

g15

Building diversity

Helping to meet black and minority ethnic housing needs in London



January 2000

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A report by the G15 Registered Social Landlords

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Foreword

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and subsequent MacPherson report have put race equality issues centre stage. Organisations from all sectors are rightly being urged to honestly assess how their policies, practices and performance affect communities as a whole, including black and minority ethnic communities.

The G15 is a group of the largest Registered Social Landlords operating in the London area. We thought that it would be useful both to examine our recent contribution in helping to meet black and minority ethnic housing needs, and to highlight issues of concern. Given that the G15 RSLs own more than 140,000 dwellings, the majority of which are in London, we believe that the assessment contained in this report is likely to be fairly representative of RSL activity in London more generally.

The picture that emerges is cause neither for complacency nor pessimism. By comparison with other sectors RSLs demonstrate a very high level of participation by black and minority ethnic communities, both in the provision and receipt of the products and services we provide. However, there is much still to be done, and this report sets out some of the areas for possible development.

We hope that this report will promote informed debate about the achievements of RSLs to date, but also how we might contribute further to an ethnically diverse capital city.

Executive Summary

- **Working in London, the G15 Registered Social Landlords are operating in the most ethnically diverse city in the country.**
 - **Headline data on lettings, sales and staffing indicate that the G15 RSLs are making a considerable contribution towards meeting housing need among black and minority ethnic communities.**
 - **During a fifteen month period from April 1998 to June 1999 the G15 RSLs made more than 11,200 lettings. 46% of these, or 5,150 lettings, were to households which were not “white British/European”.**
 - **Shared ownership and DIYSO sales give a similar picture. Sales data from nine G15 RSLs shows that at least 33% of sales during 1998/99 were to black and minority ethnic households, representing some 465 sales.**
 - **Information on staff working in London, provided by thirteen of the G15 RSLs, indicates that RSLs employ staff that reflect the ethnic origin of the wider London population. If this data is applied across all the RSLs, it is estimated that the G15 members employ at least 2,000 black and minority ethnic staff in London.**
 - **An assessment of projects undertaken by the G15 RSLs reveals a wide range and breadth of activity aimed at black and minority ethnic communities. Activities such as BME housing schemes, working alongside BME RSLs, and undertaking community and employment projects demonstrate the G15 RSLs’ commitment to contributing to meeting the housing needs of London’s black and minority ethnic communities.**
 - **The G15 RSLs are not complacent however, and following the publication of the MacPherson report there is a renewed commitment among members to monitor and review services, policies and procedures. In addition to the wide range of ongoing projects and initiatives, specific commitments arising out of this report include:**
 - **Developing a range of detailed performance indicators that more comprehensively examine allocations, lettings and service provision in the context of ethnicity.**
 - **Establishing a framework to implement shared ownership BME good practice recommendations, and undertaking research into income and ethnicity with regard to low cost home ownership.**
 - **Undertaking more meaningful and comparable monitoring of staffing and recruitment, and committing to the Commission for Racial Equality’s Leadership Challenge.**
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Introduction

Registered Social Landlords in London have a proud history of developing and managing accommodation in the most ethnically diverse city in the country. The Housing Corporation recently acknowledged that mainstream Registered Social Landlords “have the largest impact on meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic communities in most local areas”¹. This report recognises that impact, and examines the recent contribution of fifteen of London’s largest Registered Social Landlords in meeting the housing needs of the black and minority ethnic population in London.

In the aftermath of the death of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent MacPherson report, Registered Social Landlords are aware of the need to guard against complacency. The report therefore not only examines what the G15 RSLs² have achieved in the past, but also considers what is currently being done by the G15 to review work in this area, and sets out a range of key objectives for the future.

Background

Nearly a decade on from the 1991 census, obtaining reliable statistics on the size of the black and minority ethnic population is acknowledged to be problematic. Obtaining dependable data on black and minority ethnic housing needs is even more difficult. However, the Housing Corporation’s London black and minority ethnic housing strategy consultation paper makes some useful progress by using the Survey of English Housing to estimate the proportion of households in each tenure by ethnic group.

Utilising the data provided by the Housing Corporation Table 1 (over) compares the ethnic composition of RSL tenants with the ethnic composition of the London population.

The data is subject to relatively wide confidence intervals, but if used as a broad measure the data indicates that the ethnic mix of those living in housing association accommodation in London reasonably closely reflects the capital’s population as whole.

