

## **Still Beyond the Pale.....?**

**The response of social landlords to the housing and related health needs of London's Irish community**

**July 2001**

*Inside front cover*

## ***The Pale***

***From Norman times, for many centuries in Ireland, the area over which the English kings exercised power and control was centred on Dublin and was known as 'the Pale'. The word 'pale' means boundary and the phrase 'beyond the pale' has since become established in the English language meaning 'socially unacceptable or 'uncivilised'***

[Source: Liz Curtis *Nothing but the Same Old Story*, 1991 edition].

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# **Foreword**

Baroness Dean of Thornton Le Fylde Chairman of the Housing Corporation

Gurbux Singh Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared for the four London Irish housing associations. The Project Steering Group comprised:

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Sean Hutton, Federation of Irish Societies;  
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Clare Winstanley, Chief Executive, Innisfree Housing Association;

We would like to thank the many people and organisations that assisted with this project. Firstly, the officers of the London boroughs and housing associations who took the time, despite busy schedules, to respond to the questionnaire.

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We also wish to express our appreciation of the Housing Corporation's Innovation and Good Practice Grant, which has contributed towards the costs of producing this report. Finally, our thanks go to the Commission for Racial Equality and the Irish Embassy in London for their commitment to this project.

The report was written by Helen Cope who was Chief Executive of the East Thames Housing Group from 1991 to 1998. She also served as Chair of the National Housing Federation and Stratford City Challenge before becoming an independent, housing and regeneration consultant. Also a former senior lecturer in housing policy and finance, Helen Cope is author of *Housing Associations: Policy and Practice* published by Macmillan (1990, 2nd ed. 1999).

**The Project Steering Group  
July 2001**

***The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity.***

*(George Bernard Shaw)*

## **Summary**

This research, commissioned by the four London Irish housing associations has two elements. Firstly, it aims to assess the response of the social landlords in London to meeting the housing and related health needs of London's Irish community. In particular, it is concerned with the extent to which these bodies have responded positively to the recommendations of the CRE report *Discrimination and the Irish community in Britain* (1997) and in the case of housing associations, to the expectations of the Housing Corporation.

The second element is an Annotated Bibliography of the housing and related health needs of London's Irish community which outlines reports published since 1991, relevant to London and which forms Appendix 2 to the report. More substantial key, national reports which refer to the Irish in Britain have been used to inform the main report and are listed in the references to it.

### **The Needs**

Part 1 of the main report considers the housing and related health needs of London's Irish community. The Irish population in Britain is estimated to be 2.5 million. While thousands of migrants have successfully integrated into British professional and cultural life, research has consistently shown that this community is over-represented against indicators of disadvantage. The complex nature of migration between the two islands is considered, followed by an analysis of anti-Irish discrimination which has led to the largest ethnic minority in Britain being in some senses 'invisible'. The demography of the Irish community is then examined, with detailed statistics given of the London population. One third of the Irish population of Britain lives in London. Although the traditional community base is concentrated in the north-western and western boroughs there is evidence of substantial settlement in many other boroughs. The disadvantage faced by elements of this community is therefore a London wide issue.

Several research studies have shown that this community is over-represented in terms of poor housing, high rates of mortality and morbidity. The Irish are twice as prevalent amongst the homeless of London, as the population at large. Decent housing is a prerequisite for good health, therefore the emphasis of the report is that housing and related needs must be met in order to improve life and health chances. The Irish population is ageing and there are substantial housing and related care needs amongst

this group. Young vulnerable migrants also require more assistance. The overwhelming need is for more self-contained accommodation, supplemented by shared housing for elders and vulnerable, single people who for a complex set of reasons prefer not to live alone. For these groups and for much of the population the need is for more culturally sensitive services provided by the Irish organisations directly and in partnership with others. The needs of the community are, however, too great and widespread to be met by the Irish sector alone; mainstream social landlords and the boroughs must work with this sector to meet these needs.

## **The Response**

Part 2 analyses the response of London's social landlords. Three sets of CORE data were analysed to assess the housing association response to these housing needs. The top 12 London boroughs in terms of the concentration of the Irish population were contacted to assess the local authority response to rehousing this community. A questionnaire covering a number of aspects of policy and practice was circulated to the 33 London borough housing departments and to key housing associations operating in London. The respondents were contacted by telephone in a number of instances to follow up the responses. A response rate of 85% was achieved for the boroughs and 91% of housing associations responded to the survey.

Part 2 commences with a consideration of the importance of ethnic monitoring. The Irish community has been disadvantaged by the failure to maintain data in the form of a separate 'Irish' category. This had led to needs being missed and a lack of resources allocated to this community. From 2001, there is an 'Irish' category in the national Census which, when supplemented by effective monitoring data, will enable the needs properly to be assessed and an effective response delivered.

