

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Issues for Black and Minority Ethnic Elders

A summary of the findings of the evaluation of pilot local housing options advice services for older people of particular relevance for the equitable provision of housing and related services to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) elders.

Introduction

The 'Evaluation Overview' highlights the main findings of the *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* programme evaluation. This summary focuses on the particular issues and lessons that have emerged with regard to the equitable provision of services to BME elders.

It looks specifically at this issue for a number of reasons:

- **The over-representation of people from BME communities living in poor housing** – BME households are less likely to live in decent homes – 40% live in non-decent homes compared to 32% of white households (*2001 English House Conditions Survey, ODPM*).
- **The demographic picture** – Whilst there is currently a lower percentage of people over 60 within most BME communities compared with the white population (7% vs 17%), over the next decade there will be a significant increase as middle aged people from BME groups (now 12%) reach retirement (*Census, 2001, ONS*).
- **Inadequacies of housing advice, information and options for BME elders** – Research undertaken by Help the Aged (*'Housing Advice for Older People', 2002, 'Who do we trust?' 2004*) concludes that current housing advice services are not meeting the needs of BME elders, many of whom have more complex housing advice and practical support needs.
- **Anticipated issues for BME elders** –
 - *availability of suitable and culturally appropriate alternative housing options*
 - *possible future demand for, and availability of, suitable supported housing*
 - *repair, adaptations and culturally appropriate home support services, given the high levels of low income, low equity home ownership amongst some BME groups*

About the evaluation

The following findings, conclusions and recommendations are based on the quantitative data collected from local pilot projects, plus qualitative data from face to face and telephone interviews with service users, housing options advisers, service providers, commissioners and planners undertaken with Sheffield Hallam University.

Key findings about demand for housing options services

Whilst in many pilot areas the level of use of housing options services by BME elders was proportionate to the ethnic composition of the local population, there were issues both with regard to reaching BME elders who might have been able to use housing options services and with finding appropriate alternative housing. A number of approaches were taken and discussed with the projects and conclusions drawn from these.

Ethnicity of Housing Options Service Users (all areas)

White	Caribbean	Black other	Indian	Pakistani	Bangla-deshi	Chinese	Eastern European	Other *1	Total
436 (83%)	27 (5%)	2	24 (4%)	12 (2%)	2	1	2	21 (4%)	527 *2

*1 - Jewish, Polish, West Indian, East Asian, Italian, Danish, Portuguese, New Zealand, French, and Irish

*2 - Not recorded in 34 cases

The highest level of use by BME elders was in Hackney – 56% of service users compared with a total BME population of all ages of 39.6% (2001 Census). The Staying Put service with which this pilot is based is extensively used by BME elders and this clearly influenced the level of take up of the housing options service.

64% of all BME service users were owner occupiers, 11% lived in the social rented sector and 8% were renting their accommodation from private landlords (remainder other/not recorded). BME elders were significantly more likely to live in a terraced house than the total user group (34% compared to 23%).

BME service user ages ranged from 53 to 102 years but were on average slightly younger than the overall group. The highest proportion of BME elders was in the 70 to 79 age range (35% compared with 25% for all users). Poor health was the predominant reason for referral (70%).

BME elders were much less likely to live alone (32%) than those from the total user group (53%) and more likely to live in couples (31%) than the total user group (25%). Many of the group defined as 'other' (24%) lived with other members of their family.

A significant proportion of BME service users (46%) were considering staying put as one possible option prior to being helped by the housing options service, and 35% were considering a move. This presents the reverse picture from that of all service users where more people (63%) were considering moving on than were thinking of staying put (28%).

Key findings about improvements to the housing situation of individual older people

BME elders using housing options services were less likely to move home - 7% compared to 14% of the total user group (closed and open cases). Whilst the total number moving was small, the main move was out of owner occupation or private rented housing into social rented.

One owner occupier purchased a flat, another moved to a care home and one person moved out of general social rented into sheltered housing.

Those who moved home considered the help of the housing options service to be crucial.

"He helped me good, he try and do everything for me to help me move"

[Mrs H moved to social rented housing specifically for BME households of all ages]

As noted previously, 46% of BME service users were considering staying put when first in contact with the housing options service. After receiving information, advice and support, some made a positive decision to stay in their existing home and many were helped to access adaptations and other support services. BME elders were:

- *more likely to be referred for major adaptations (21% compared to 13% average)*
- *more likely to be referred for help with security (10% compared to 2% average)*
- *more likely to be referred for equity release (5% compared to 2% average)*
- *more likely to be referred for a personal alarm (10% compared to 7% average)*

Although less BME elders had thought of moving home prior to being in contact with the housing options service than in the overall user group, the picture of older people's housing aspirations not being met is mirrored in the experiences of BME elders.

Location and suitability of alternative housing options, including whether these were culturally appropriate, were significant issues for some BME elders. Those who did not move and who gave reasons for not moving often decided that they preferred their existing home to the alternatives available (33% compared to 20% average).

Alternative housing location rather than support services emerged as a key issue for many BME service users. Housing options staff reported that in their experience BME service users were particularly likely to express a desire to stay living within familiar neighbourhoods and communities.

Lessons for the provision of housing and related services to BME elders

Improving access to services by BME communities requires a pro-active, networking approach

- *Example:* Working through local BME community and professional networks helped with the distribution of information about housing options services. In some cases it may be more effective for the housing options service to act as a housing information and advice resource to BME community leaders and generalist advisers.

There is a lack of culturally appropriate housing for BME elders

- *Example:* The lack of housing options for BME older people resulted in one housing options service re-directing its efforts towards working with the local authority in order to improve consultation with BME communities about planning/provision of more suitable housing.

The housing needs and aspirations of BME elders are not substantially different from other groups of older people, but location within the wider BME community is important

- *Example:* Housing difficulties associated with declining health, mobility problems and home maintenance, and the overall desire to maintain independence were experienced by older people from all ethnic groups and common factors influenced decisions about moving.

Recommendations

- The preferred option of the majority of older people from BME communities is the same as for the older population as a whole - to stay put in their existing home for as long as possible. Ensuring that services providing adaptation, repair or practical help around the home are accessible and appropriate to BME elders must be a high priority for service providers given the higher levels of occupation of housing which is in a poorer state of repair amongst many BME households.
- There are major communication and cultural barriers preventing older people from BME communities from accessing mainstream housing advice and related services, including housing options. All providers of services need to give particular consideration to delivering services in a culturally appropriate manner and work through existing community networks.
- A significant minority of older people from BME communities would be interested in moving to a more suitable home where it would be easier to continue to live independently. There is a need for improvements in the range of both general and supported housing which meets social and cultural needs of BME elders. Social housing providers in particular need to address this growing need as home equity/ income levels amongst many BME elders in the owner occupied sector will leave them excluded from private sector options.
- Location of such housing is critical. Many ethnic communities have become established in very specific geographical areas, with local development of shops, religious and cultural facilities. Understandably most BME elders will not wish to move out of these areas.

Find out more

General information about housing options services, evaluation summary reports and the Sheffield Hallam University Evaluation are available from the Care & Repair England website www.careandrepair-england.org.uk – click on ‘Housing Options’.



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