¹ Black and minority ethnic housing strategy for London, Housing Corporation, September 1999

² See Appendix 1 for details

Table 1: Ethnic composition of RSL tenants and London population

	RSL tenants	London households (HC estimate)	London population (1991 Census)
Black Caribbean	7%	5%	4%
Black African	7%	3%	2%
Black other	3%	1%	1%
Indian	2%	4%	5%
Pakistani	1%	1%	1%
Bangladeshi	1%	1%	1%
Chinese	0%	1%	1%
White	73%	79%	80%
Other	5%	5%	4%
Total	99%	100%	99%

The G15 Contribution

During November and December 1999 the G15 RSLs compiled a range of statistical and qualitative information, examining their contribution to meeting the housing needs of black and minority ethnic households in London. The National Housing Federation was also commissioned to provide lettings data for the G15 RSLs relating to race and ethnic origin. The RSLs examined lettings, shared ownership sales, and staffing, along with specific projects and schemes for black and minority ethnic communities. A preliminary report, based on this information, provided a summary of the G15 RSL's historic performance and current initiatives. The preliminary report provided a focus for discussion by the G15 members, and resulted in agreement on a range of future objectives, which are highlighted within this report.

General needs lettings

Table 2 below provides a summary of general needs lettings by G15 RSLs during a recent 15 month period. The data is based on more than 11,200 lettings and represents a comprehensive picture of recent activity by the 15 RSLs.

Table 2: General needs lettings April 1998 to June 1999

	G15 Average 4/98-6/99	RSL tenants (HC estimate)	London households (HC estimate)
Black: Asian/SE Asian	6%	4%	6%
Black: African/Caribbean	22%	14%	8%
Black: British/Other	6%	3%	1%
White: Irish	3%	See note 1	See note 1
White: British/European/Other	54%	73%	79%
Mixed/Other	8%	5%	6%
Total	100%	99%	100%

Note 1: The Housing Corporation estimates are based on the Survey of English Housing which does not include Irish as a separate ethnic group. The 1991 Census indicated that 3.8% of London's population (*not* households) was born in Ireland.

The data is encouraging for two reasons. Firstly it indicates that the G15 RSLs are housing proportionately more black and minority ethnic households than exist among London households generally. This indicates that the RSLs are helping to address the greater levels of housing need that research indicates that black and minority ethnic communities experience.

Secondly, Table 2 also indicates that the G15 RSLs are housing proportionately more black and minority ethnic households than currently exist among RSL tenants in London. This is important, since it suggests that the G15 RSLs are continuing to increase the overall proportion of black and minority ethnic households that are housed in the sector.

This second conclusion reflects the Housing Corporation's assertion in the London black and minority ethnic housing strategy consultation paper that the number of BME social housing tenants in London has risen almost threefold during the last twenty years, against a backdrop of a reduction in the total number of social tenancies.

The Corporation states that 28% of RSL tenants in London are now from BME communities, compared with 13% in the late 1970s. The data in Table 2 indicates that 46% of recent lettings by G15 RSLs were to non-“white British/European households”. It seems likely therefore that the proportion of RSL tenants in London from BME communities looks set to continue to increase.

At face value the data is encouraging, as the G15 RSLs are housing a large number of BME households each year. To put it into perspective, the *total number of homes* owned by black and minority ethnic RSLs in London as at March 1998 was 9,666. In the fifteen months between March 1998 and June 1999 the G15 RSLs made 5,150 lettings to non-“white British/European households”. In this context the contribution of the G15 RSLs to meeting the housing needs of the black and minority ethnic communities can only be viewed as significant.

The potential weakness of this analysis is that it concentrates on issues of quantity above other factors. It is recognised, for example, that this data does not provide any indication of the quality of housing that has been let to or which is occupied by BME households (although many RSLs do record a property quality score against new lettings). Additionally, there are several other ways in which a simplistic analysis may disguise different levels of service provided to different communities. Examples may include different rates of overcrowding, access to transfers within an RSL or the quality of the repairs service provided.

It is also worth noting that a significant proportion of new RSL tenants are local authority nominations, and that in general, London local authorities are giving due priority to BME households.

The G15 members recognise that lettings data on its own provides only a partial account. For example, internal policies, procedures and controls should all be reviewed in a critical light following the MacPherson report. However, as a primary indicator of the extent to which the housing need is being met, recent lettings data suggests that the G15 RSLs are making a significant and valuable contribution.