## **The findings**

The survey of London's social landlords undertaken for this study has found an unacceptable lack of resources directed to meet the clearly established needs of this community. The proportion of lettings by local authorities and housing associations is considerably lower than would be expected given the needs and the size of the community. New lettings by housing associations to Irish people have averaged at just over 3%. Capital allocations are also low. Less than 1% of the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme is directed to this group either directly or indirectly and this is an increase on earlier levels.

The survey found evidence of improved collection of ethnic data on the Irish community but very patchy use made of the information to plan a response in relation to housing or employment issues. Levels of consultation with the Irish community in relation to Best Value, tenant involvement and the 'supporting people' programme, were also disappointingly low. Partnership with the Irish housing associations was concentrated in certain Boroughs with longstanding Borough and mainstream housing associations partners. A number of Boroughs have started to assess the needs of this community but few have taken an active policy stance in meeting needs.

Part 3 of the report considers some examples of good practice operated by a number of housing associations and boroughs in the hope that it will offer some food for

thought to other social landlords in London. The report then offers some conclusions and recommendations.

These include the need for further initiatives to meet requirements through stock transfers to and management arrangements with the Irish housing associations. The future of socially excluded communities and vulnerable people lies not only in procuring decent housing and culturally sensitive services however, but also through the holistic approach to community regeneration which considers health, care needs, employment and training. Such regeneration is only achieved through a partnership that embraces all sectors and the communities with which they work. There are examples of such partnerships highlighted in this report and it is hoped that more social landlords will consider the Irish dimension when formulating and developing such initiatives in future.

Twenty-four recommendations are suggested for consideration by the London boroughs, housing associations, the Housing Corporation, the Government Office for London and the Commission for Racial Equality, covering a wide range of policy and practice, including responsibilities arising from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

This report brings together, in one volume, the facts that give the lie to that view that the Irish community faces no disadvantage. Many social landlords still appear to be unaware of the relative disadvantage faced by much of the Irish community and the scale of indifference is all the more astounding given the volume of evidence to the contrary. To assess whether the cause of this is ignorance, indifference, or discrimination was not the purpose of this study but its conclusion must be that in many cases this community is still considered by some to be 'beyond the Pale'.

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# **Part I: The Needs**

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 On the Irish in Britain

*“The Irish have made their contribution to British Society over centuries. They have - literally - physically constructed Britain’s infrastructure. They have served in every walk of life, but have made a special contribution to our health and education services.*

*The Irish have made eloquent contributions to our artistic and cultural life – ranging from Oscar Wilde to Bernard Shaw and James Joyce to the brilliance of today's poets and writers such as Seamus Heaney, Edna O’Brien and Ronan Bennett. In theatre film and dance we have recently been inspired by an Irish renaissance.....*

*In return for the contribution that the Irish have made to this country, the Irish community at least deserves the right to live free from discrimination and in equality and respect.”*

(Mr John McDonnell MP)

The above quotation is an extract from Hansard which details the first recorded debate in Parliament on the Irish Community in Britain, which took place on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1998. That this event was a first was recognised to be all the more astounding as Irish migration to Britain dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. The debate, secured by John McDonnell, Member for Hayes and Harlington, considered how Parliament could ensure that the recommendations of the then recently published report *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain*, (CRE 1997), could be implemented and so begin to undo centuries of anti-Irish racism in this country. This research followed on from a plethora of reports and lobbying by the Federation of Irish Societies and other agencies, all highlighting the discrimination and consequent poor housing, health and other services faced by many members of the Irish community in Britain.

The Irish population in Britain is currently estimated to be 2.5. million [1]. While thousands of migrants from Ireland have successfully integrated into British professional and cultural life and have made huge contributions across a range of trades, industries and professions, research has consistently shown that the community is over represented in terms of poor housing, low income and unemployment. Irish people are over represented among street homeless and are more susceptible to ill health than many other minority communities. As over one third of the Irish in Britain live in the Greater London area this is an issue to be tackled by London in particular.

## **1.2 Rationale for this research**

In commissioning this research the four London Irish Housing Associations, An Teach, Cara, Innisfree and Irish Centre Housing and the agencies with whom they work were concerned that most of the recommendations in the CRE Report, *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain*, (1997) had not been addressed by most local authorities. They were also of the view that social housing provision and related support remained totally inadequate for the Irish community.

The 2001 Census for the first time had an Irish category on the form. This is a major turning point. Subsequent research will be based on evidence which is quantitatively and qualitatively sounder than any hitherto.

## **1.3 Description and purpose of the project**

This research attempts to create a position statement, prior to the publication in due course of the 2001 Census data. It details what progress has been made by individual London authorities and housing associations in pursuing actions recommended by the Commission for Racial Equality and the Housing Corporation in particular, and other key research reports.

