We want to understand whether more residents need to be able to access independent advice and potentially advocacy to support them in making a complaint.

Alternative dispute resolution and mediation services can be critical in allowing issues to be resolved swiftly and locally, while sustaining positive relationships between the parties involved. We are considering whether and how we might strengthen the mediation available for residents and landlords after initial attempts at resolution have failed.

Where a complaint is not resolved, a resident should refer their complaint to a “designated person”, such as a local MP, councillor or tenant panel, (known as the democratic filter), but if they do not want to do this or the designated person does not resolve or refer it on themselves, a resident must wait for eight weeks before the complaint can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman. There is a perception that the process of seeking redress took too long, and that the “democratic filter” contributed to delays.

Reforming the filter stage would require primary legislation. We therefore also want to explore what more could be done in the meantime to help ensure that “designated persons” better understand their role and help to deliver swift, local resolutions for residents.

16. What can we do to ensure that “designated persons” are better able to promote local resolutions?

Designated persons must receive equality and diversity training so they can deal with complaints from LGBT people appropriately and effectively. It needs to be ensured that any complaints of discrimination or abuse from LGBT people are taken seriously. A recent survey of LGBT people in social housing found that many felt that
their complaints of homophobic or transphobic abuse from local residents were not being taken seriously.¹

These designated persons must monitor the sexual orientation and trans status of anyone submitting a complaint. This is so accurate data can be gathered on the experiences of LGBT people in social housing and the barriers they may have faced in making a complaint to their landlord. This is to ensure services operate in line with the Equality Act (2010) and do not indirectly discriminate against LGBT people.

*We want to understand whether more residents need to be able to access independent advice and potentially advocacy to support them in making a complaint.*

**18. How can we ensure that residents can access the right advice and support when making a complaint?**

It needs to be ensured that LGBT residents know about, and can easily access, LGBT specific housing services and advice.

A recent survey of LGBT in living in social housing found that the majority of respondents had faced homophobic or transphobic abuse from local residents. Very few of these incidents were reported to landlords and many felt their concerns and complaints were not given sufficient attention by housing providers.² It needs to be ensured that residents are aware of other services they can access, especially if they feel their complaints have not be taken seriously. For example Stonewall Housing can give advice to LGBT people who have had a dispute with their landlord. There are other LGBT specific housing and homelessness charities such as the Albert Kennedy Trust, Michael Causer Foundation and the Outpost Housing Project.

Awareness of these organisation can be raised in a number of ways, for example leaving leaflets in accommodation offices and putting information up on notice boards in the entrances of housing blocks. Links to these organisations should be placed on housing association’s websites. It also needs to be ensured that social housing providers know what LGBT specific housing organisations exist and operate in their area so that they can signpost residents if necessary.

It is very important that social housing providers carry out Sexual Orientation Monitoring and Trans Status Monitoring. This means that service providers can

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¹ Matthews and Poyner. ‘Your tenants are gay, get over it!’: how housing services discriminate against LGBT+ people’ http://www.democraticaudit.com/2017/10/23/your-tenants-are-gay-get-over-it-how-housing-services-discriminate-against-lgbt-people/.

² Matthews and Poyner. ‘Your tenants are gay, get over it!’: how housing services discriminate against LGBT+ people’ http://www.democraticaudit.com/2017/10/23/your-tenants-are-gay-get-over-it-how-housing-services-discriminate-against-lgbt-people/
signpost the correct people to LGBT specific services. Without adequate monitoring people’s LGBT status is not likely to be known and effective signposting likely not be given. If monitoring is not carried out service providers risk indirectly discriminating against LGBT people and therefore breaching the Equality Act (2010). Indirect discrimination is when the same service is provided to everyone but it has a worse effect on some due to a protected characteristic. Not monitoring sexual orientation or trans status may mean that service providers are not aware that their services users are LGBT and therefore may not be providing them with an adequate service based on the specific needs they have.

53. **In addition to sharing positive stories of social housing residents and their neighbourhoods, what more could be done to tackle stigma?**

Specific identities of social housing residents should be celebrated, this should be done to improve belonging and celebrate diversity. For example there could be an event for Black History Month and an event for LGBT Pride Month. Celebrating the fact that social housing residents have all kinds of identities and backgrounds and making residents feel proud of these identities may help to combat internal shame social housing residents may feel. Furthermore acknowledging that social housing residents have a range of identities, just like the rest of the population, helps to break down stereotypes and hopefully tackle stigma.

*We want to embed a customer service culture and attract, retain and develop the right people with the right behaviours for the challenging and rewarding range of roles offered by the sector.*

54. **What is needed to further encourage the professionalisation of housing management to ensure all staff delivers a good quality of service?**

A culture of inclusion is important in housing management to ensure all staff deliver a good quality of service.

The sector should promote diversity and ensure that a range of identities are represented by employees, this should include LGBT identities. LGBT staff groups should be set up to support LGBT employees. LGBT employees may face discrimination and poorer treatment in the workplace, LGBT groups can help to address this as they allow staff to bring up any issues and work towards resolving them. The housing association Gentoo is an example of good practice, they have an active LGB Staff Network Group which ensures all of Gentoo’s policies and practices are LGB inclusive. Gentoo has been recognised by Stonewall as top housing association for LGBT inclusion.
It should be ensured that all staff receive equality and diversity training so they can ensure their workplace and the services they provide are not discriminatory and are LGBT inclusive. For example it is important that employees use LGBT inclusive language, for example asking about someone’s partner rather than their wife. This is important in dealing with other employees as well as service users.

A culture of inclusion and the promotion of diversity in the workplace is important not only to ensure the wellbeing of all staff but also to ensure that housing associations provide a good quality service. Residents will be a whole range of identities, including being LGBT.

Almost one in five LGB people expect to be treated worse than heterosexual people when applying for social housing. Furthermore a recent survey of LGBT people in social housing found that most had experienced homophobic or transphobic abuse from other residents and very few of these incidents were reported to service providers. Many felt that their concerns and complaints were not given adequate attention by housing providers. Improving LGBT representation and visibility in the workplace can work towards improving services for LGBT people as. LGBT people may feel more comfortable coming forward with complaints and the severity of complaints of homophobia and transphobia will be better understood.

61. How can we encourage social housing residents to be involved in the planning and design of new developments?

LGBT residents must be included in the planning and design of new developments. This would involve specific LGBT outreach, currently nearly 50% of LGBT people living in social housing accommodation do not feel a sense of belonging in their local community. This may mean that LGBT people may be more reluctant to get involved with the planning and design of new developments. One way in which LGBT people can be encouraged to be included by holding LGBT specific focus groups, these groups may encourage LGBT engagement as well as providing a safe space for LGBT people to voice their concerns free from fear of judgement or discrimination.

It is vital to include the voices of LGBT people in the planning and design of new developments. Currently 60% of trans people and more than a third of LGB people in

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4 Matthews and Poyner. 'Your tenants are gay, get over it!': how housing services discriminate against LGBT+ people’ http://www.democraticaudit.com/2017/10/23/your-tenants-are-gay-get-over-it-how-housing-services-discriminate-against-lgbt-people/
5 ibid.
social housing do not feel safe in their neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{6} Including the voice of LGBT people will go some way in creating new development that LGBT people feel safer living in.

\textsuperscript{6} ibid.