To further improve the value of data gathered by the G15 RSLs, members have agreed to develop a range of more detailed indicators on allocations, lettings and housing services. These will enable a more comprehensive and robust account of BME housing needs to be established. Data is likely to include issues such as property quality, priority transfer requests, income and ethnicity and satisfaction with services. In the latter case, G15 members will examine how residents' views on service delivery and ethnicity might be developed further. It is proposed that definitions will be agreed and data collection piloted by January 2001, and it is intended that data collection will commence in April 2001 for the financial year 2001/02.

Shared ownership

Shared ownership remains an important element in helping to meet housing need in London. Nine of the G15 RSLs provided data on shared ownership and DIYSO sales in London during 1998/99. Table 3, below, provides a summary of the ethnic diversity of recent low cost homeowners.

Table 3: Shared ownership and DIYSO sales 1998/1999

	G15 RSLs 1998/99	London households (HC estimate)
Black: Asian/SE Asian	5%	6%
Black: African/Caribbean/Other	17%	9%
White: Irish	7%	See note 1
White: British/European/Other	53%	79%
Mixed/Other	4%	6%
Refused	14%	n/a
Total	100%	100%

Note 1: See table 2 for explanation.

The data in Table 3 is based on total of 1410 sales, of which 1081 were shared ownership sales and 329 were DIYSO. The data indicates that, in comparison with general needs lettings, a somewhat lower proportion of black and minority ethnic households are assisted through shared ownership.

The lower proportion of BME households being assisted through low cost home ownership schemes is neither particularly surprising nor necessarily a cause for concern, and may be the result of a number of factors. The main issue is one of relative housing need. Research has indicated that BME communities are generally disproportionately worse off in terms of housing need and social deprivation. It is reasonable to assume then that as shared ownership requires steady employment and a higher level of income, it is likely therefore to be less accessible to BME households. Many of the white British/European households moving into shared ownership are those who would otherwise have been in social rented housing, and it is partly this factor which has contributed to the increasing proportion of BME households who are renting.

Research has also indicated³ that other factors may contribute to the comparatively lower proportion of BME households in shared ownership. For example, the London Research Centre found that BME households (and in particular those of Asian origin) tended to prefer DIYSO to other forms of shared ownership. With larger families on average, DIYSO enabled BME households find larger accommodation than that which was on offer through conventional shared ownership. DIYSO also offered greater choice of location, an important factor for BME households. The balance between shared ownership and DIYSO in Table 3 (approximately 77% shared ownership to 23% DIYSO) may therefore explain some of the difference in the proportions of BME and non-BME households, and the relative difference between the various BME groups.

However, despite the issues identified above, some 33% of shared ownership and DIYSO sales by the G15 RSLs during 1998/99 were to BME households, compared with an estimated London BME population of around 25%. As a basic indicator of performance, the data suggests that in shared ownership the G15 RSLs are again making an important contribution to meeting the housing needs of the black and minority ethnic communities.

An agreed objective of the G15 RSLs is to establish a framework to ensure that the good practice recommendations for low cost home ownership contained in the London Research Centre's report are implemented effectively.

It is intended to undertake further research into ethnicity and income to establish whether the proportion of BME households taking up shared ownership reflects wider socio-economic trends in London. Such research would also examine the effects on BME communities of the introduction of Homebuy as a replacement for DIYSO.

Staffing

It is widely accepted that staff are a major influence on an organisation's ability to provide a culturally-sensitive service. In particular, the staff employed by an organisation should broadly reflect the ethnic origin of the areas in which an organisation operates.

Table 4 (over) is based on staffing information provided by thirteen of the G15 RSLs. As far as practicable the data relates to London-based staff, and in most cases represents the position at 31 March 1999.

³ Shared ownership & black and minority ethnic communities, London Research Centre, 1998

Table 4: Staffing in London 1999

	G15 RSLs 1998/99	London households (HC estimate)
Black: Asian/SE Asian	5%	6%
Black: African/Caribbean/Other	21%	9%
White: Irish	3%	See note 1
White: British/European/Other	61%	79%
Mixed/Other	5%	6%
Refused	5%	n/a
Total	100%	100%

Note 1: See table 2 for explanation.

The percentages in Table 4 are based on nearly 5,300 staff, and represent a substantial cross section of the G15 RSLs. The data indicates that most BME communities are well represented among RSL staff, with Black African/Caribbean/British staff represented particularly highly.