The Brief was in two parts:

1. To prepare a report which would:
  - assess the awareness and impact of the research upon housing strategies, policies and monitoring by those local authorities with a particular emphasis on those authorities with large Irish populations;
  - recommend methods to increase awareness in respect of Irish needs;
  - evaluate progress made by the Housing Corporation and mainstream housing associations in adopting an Irish perspective, in particular since the publication of the CRE Report, and the Corporation's own Black and Minority Ethnic Strategy.
2. To list and describe existing research projects on Irish housing and health needs in London by producing an annotated bibliography

## **1.4 Management of the project**

The project was overseen by an Advisory Group, with representatives from the four Associations and Sean Hutton, Community Care Co-ordinator at the Federation of Irish Societies.

### **1.4.1 Funding**

The project was funded jointly by Cara, Innisfree and Irish Centre Housing with assistance from the Housing Corporation through an Innovation and Good Practice Grant for the printing of the report.

## **1.5 The Report and Methodology**

It is a sad fact that despite the evidence, research shows that there is still an inadequate understanding of (or response to), the housing and related health needs of this community. Part 1 of this report therefore brings together a London wide view of the community's housing and related health needs. It does not consider the position of travellers however, who also have particular needs but which require independent consideration in greater depth than could be accommodated by this study.

Part 2 assesses the response of social landlords to these needs and to the recommendations of Commission for Racial Equality and the expectations of the Housing Corporation.

The final part offers some examples of good practice and sets out the conclusions and recommendations.

### **Methodology**

#### *Literature review*

The research commenced with a literature review of existing research and related reports, which informed part 1 on housing and related health needs. The relevant publications are collected together in an annotated bibliography at appendix one to the report.

#### *Data Searches*

The top twelve local authorities in terms of concentrations of Irish people were contacted for further information on lettings to Irish households and for examples, where appropriate, of good practice. Housing Corporation investment data and three sets of housing association lettings data (CORE reports) were then interrogated to assess the response of the housing association sector to the community's needs.

#### *Survey*

In April 2001 a questionnaire was sent to the 33 London borough housing departments and 23 key housing associations. The sample of housing associations included all the Group of 15, which are the largest housing associations operating in London. In addition, associations operating in areas of London with large concentrations of Irish people were included, as were the top three national housing associations that have operations in London. The questionnaire was constructed with

the intention of assessing how far the recommendations of the CRE report in particular and the Housing Corporation's Black and Minority Ethnic Strategy had been implemented. The questionnaires were supplemented by a number of interviews.

A response rate of 84.8% was achieved for the London boroughs. 28 boroughs responded. 21 housing associations responded, a response rate of 91%. The list of those who responded is given at Appendix 1.

## **2. The Irish Community in Britain and London**

### **2.1 Historical perspective**

The Irish have been in London for many hundreds of years. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century there has been a series of mass migrations which have mirrored, to an extent, periods of economic stagnation in Ireland and boom in Britain. The relationship between Britain and Ireland has also been a colonial one which has therefore been underpinned by a fundamental inequality. The nature of Irish migration to Britain is complex, however, with a number of causes and effects. There is a strong representation of the so-called 'unskilled' but that is not by any means the whole story.

There have been three main waves of immigration which, with the inclusion of second and third generations, have led to an Irish population of circa 2.5 million in Britain today. The scale of these migrations is evidenced by the fact that the population of Ireland in the 1980s of just over 5 million was three million lower than before the Great Famine of the 1840s. [2].

#### **2.2.1 The Nineteenth Century**

The first wave was accentuated by the Great Hunger of 1845-1849. During this period one commentator has noted that Ireland had become "England's Larder" resulting in a series of famines. His assertion is not unfounded as Ireland did in fact produce enough food to feed herself. Taxation and rent racking, however, caused widespread poverty. While ships were leaving Ireland laden with grain and cattle, the Irish people subsisted on a diet of potatoes. During the Great Hunger of 1845 to 1849 and the potato blight of that period, one and a half million people died of starvation and disease and a further million emigrated. Irish people had no option but to leave their country and look for work elsewhere.

In those days the migrant community was concentrated in what is now central London and along the riverside. The communities eventually moved from these areas to the outer suburbs; first to Kilburn and Camden Town and then to Cricklewood.

Those who migrated to Britain came from mainly agricultural and labouring backgrounds. They pursued largely manual occupations in Britain. In 1859 there were 38,000 men employed in the building industry of whom 12,000 were labourers receiving between 13 and 21 shillings a week. Irish men predominated in this group. Women were mainly employed in domestic work, as maids for example. [3]. In the 1950's, Irish migrants fulfilled similar roles leading to the stereotype of the Irish as providing unskilled labour in areas of shortage especially construction, domestic and service industries.

