



NED Network briefing

11th October 2021

Set up by [HACT](#) and [PlaceShapers](#), with the support of [Anthony Collins Solicitors](#) and [Badenoch + Clark](#)

What part can board members play in challenging and addressing stigmatization of social housing tenants?

Chair: Andrew van Door, Chief Executive, HACT and
Non-Executive Director at London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust

Introduction (Andrew van Doorn)

Andrew introduced the session, which focused on what role board members play in challenging and addressing the stigmatization of social housing tenants. Andrew highlighted the Government has recently become more cognisant of the stigma around social housing and social housing tenants as it was a feature in the Social Housing Green and subsequent White Papers.

Main Speakers:

Dr. Mercy Denedo, Assistant Professor of Accounting at Durham University Business School;

Dr. Amanze Ejiogu, FCCA, Associate Professor of Accounting at the University of Leicester.

- Dr Ejiogu opened the discussion by introducing the objective behind their research – to develop an in-depth understand of how stigma is constructed, experienced and challenged in social housing. They achieved this by conducting interviews, interacting with focus groups and utilising different social media platforms.
- They concluded that from the late 1970s an intense stigmatisation of social housing occurred through politicians promoting home ownership and stigmatising social housing to justify policies such as welfare reforms. The media and, more recently, social media have also played a role in the stigmatisation of social housing.
- Social housing is complex and needs to be viewed in its wider socio-economic context including other factors such as drugs, crime, mental health, poverty, employment, class, race and immigration.
- The stigma also has practical consequences too including how organisations such as the police, GPs and social housing providers engage with social housing tenants.



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- There was a question-and-answer session with Dr Denedo and Dr Ejiogu on the findings of their research and their recommendations that, in order to challenge the stigma attached to social housing, the following policy changes should be implemented:
- Housing providers need to embed the tenant voice in their governance arrangements and make themselves more accountable to their tenants;
- The Government needs to adopt a rights-based approach to housing which views access to affordable housing as fundamental human right (and then behave accordingly in addressing the shortage of safe and affordable housing); and
- The media generally needs to be balanced and fair in its reporting of social housing.
- A consultation is ongoing and the deadline is 31 October 2021. Board members are invited to complete the survey and the link may be found here: [Questions for Group Discussions: Members were split in three groups and were asked to consider the following questions:](#)
 1. [How can we as board members embed stigma consciousness in our organisations?](#)
 2. [How can the board address and challenge how language is used?](#)
 3. [How do we drive services and our organisations to irradicate stigma and achieve greater accountability?](#)

Outcomes of Group Discussions

Group 1 queried how the stigma attached to social housing went from it being “the good guy” to “the bad guy”. The social housing sector needs to be better at communicating the great work it does. Social housing stigma of itself is currently not on the agenda of the majority of boards. Questions were also raised on how members can challenge the language used around the board table.

Group 2 acknowledged that stigma comes in many forms: it is felt by people living in social housing and it can be allotted to people living in social housing by others including their landlord but also external agencies. There is a lived experience contrast between tenants of social housing and private renters and owner-occupiers. Boards may not be aware of this. More needs to be done to promote the value of social housing and remove generalisations on how social housing tenants treat their homes, for example. An organisation’s response needs to be proportionate to its size and reflective of its communities.



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Group 3 recognised that stigma is engrained within social housing and queried whether there is a bias against social housing tenants on the basis of the perspective that they should be 'grateful' for their social home. How we as social landlords stigmatise people is within our gift to challenge and change. Kindness and compassion have been lost in public policy. There are also some challenges with language, especially in the supported and sheltered housing context. Small actions such as signage on vans and the specifications of social housing properties may further embed the stigmatisation.

Victoria Jardine and Tom Corrigan
Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP

Next meeting

Our next meeting will take place on Monday 25th October 2021, 4.00-5.00 pm

"Sustainability for Housing and how Boards need to understand reporting standards around ESG"

We'll be joined by Brendan Sarsfield, Chair of Sustainability for Housing and Trustee at Hesita Charity who'll be sharing his insight from his extensive experience in his current and previous roles.

[Book you free place here](#)