As with lettings data, the overall numbers provide only a partial picture. The data contained in Table 4 suffers from two potential problems. Firstly, it provides no indication of the relative seniority of the staff, and therefore may disguise particular patterns of recruitment. Secondly, given the wide variations in local BME populations between and within London boroughs, the balance of different ethnic groups between different RSLs may need to reflect the specific local community rather more than London as whole.

Despite these obvious limitations, the headline data indicates that the G15 RSLs are staffed appropriately in overall terms, given the composition of black and minority ethnic communities within London.

The G15 RSLs have agreed to develop a monitoring framework that provides consistent data on ethnicity and staff grade. This will require the development of a relative grade indicator, based on salary and responsibility. The data produced will enable more meaningful monitoring of staffing and recruitment to be provided, reviewed and acted upon.

The G15 RSLs are also committed to the Commission for Racial Equality's Leadership Challenge, to promote the principles and practice of racial equality. All G15 Chief Executives have agreed to become signatories to the Challenge and to develop appropriate Leadership Challenge strategies.

Black and minority ethnic initiatives

To provide a snapshot of activity beyond lettings, sales and staffing, each G15 association provided a summary of projects and activities which had been undertaken recently which were geared towards black and minority ethnic communities. Eleven RSLs provided details, and the striking feature is the range and breadth of activity that is being carried out. A summary of activity, divided into four categories, is provided below, with some of the more interesting projects highlighted.

Housing Projects

Most of the G15 RSLs own and manage accommodation and housing schemes that are specifically aimed at black and minority ethnic communities. The range of housing provided varies considerably, but includes sheltered housing, residential care, special need and supported housing, women's refuges, schemes for young people, and refugee projects.

A wide range of black and minority ethnic communities are catered for by these projects. For example, sheltered schemes have been developed which cater for the needs of the following ethnic groups: Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Chinese, Greek, Turkish, Cypriot, Irish, Vietnamese, and Somali.

Supported housing and housing projects for young people include those aimed at people of Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Vietnamese, Tamil, and Irish origin.

Asian Elders Project, Circle 33

The Asian/Elders Team manages seven properties, providing shared supported housing for 45 vulnerable Asian men with diverse support needs. The housing schemes provide an environment where tenants can participate in the local community and make choices about the services and support provided to them. The staff team provides support in a variety of languages including Bengali, Urdu, Hindi & Gujarati.

Refuge for Asian Women, Peabody Trust

Due to be completed in January 2000, the refuge will provide a high quality flexible response to the needs of Asian women escaping violence. The project has been developed in partnership with LABO (a local housing association that primarily services the Asian community) who will manage the scheme. The refuge consists of 13 self-contained 'studios', with their own kitchen and bathroom, and units can be linked to enable larger families to stay together.

Working with BME RSLs

The G15 RSLs have a tradition of supporting BME RSLs, and many of the reported projects and activities involve working in partnership with such specialists. A number of mainstream RSLs reported that they have carried out development work on behalf of BME RSLs, whilst others have transferred properties into their ownership. Housing Corporation data indicates that more than 1,000 units were transferred to BME RSLs in London between March 1996 and December 1998.

Several G15 RSLs also offer shortlife properties to BME RSLs. Shortlife properties are managed by a variety of BME RSLs, including those aimed at the Irish, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, South East Asian, Kurdish, Muslim, and Latin American communities.

G15 RSLs often work in conjunction with BME associations to provide special needs and supported accommodation, particularly for refugees and for young single persons.

Emergency Housing Service, Family HA

Latham House is a 93 unit block leased from LB Tower Hamlets and renovated using Temporary Social Housing Grant (the largest such scheme ever undertaken). 53 of the units are underleased or managed by other RSLs including Spitalfields HA, Apna Ghar HA and Karin HA.

Supported Housing Projects, South London Family HA

SLFHA Care and Support currently work with three BME RSLs to provide supported housing. These include South Sea HA (accommodation for young Vietnamese single homeless) and Tamil Community HA (accommodation for Tamil refugees).

Community and Employment Projects

The area of work in which the G15 RSLs demonstrate considerable versatility and imagination is in the provision of non-housing services to black and minority ethnic communities. Either working alone or in partnership with specialists, the G15 RSLs have undertaken a wide range of activities concerned with welfare, employment, training and community development.