### **2.1.2 The Second Wave**

A second wave of emigration began in the 1920s when migration to the USA became more difficult, and rose sharply from the 1930s. Until this time most nineteenth century emigration from Ireland had been towards the USA. There was a dramatic increase in the Irish-born population of Britain between 1951 and 1961 caused partly by the slump in the Republic of Ireland's weak economy. In addition, during this period London needed labour and a substantial part of the workforce for the reconstruction of large areas of post war London was drawn once again from the Irish community, illustrating the relationship between the two islands.

During this period the British government of the day was also attempting to control immigration. The Irish were granted immunity from immigration controls however, partly owing to the nature of the relationship between Britain and Ireland. Those who did come experienced intensifying prejudice at this time. Many British personnel who were demobilised after the war expected homes and jobs fit for heroes and were disappointed with the conditions which they came home to. Although there was a need for this labour, Irish migrants easily became a scapegoat for this disillusion. Not only the Irish suffered however; jobs were being created during this period of reconstruction faster than they could be filled and as a result there was an influx of workers from the West Indies and India too.

The racism experienced by these communities in the 1950's was exemplified by the common place signs in rented accommodation across London "no Irish, no coloureds, no dogs". The hostility of the host community partly contributed to the desire to set up Irish cultural and community support in key areas such as Camden Town, Kilburn, Cricklewood and Paddington.

Although some Irish immigrants entered the professions linked with the health service and did well, many came from poverty-stricken small holdings in the west of Ireland or from working class communities in the major Irish cities. Social mobility in London for the majority of the Irish was therefore inevitably hard. One commentator has noted "only rarely did the Irish from working class backgrounds enter the higher professional categories like surveying and architecture. It was hoped that these aspirations would be fulfilled by the developing second generation." [4]

During this second wave of migration, 40 per cent of the 502,000 young people aged 16-19 living in the Republic in 1951 emigrated. These individuals now form the older population of Irish people in Britain today. [5]

### **2.1.3 The 1980s**

Throughout the 1960's and 70's the situation reversed as the Irish economy grew and many immigrants returned during this period bringing about the first sustained increase in the Irish population since the 1840s. The depression of the early to mid 1980's with increased unemployment particularly amongst young people led to further migrations. Of those that emigrated between 1981 and 1986, two thirds were aged under 25 and 90 percent under 35. The profile of these migrants changed. Most

were young and from urban areas.

These young migrants often had less difficulty in finding work but housing accommodation was a real issue however [6].

Emigration from Ireland to Britain has decreased from a relatively recent high in 1989 of 48,900, to an estimate of 6,300 in 2000. Table 2.1 shows that emigration from Britain to Ireland now outstrips immigration. While this may reflect the relative strengths of the two economies - the boom in Ireland, or the “Celtic Tiger” as it is known, attracting migrants back home - there is evidence that most Irish born migrants ultimately settle in Britain leading to a remarkable stability in population, given the proximity of the two islands. This also gives rise to the view that the decision on residence for the majority is not significantly affected by the economic conditions in their country of origin [7].

Although immigration is currently falling, and there is therefore a lower overall requirement for accommodation to meet the needs of newly arriving immigrants, the needs of those who have settled require addressing, as the remainder of this report will show. Furthermore, the fall in immigration may not be sustained in the future.

**Table 2.1 Immigration statistics for Britain 1994 to 2000**

| <b>Year to end<br/>April</b> | <b>Ireland to Britain<br/>(Emigrants)<br/>000s</b> | <b>Britain to Ireland<br/>(Immigrants)<br/>000s</b> |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| 1994                         | 14.8   | 15.2  |
| 1995                         | 13.3   | 15.6  |
| 1996                         | 14.1   | 17.6  |
| 1997                         | 12.9   | 20.0  |
| 1998                         | 8.5  | 21.1  |
| 1999                         | 10.2   | 21.6  |
| 2000*                        | 6.3  | 16.4  |

**\*estimate**

*Source: Irish Embassy in London /Central Statistics Office, Ireland*

In 2000, Britain was the destination for 28% of emigrants from Ireland. Those leaving Ireland were younger than those returning there. Of those leaving 55% were aged 15 – 24 years, while 46% of those moving to Ireland were in the 25-44 age group. This has implications for public policy; London is a popular destination for young migrants in particular. Although many come with qualifications and in many cases employment, others are often vulnerable and most will require assistance with accommodation, as discussed later.

## **2.2 The “Invisible” Community**

One of the many problems faced by the specialist, Irish providers in London is that they are continually told that there is insufficient evidence to support their claims that Irish need is unmet despite the extensive published evidence to the contrary. Indeed there even remains a startling lack of willingness to accept that anti-Irish discrimination exists despite the findings of the 1997 CRE report *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain*.

