistance team - supportive and responsive”, this didn’t reflect the overall perceptions from respondents of the Council Housing Team. Of the local services assessed, it received the third-highest dissatisfaction rating at 48%, and the second-lowest satisfaction rating at 16%.



The reported dissatisfaction is likely to reflect the national housing crisis. One respondent noted that “...I now have one of the few adapted Lewisham Homes properties after years of waiting in an unsuitable property.” This reflects the finding that only one in three residents agreed that they had found it easy to find a home.

...Living in a three storey town house and using a wheelchair on many days, unable to access the bathroom [...] being forced to sleep in a wheelchair on many occasions does not help one’s mental health, and no one at Lewisham really cares.



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Access to housing through the Council and Housing Associations

As well as access to adapted housing, overcrowding has also been raised as an issue affecting some disabled people.

“

*...I'm autistic and live with family.
Lewisham left us overcrowded in a
flat, and it affects me.*

”

People also struggled with a lack of maintenance provision in their properties.

“

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General housing experiences

For a significant number of residents, housing (regardless of provider) didn't meet their key needs.

The shocking fact that there were 9 respondents whose homes didn't have toilets they could use, 25 whose homes didn't have baths or showers they could use, and 31 who couldn't move around their homes easily using the mobility aids they needed is addressed in more detail elsewhere.

The survey demonstrates that more than two in three disabled respondents were in homes unsuitable for their future needs. Almost one in three of respondents were not in homes suitable for their present needs. This contributed to the recommendation that 30% of new social housing stock should be adaptable, and that all single level homes should be.

This section of the survey demonstrates that less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of disabled respondents were in homes suitable for their future needs. This contribution to the recommendation that 30% of new social housing stock should be adaptable, and that all single level homes should be M4(3)(2)a-compliant.

“

...I'm autistic and live with family. Lewisham left us overcrowded in a flat, and it affects me.

”

“

...my housing is meeting my needs less and less as I get older and more disabled.

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For ¾ respondents, their homes were not near transport links they could use, or in reach of services such as their GP and the shops. Disabled people are likely to face more transport barriers than non-disabled people. This is why housing targeted at disabled people needs to be built in areas where accessible transport and local services are available.

Almost ½ of respondents noted that disabled friends and family cannot enter their homes without access issues. This reflects the isolation of disabled people when inaccessible housing is the norm, further highlighting the importance of committing to building houses according to M4(3)(2a) criteria and ensuring that properties are adaptable.

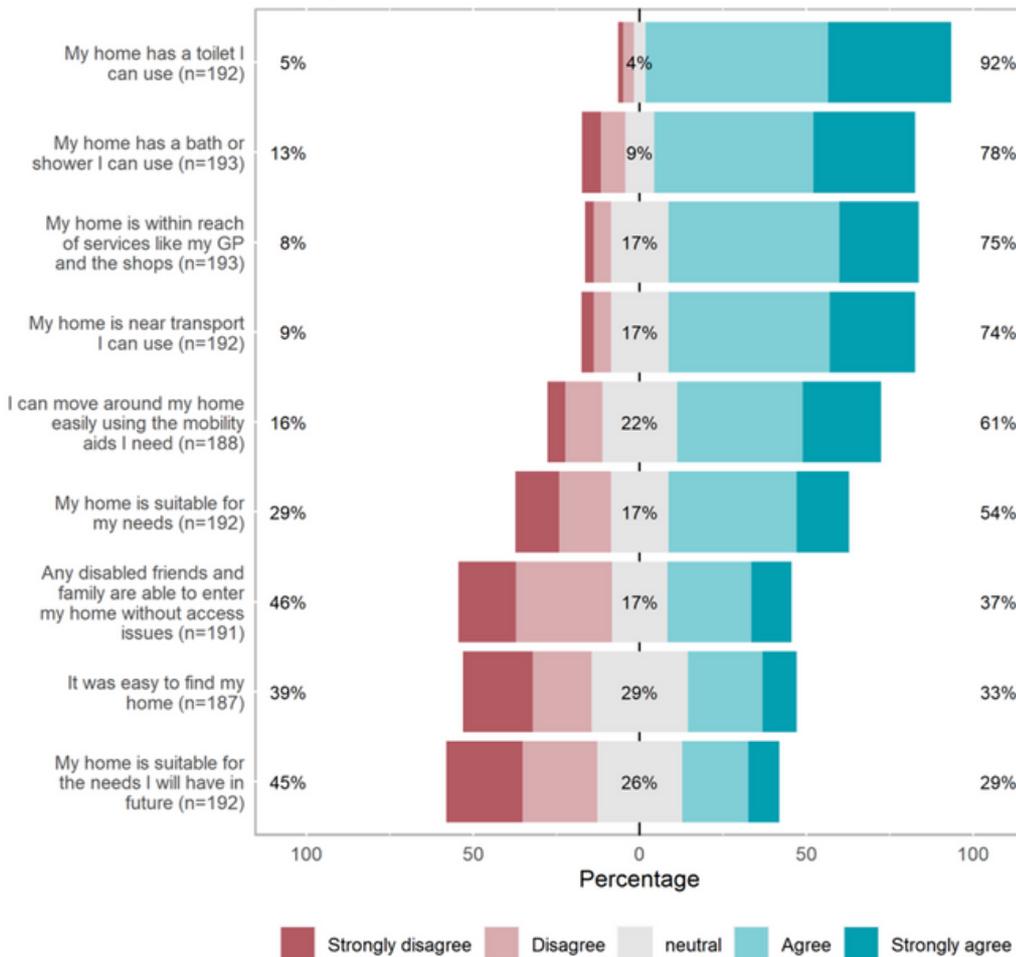
This is especially important given the ageing population and the increasing need for adaptable and adapted homes that will accompany this.



[There's a sense that those involved with house building] ...do not seem to have 'improving access' for disabled people or for the wider community in mind. Blocks of flats with little to no affordable housing pop up every month.



Statements about home life
All Respondents



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...there is a lack of practical and affordable services for things that need doing around the home, e.g., lightbulbs, lifting & moving things, mattress turning, and basic gardening. Also, no one provides any decorating service - it's not affordable on benefits

”

“

As a renter, I am not able to apply for a disabled facilities grant to adapt my home, as all decisions re: adaptations are ultimately up to my landlord.

”

Other issues included a lack of affordable support for disabled respondents who could not carry out key maintenance tasks in their homes.

For residents who own property, there was also issues of overcrowding, and a lack of, “...support or affordable housing for people like myself (worked hard, sacrificed a lot, but own a property). There is no affordable option for me and my family to own a decent place and provide a quality of life for my children.” This quote reflects the national housing price crisis, and the fact that housing prices in Lewisham far outstrip what the majority of residents are able to afford.

Adaptations for properties were also a concern. The OT service were described as “...very helpful with the Disabled Facilities Grant, they really are excellent,” but issues were noted, including: “...what it says about the process on the Council website is different to what actually happens [...] also the form is massive, so off-putting, as it includes all the different situations in one form.”

“

...There should be fairer pay in London and a regulated housing market so people can afford decent homes without private landlords making profits and regular people being outpriced from the property ladder.

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Overall, whilst the recommendations for local change are key, it is also clear that national change needs to take place for people to access appropriate housing. It is hoped that local governments are able to take on board the needs residents have for appropriate, affordable housing, and bring those forward on a national stage.

“

...Until I lived in affordable housing, money was one of the biggest stresses in my life, which meant I couldn't hold down a job. Since getting affordable housing, I was able to start working, and that has only grown in the last few years.

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