A number of G15 sheltered schemes for black and minority ethnic communities incorporate day centres for the elderly, offering services that provide social activities alongside health and social services. Other G15 RSLs offer separate day centre facilities.

Other projects that G15 RSLs are involved in include training schemes, ESOL projects, BME community development, telephone conferences for BME residents and focus groups aimed specifically at BME residents.

St Peter's North Community Project, Peabody Trust

The Trust co-ordinates this project, based in St Peter's in Bethnal Green, the third most deprived ward in London. Over half of the residents have Bangladeshi origins, and the project encourages local people to take responsibility for enhancing their own quality of life, through a range of anti-poverty measures, and by breaking down racial and cultural barriers. Initiatives have included employing a bi-lingual project co-ordinator and holding a Bengali music event.

Southall Day Centre, Ealing Family Group

The Southall Day Centre provides day centre and drop in facilities for elderly Asian men and for Asian women of all ages. Activities and services are available 365 days. On average more than 225 people attend the Southall Day Centre every day, while the total membership is over 1,000. The Southall Day Centre and Ealing Family Group also provide management and support services to the Milap Day Centre, a centre for Asian elders located to the north of Southall.

Telephone Conference, Southern Housing Group

Southern Housing Group is currently organising a telephone conference in partnership with The Quest Trust for Bangladeshi tenants to discuss their priorities and issues of concern.

Supporting Local Voluntary Groups, Broomleigh HA

Broomleigh HA have an active programme of supporting local voluntary sector groups. This has included involvement in constructing a package of financial support for the Bromley Race Equality Council. Broomleigh staff have served upon its committee and one of Broomleigh's Board Members (a local councillor) is currently its chairman. Broomleigh also work with the Bromley Refugee Council to provide financial support and assistance with their "Language line" service.

Corporate Initiatives

All of the G15 RSLs have a strong corporate commitment to equality of opportunity and service provision. This is reflected in a range of corporate and staffing initiatives, such as employing PATH trainees, participation in the CRE leadership challenge, and developing equal opportunities action plans.

Equal Opportunities Action Plan, Peabody Trust

Peabody Trust recently introduced its first annual Equal Opportunities Action Plan. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that each year a review of performance against the Trust's Equal Opportunities Policy is carried out, and an action plan to ensure its effective implementation agreed.

Black Workers Group, Notting Hill Housing Trust

With some 250 BME staff, Notting Hill's Black Workers Group provide an important forum for discussion, consultation, career development and representation. The Black Workers Group uses the Trust's intranet to publicise activities and disseminate information.

Race Equality Audit, Ealing Family HA

Ealing Family has recently won an Innovation and Good Practice Grant to undertake a race equality audit, which will examine service effectiveness in achieving equality, through an examination of currently policy, procedure and administrative systems. The project will involve consultation with BME tenants to identify gaps and deficiencies in services, along with a comparison of services provided by a BME RSL. An action plan and framework for other RSLs to use will be developed and made freely available through Ealing Family's web site.

Conclusions

This report provides a summary of the contribution that the G15 RSLs have made and continue to make towards meeting the housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities in London.

The headline data and summary of projects and activities indicate that the G15 RSLs are making a considerable contribution. Lettings and sales data indicates that social housing is benefiting black and minority ethnic communities to an extent that reflects the greater social deprivation and housing need experienced by such communities. The breakdown of staff within the G15 RSLs broadly reflects the communities which the RSLs serve, while the range of additional projects and activities undertaken suggests that the G15 RSLs are not simply concerned with bricks and mortar, but are prepared to use their imagination in contributing to the solution of wider problems experienced by black and minority ethnic communities in the capital.

However, the G15 RSLs are not complacent. Following the publication of the MacPherson report G15 members remain fully committed to monitoring activity which affects BME households and to developing appropriate policies, procedures and controls wherever shortcomings are identified.

Appendix 1 - G15 Members

The G15 RSLs are:

Broomleigh Housing Association
Circle 33 Housing Trust
Ealing Family Group
East Thames Housing Group
Family Housing Association
Horizon Housing Group
Hyde Housing Association
London & Quadrant Housing Trust
Metropolitan Housing Trust
Network Housing Association
New Islington & Hackney Housing Association
Notting Hill Housing Group
Paddington Churches Housing Association
Peabody Trust
Southern Housing Group

This report published on behalf of the G15 by:

Ealing Family Group
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