Without accurate figures of population spread and records of need and access to services no statutory or voluntary agency can effectively plan their response. The Irish in Britain, until now, have suffered from a failure on two counts to adequately assess their needs. The Census on which much policy development is based has not properly enumerated this community and another vital source of information particularly relevant to housing and related health needs - ethnic records- have not consistently and extensively captured this community either. The result as this and previous research shows has been under-investment in services to meet the needs of the Irish in Britain.

### **2.2.1 Anti-Irish Discrimination**

The Irish are the largest ethnic minority in Britain. Irish women represent the largest ethnic minority group within the workforce [8]. Owing to a number of factors, discussed below, Irish status as an ethnic minority group has not been properly recognised until now and the result has been that the Irish community has in many respects become ‘invisible’, allowing their needs to be ignored and remain largely unplanned for. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that until 2001 not only was this group ignored for Census purposes but they have been absent from most studies on race and discrimination.

The 1991 Census records 837,464 people as born in Ireland; some 1.5% percent of the population. Subsequent tables were produced on the socio-economic status of those born in Ireland but second and third generations are not accounted for. Taken with the problem of under-enumeration the official population statistics from the 1991 Census substantially under represent the size of the community, as detailed later in section 2.3. [9].

Since the early 1980s, Irish community groups and voluntary agencies have been pressing for the inclusion of “Irish” as an ethnic minority category in the national Census. In 2001 this category was included for the first time and will enable a much more accurate picture to be drawn of the demography and social and economic status of the Irish in Britain.

The struggle to achieve recognition of the ethnic minority status of this community is an important factor in understanding the attitudes of service providers towards the Irish in Britain. Until now there has been some confusion as to whether this community should be considered an ethnic minority or not. The issues are complex but revolve around the black/white dichotomy which characterises race equality

issues. The outcome is that as most Irish are white and speak the same language, the needs of this migrant community have gone largely unrecognised.

Most studies of the Irish community in London report that large numbers of respondents still experience anti-Irish racism [10]. This issue was clearly highlighted by the CRE report in 1997. It is important to remember however, that although this group has some clearly defined special needs and distinct cultural requirements particularly in the field of housing and health, as discussed later, it is no more homogenous than any other ethnic minority group.

Although the perception is that second and particularly third generations have few cultural differences or requirements that differ from those of the host society, these individuals still need to overcome discriminatory experiences and practices in order to access services and accommodation. It is one of the aims of this research to assess what progress has been made and to consider whether the position has changed since the recommendations of the 1997 report were published.

A survey of the London Irish in 1987 [11], one of the first and most comprehensive, had shown that the community suffered from housing and employment disadvantage. The proportion of individuals in positions of power or privileged jobs was relatively low. A growing pool of people suffering from relative deprivation included disproportionate numbers from minority ethnic communities, including a large proportion of Irish people. The report noted that this is partly to do with the colonial relationship between Ireland and Britain and that "anti-Irish racism is never far below the surface of British society".

The proof of this statement is clearly established in *Nothing but the Same Old Story*, a study which offers a devastatingly graphic account of the roots of anti-Irish discrimination. It traces Irish history and the vilification of the Irish people from the 12<sup>th</sup> century to present day Britain using extracts from articles and cartoons to show how this community has been demeaned and abused over the centuries. [12].

A further study constitutes one of the most important records of issues and experiences affecting Irish people and with well over 1000 cases is one of the largest ever survey samples of the Irish community in Britain. The data highlighted a number of issues of concern to those using Irish services such as the extent of racial and sexual harassment, domestic violence and the extent of mental health problems experienced by clients. The data also presents for the first time a client profile and identifies groups of clients for specific service needs. This same report also recommended the introduction of the Standardised Information System (SIS) which has since been adopted on a long term basis to enable Irish agencies to monitor the effect of delivery of their services, and equally to identify changes in client service needs. [13]

In 1994, of those services provided to clients at the first or subsequent visits, 59% related to advice services such as housing, employment, welfare rights and health; 25% to support services including repatriation, travel, accommodation and counselling; and 16% to material support services consisting of providing food, clothing and financial support.

70% of Irish clients were self-referrals, only 5% were served by other voluntary

agencies and 6%, by statutory agencies. This highlights the importance of the Irish voluntary sector in meeting the needs of this community. The study found that not only were new arrivals being assisted but also that settled members of the Irish community were using these services. While 18% of the sample had been in Britain for less than a year, over one third of the clients have been resident in Britain for ten or more years, in fact 5% had lived in Britain all their lives.

The findings of this study echoed those of many earlier reports:

- Two thirds of the sample population describe themselves as unemployed and 29% lived in insecure housing.
- One third of clients reported that they have experienced some form of racial harassment in the last twelve months.
- Many clients reported health- related problems.
- One in ten clients reported mental health problems.
- One in eight men reported mis-use of alcohol.
- 4% of the younger under 25 year age group reported drug mis-use.
- Over a third of the 65 and over age group had a disability.

