

Community-led housing for all

Opportunities and challenges for black and minority ethnic community-led housing

Executive summary





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There is a long history of black and minority ethnic community-led affordable housing solutions in England, including the establishment of cooperatives and housing associations in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of community-led housing solutions, including community land trust and co-housing models, which are proven to empower citizens in the planning, development and ownership of affordable housing and community assets. However, research and observation has suggested that black and minority ethnic communities have been under-represented in these recent developments, even though the benefits of community-led housing are well suited to addressing racial inequalities in housing.

The objectives of this research were to raise awareness of the barriers encountered by black and minority ethnic communities when accessing community-led housing, and to enhance understanding and the benefits of community-led housing to black and minority ethnic communities and relevant stakeholders. The research is based on 26 interviews and participatory workshops with community-led housing projects and practitioners and used a co-production methodology between community-led housing practitioners with lived experience of the issues being studied and academic researchers.

The research highlights significant opportunities to diversify leadership and participation of community-led housing initiatives and makes recommendations to enhance the inclusion and contribution of black and minority ethnic communities to the community-led housing sector. In enabling greater engagement and opportunity for black and minority ethnic communities in the creation of community-led homes, there are a range of positive social, economic and political outcomes to be realised for communities, public authorities, and funders.



Research findings

The benefits of community-led housing and the importance of partnerships

Black and minority ethnic community-led housing project participants who contributed to this research felt that developing community-led housing enhanced their ability to influence and own planning and development processes in their local areas, in addition to providing more secure and affordable housing for communities under-served by other forms of housing provision.

The projects involved in this study that had formed in recent years benefited from significant support from enabler hubs, national infrastructure bodies, and development partners such as housing associations. These partnerships are key to supporting communities to development projects and realise the benefits of community-led housing. However, the existence and extent of these partnerships varied between projects in different areas, according to the nature of local relationships. There is therefore geographical variation in the ability of projects to secure supportive partnerships.

Representation and awareness of black and minority community-led housing

While this research demonstrates the benefits of community-led housing, research participants from communities and professional organisations perceived that awareness of community-led housing among black and minority ethnic communities can be low. This included limited awareness of the benefits of community-led housing among civic and advocacy organisations.

Low awareness was attributed by some black and minority ethnic community members to under-representation in key roles in the community-led housing sector, including funders, policy organisations, and infrastructure and advocacy bodies. They highlighted the importance of representation to communicating an inclusive image of the community-led housing sector, as well as its importance to ensuring that black and minority ethnic community housing needs derived from lived experience are accommodated in policy, strategy and practice. Many community members in the research highlighted experiences of exclusion from decision-making and desired proactive engagement with and from sector bodies to ensure funding and delivery models are shaped by lived experience. There is a lack of data that provides a quantitative understanding of representation.



Awareness of community-led housing could be enhanced through greater peer-to-peer support. While this is often associated with the exchange of technical knowledge to help advance projects, in this context it was felt that co-ordinated forums for peer-to-peer support could develop solidarity between projects (both established and newer projects) and enhance the identity and representation of black and minority ethnic communities within community-led housing infrastructure bodies and in exchanges and engagement with professionals. A rich history of cooperative and self-build schemes can provide important inspiration to black and minority community-led housing initiatives today.

Resources and support

Access to resources is key to the success of community-led housing projects. The success of black and minority ethnic community-led projects is threatened by inconsistent funding frameworks and policy processes that are unsupportive of community agency. Similarly, reductions in funding for enabler hubs and infrastructure bodies affect their ability to provide the technical support and guidance necessary for community-led development. The community-led housing infrastructure has been negatively affected by the lack of systemised funding streams to support all forms of community-led housing.

Black and minority ethnic community-led housing projects in this study benefited from a range of good practice, including local authority land disposal policies that created bespoke opportunities for land acquisition and supportive partnerships with housing associations and enabler hubs to progress projects.