These figures far exceeded national averages. It should be noted however that this is not a representative sample. The figures are drawn from the users of front-line Irish agencies and in some respects present a profile which is much worse than the rest of the Irish population as a whole, as indicated by Census figures. What it does highlight however is a marginalised section of the Irish community with complex and multiple needs.

This report was in a way a forerunner of the equally disturbing CRE report which highlighted "evidence of inequality and a deep sense of hurt amongst people of Irish origin in the way they have been treated".

In 1995, before the report was finished the CRE recommended that an Irish category be included in those for use in ethnic origin monitoring systems. This had long been recognised as necessary by Irish agencies and is discussed further in Part 2.

In concluding the study, the authors of the CRE report note that there was a strong indication that the denial of the specific needs of the Irish community and failure to recognise the Irish dimension to a host of social policy issues was the result of an "ingrained pre-disposition" in many professionals working in both the voluntary and the statutory sectors.

The report notes that this is, in fact, discriminatory practice and that there have been several successful cases brought by the CRE which have established that the Irish are subject to discrimination The authors state:

*“Our evidence suggests that there are four discriminatory and exclusionary practices which operate in relation to service provisions for Irish people. All four practices are predicated on the denial of Irish specificity...”*

*The absence of Irish issues in the plans for service provision of statutory bodies and voluntary organisations compounded in many cases by a lack of consultation with local Irish groups.*

*The non-recognition of the existence of anti-Irish racism leads to a "battle" in most contexts to raise Irish issues.*

*The lack of provision of a culturally sensitive service for the Irish in Britain by service providers.*

*The existence of stereotype responses to Irish clients by service providers”*

[14]

The report went on to make a number of recommendations and five years on, Part 2 of this study examines the housing association and local authority response to them.

### **2.2.2 The Nature of Discrimination**

Discrimination takes many forms and individual experience of it differs. Clearly discrimination does not affect all Irish people equally. It may relate to social class, to occupation or to religion. It will affect different sections of the Irish community in differing ways and to varying degrees. Some immigrants may have experienced direct racial harassment or discrimination in access to housing. Others may have experienced it only in the form of Irish jokes or comments about their accent.

The Irish community like all communities wishes to exercise choice in obtaining services including housing. Like all ethnic minority communities they face barriers to this in a number of ways. One commentator has demonstrated that there are three main factors and that these often interact. They are the actions of individuals or ‘gatekeepers’, the systematic effects of organisational policies and procedures and a structural framework which may be provided or condoned by central government [15]. The latter two factors are often known as institutionalised racism. Racist acts may occur deliberately in any of these areas as acts of commission, or through conscious or unconscious acts of omission.

#### *Discrimination in Housing Policy and Practice*

In delivering housing services there are many circumstances in which racist actions can occur however unintentional they may be. The process may start with a failure to recognise cultural preferences or differences which diminish choice and prevent needs being met. In the case of the Irish community, this is evidenced, as we shall see, by a failure to recognise the extent of the need for shared housing or specialist schemes for older people at a central and local policy level and limited consultation on its needs and preferences.

Housing waiting lists and allocations processes are often complex, bureaucratic and this may discourage applicants. This can lead to a failure to access services or to succeed in achieving one's rights. Trained staff and open and culturally sensitive policies and processes can help to overcome this, as may targeted advocacy services.

Housing allocation systems have been refined over the years in an attempt to remove subjective decision-making by gatekeepers, which led to discriminatory practices in the past. The outcome of this for example, included concentrating ethnic minorities in the worst housing or not allocating housing in proportion to the needs indicated by the size and nature of the community in question. Ethnic record keeping was a means of monitoring progress in this area. The Irish community has therefore been particularly adversely affected by the failure to implement adequately this approach.

Local authorities have some discretion as to which households are assisted as homeless persons. The legislation has excluded those, whose homelessness could be described as intentional. This has been applied, for example, to households in rent arrears or those that have been evicted for breaches of the tenancy agreement. However, 'Leaving Ireland' has been cited as leading to intentional homelessness, which in turn has excluded some families from statutory assistance. This is a particularly disturbing example of how systems and policy frameworks can be abused and lead to discriminatory practice.

For over twenty years the housing profession has sought, in the main, to outlaw such discriminatory acts and practices. There is no doubt that substantial progress has been made and Part 2 of this report examines the current record of London's social landlords in this area.

## **2.3 Demography**

In painting a picture of the Irish community in London we have, at present, to rely on the 1991 Census and work undertaken by a number of researchers to update these figures from further statistical bases and surveys. Data in this report are based upon the work of Owen (1995) [16] *Census Briefings on the Irish in London* [AGIY 1995] and the 1997 CRE report. Unfortunately, other data sources such as the Survey of English Housing (SEH) and the National Dwelling and Housing Survey do not contain an Irish category. The SEH is continuously updated by the Department of Transport Environment and Regions (DETR) and may include 'Irish' as a category in future given the change to the Census categories from 2001. It should be noted however that the view of some researchers is that it is possible that a lower number of British-born second or third generations may choose to classify themselves as Irish compared with other BME groups and therefore despite the change to the Census categories it may still be difficult use the data to measure needs and plan responses accurately.

### **2.3.1 The Irish population in Britain and London**

The first problem with the Census data of 1991 is the extent of under-enumeration involving approximately 1.2 million people overall, which is likely to have an effect on Irish numbers. Secondly, as stated earlier, despite active representations by Irish

agencies, the category Irish was not included in the new ethnic origin question in the Census 1991. By developing other statistical information, however, the authors of the CRE report were able to compile a more accurate picture of the population of Irish people in Britain.

In 1991, the Census recorded 837,464 people born in Ireland i.e. 1.5% of the total population. Women outnumbered men comprising 53% of the Irish born total. However the CRE report shows that if children of an Irish parent are taken into account thus including second and third generations, the population of Irish in Britain should, the report argues, be tripled. This would give a total of 2.5 million or 4.6% of the total population.

The impact in London is substantial as over one third of the Irish population of Britain live in the capital. The CRE study suggests that a conservative estimate would give a proportion of 9.6%, and a more realistic one would establish that a total of 11.5% of the population is Irish. Hence the assertion at the outset of this report that the Irish are the largest ethnic minority group in both Britain and London. (See Table 2.2.)

The Irish community has tended to concentrate in areas where people can offer support to each other and where cultural and other centres have developed. For this reason the Irish population in London is clustered particularly in the north west and western boroughs. The highest proportions are in Brent - 9%, Islington - 7.1%, Hammersmith and Fulham - 6.9%. (Table 2.3.). If the correction factor is applied to include second generations the figures for these Boroughs increase to 22.5%, 17.8% and 17.0% respectively (see Table 2.4).

The CRE report highlights the following features of the Irish population in Britain in 1997:

- Family size tends to be small which is typical of migrant patterns.
- There is a 'bulge' within the 40 to 69 age group representing 58% of the total, particularly of the Republic born Irish.
- Women outnumber men in all age groups.
- Young migrants, particularly from Northern Ireland, now make up a larger proportion of the Irish born age group than in the past at 38%.
- Young people (those under 25), are clustered in south-east England particularly London.
- There are many more single person households, reflecting lower marriage rates, and lone pensioners than in the population of Britain as a whole.

**Table 2.2 Relative size of the Irish community in London 1991**

| <b>Group</b>                           | <b>Size</b>      | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| White Non-Irish Born                   | 5,077,110        | 76.0           |
| <b>Irish Born</b>                      | <b>256,470</b>   | <b>3.5</b>     |
| <b>*A: first and second generation</b> | <b>641,175</b>   | <b>9.6</b>     |
| <b>*B: first and second generation</b> | <b>769,410</b>   | <b>11.5</b>    |
| Indian                                 | 347,091          | 5.2            |
| Black Caribbean                        | 290,996          | 4.4            |
| Black African                          | 163,635          | 2.4            |
| Pakistani                              | 87,816           | 1.3            |
| Bangladeshi                            | 85,738           | 1.3            |
| Black Other                            | 80,613           | 1.6            |
| Chinese                                | 56,579           | 0.8            |
| Asian Other                            | 112,807          | 1.7            |
| Other others                           | 120,872          | 1.8            |
| <b>Total:</b>                          | <b>6,679,699</b> | <b>100</b>     |

\* Note: A: includes an uplift in population by applying a correction factor of 2.5% to Census figures and B includes a correction factor of 3.0%.

*Source: CRE 1997*

**Table 2.3 Largest local concentrations of people born in Ireland within London boroughs and by parliamentary constituency, (based upon Census 1991 data).**

|                                     | <i>Percent</i> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>All Born in Ireland</b>          |                |
| Brent                               | 9              |
| Islington                           | 7.1            |
| Hammersmith & Fulham                | 6.8            |
| Camden                              | 6.5            |
| Ealing                              | 6              |
| Westminster, City of                | 5.3            |
| Haringey                            | 5.2            |
| Luton                               | 5.4            |
| Harrow                              | 4.9            |
| Lambeth                             | 4.8            |
| Southwark                           | 4.5            |
| Wandsworth                          | 4.2            |
| Kensington & Chelsea                | 4              |
|                                     |                |
| <b>Parliamentary Constituencies</b> |                |
| Brent East                          | 12.3           |
| Hammersmith                         | 8.5            |
| Brent South                         | 8.2            |
| Islington North                     | 8.2            |
| Ealing, Acton                       | 6.8            |
| Holborn & St. Pancras               | 6.7            |
| Brent North                         | 6.5            |
| Hampstead and Highgate              | 6.2            |
| Ealing North                        | 6.2            |
| Islington South                     | 5.9            |
| Westminster North                   | 5.8            |
| Harrow East                         | 5.5            |
|                                     |                |