However, access to funding was a particular barrier. This included perceptions of under-representation in allocations made through the Community Housing Fund historically and limited proactive promotion of social lending opportunities, where it was felt by communities and practitioners that funding opportunities could be more effectively disseminated through civic and advocacy infrastructure groups that engage with diverse communities.

There is a lack of data that enables quantification and monitoring of the allocation of funds to different demographic groups, which prevents a quantitative understanding of these issues. Funding processes, including the requirement and definition of a 'track record' held by some funders and the availability and alignment of revenue funding, were felt to exacerbate under-representation.



Recommendations

Recommendations for community-led housing infrastructure bodies

- Develop and publish a strategy to grow the number of black and minority ethnic community-led housing projects and accredited advisors, including key milestones and actions to achieve this.
- Facilitate the formation and implementation of a black and minority ethnic community-led housing peer-to-peer practitioner network, which can act as an important reference point for engagement and representation in the sector.
- Catalogue and evidence historic and contemporary case studies of black and minority ethnic community-led housing.
- Consider how standardised models of delivery can be developed and adapted to the benefit of black and minority ethnic community-led housing groups.

Recommendations for community-led housing funders

- Enhance the promotion and dissemination of funding opportunities to black and minority ethnic communities, including proactive targeting of and engagement with relevant civic networks.
- Develop ringfenced funding allocations that provide both revenue and capital funding to black and minority ethnic community-led housing projects.
- Explicitly collect data that monitors equalities, diversity and inclusion in funding allocations.

Recommendations for Central Government

- Any future evaluation of the Community Housing Fund should include research questions that explore allocations to and representation of black and minority ethnic communities.
- The Self-Commissioned Homes Unit within Homes England should proactively encourage black and minority ethnic community-led housing projects, including consideration of ringfenced funding opportunities in future funding allocations and encouragement to housing associations to proactively partner with emerging groups.

Recommendations for Local and Combined Authorities

- Local authorities seeking to enable community-led housing should actively promote opportunities for land disposal and acquisition to black and minority ethnic community-led projects.
- Local authorities should develop inclusive planning and engagement processes within existing planning frameworks, including proactive engagement with potential groups to ensure high-quality planning proposals.
- Combined authorities should consider how the needs of black and minority ethnic communities are reflected in their powers and explore potential synergies with parallel social policy agendas such as commitments to race equity.

Recommendations for housing infrastructure bodies

- Consider how delivery models can be developed and adapted to the benefit of black and minority ethnic communities developing community-led housing, including opportunities to work with grassroots organisations on small sites and alternative approaches to asset disposal.



Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support of a number of organisations that funded it, including the Nationwide Foundation, the Tudor Trust, the Community Land Trust Network, Power to Change, East Midlands Community Housing, Ubele, Carlisle City Council, Cheshire Community Council, Kent Community Housing Hub, Communities CAN, Durham Community Action, and Community First Oxfordshire. Particular thanks are due to Gary Hartin for his support, guidance and commitment throughout the project. Thanks are also due to Steve Hoey and Blase Lambert for their encouragement to initiate this research, and to Jimm Reed of Leeds Community Homes for his supportive grant management. Finally, the research team is indebted to the contributions made by all research participants, and particularly to the inspiring community-led housing projects whose commitment to social justice and tackling racial inequalities is represented in this report.

A note on terminology

This report focuses on the under-representation of black and minority ethnic communities in community-led housing. The term 'black and minority ethnic' is used throughout, except where reference is made to secondary literature that uses other terms. The report is written with awareness and acknowledgement of the contested nature of this term, and that of 'BAME' (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), which have been contested for homogenising identities and masking disparities between different ethnic groups. We use this term, rather than terms such as 'minoritised communities', to represent this study's specific focus on race and ethnicity. We also use this term to provide consistency and clarity with some of the work and organisations referenced in this research, which includes organisations that refer to black and minority ethnic communities in their organisational names, objectives, and beneficiaries. Black and minority ethnic community-led housing groups are not homogenous in their leadership and participation and may involve people of different ethnicities. We also avoid specifying the race and ethnicity of particular respondents to respect principles of anonymity given to research participants as part of research ethical approval.



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