*Source CRE 1997 Table 2.2*

**Table 2.4 Largest local concentrations of Irish people including second generations Ireland within London boroughs**

| <b>% Irish including 1st and 2nd generation</b>                  |      |
|--|------|
| Brent  | 22.5 |
| Islington  | 17.8 |
| Hammersmith & Fulham   | 17.0 |
| Camden   | 16.3 |
| Ealing   | 15.0 |
| Westminster  | 14.0 |
| Haringey   | 13.0 |
| Harrow   | 12.3 |
| Lambeth  | 12.0 |
| Southwark  | 11.3 |
| Lewisham   | 8.5  |
| Croydon  | 6.8  |
| <i>Applies correction factor of 2.5 %<br/>(Source AGIY 1995)</i> |      |

## 2.4 Particular Need Groups

### 2.4.1 Older people

One commentator has referred to the triple jeopardy facing the older Irish population. The triple jeopardy applies to minority ethnic elders who experience disadvantage owing to their age, discrimination because they are a different race to the indigenous population and thirdly a tendency to be concentrated in inner city environments and thus face poor services, high crime rate and greater levels of poverty. The author notes that there is a sizeable group of Irish immigrants who are old and in ill health living in the inner cities and enduring social and cultural isolation. She states *“European physical characteristics do not by themselves guarantee integration into English society and many of these men and women are as Irish now as the day they left home. Their special needs deserve as much consideration as those of any other ethnic minority group.”* [17]

The Census data highlights a ‘bulge’ in older people. In London some 18,300 men and 26 000 women were over 65 in 1995 [18]. This represented a growth of 22.1 % in the population of Irish men and 32.5 % of Irish women in London between 1981 and 1991.

A number of studies have illustrated that many older Irish people are living in poor conditions, often alone or in hostel accommodation, an issue explored later. The increase in older people emphasises the need for planning appropriate housing and related health services to meet these needs; an issue highlighted in several reports on London.

An early survey by the LB of Haringey considered the social situation of a sample of Irish elderly in the borough across the areas of housing, social services, health, leisure, recreation, employment, the experience of racism in Britain and contacts with Ireland today. It found a situation where the majority of those surveyed lived alone and had no children. Moreover one third had no family or relatives in London [19]. A more recent study has also highlighted the isolation and weak social support networks faced by this group and the requirement and preference for culturally sensitive services to meet these needs [20].

Many older people tend to be reticent about coming forward to ask for assistance having pride in their independence. Thus conditions are often made worse owing to lack of access to benefits. One London survey identified this group as the one with the most severe and increasing housing needs [21]. With a higher proportion of widowers and widows than the host population they are also more likely to have remained single and to therefore live alone. This study also identified problems of social isolation in that many elders had little contact with British society but were unable to return to Ireland having lost many of their original social contacts and feared that their return would be seen as a failure.

The Trans-national Community Care Project (Ar Ais Aris) is addressing this issue by exploring how a facility for older Irish migrants living in Britain who wish to be supported in returning home could be developed under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

## 2.4.2 Young People

Migrants during the 1980s presented a different profile compared with earlier waves. They were more likely to work in retail and other service industries and the majority came from urban areas. A study by the Action Group for Irish Youth reported that these young migrants had found difficulty in obtaining employment in Ireland despite good qualifications. They came to London in search of work. Once they arrived, the survey found that although their work expectations were largely satisfied their housing conditions were less secure. On arrival, most stayed with friends or relations, sleeping on floors. Many others stayed in hostels and found difficulty in then obtaining more permanent accommodation. The report noted that half had suffered from anti-Irish discrimination. This and other factors accounted for rates of depression that rose from 13% while in Ireland to 44% in London [22].

A later study confirms that this pattern continued throughout the 1990s [23]. It also noted that lower levels of migration can increase a sense of isolation amongst these newcomers and that in the 1990s more migrants had lower qualifications and often had histories of abuse or drug addiction.

## 2.5 Poverty and Unemployment

Whilst a large percentage of Irish born people are highly qualified, the 1991 Census demonstrated high levels of unemployment amongst the Irish community, as highlighted by Table 2.5.

**Table 2.5: Unemployment rates among people born in Ireland, all white people and minority ethnic groups in Great Britain 1991**

| <b>Ethnic Group</b>      | <b>Male %</b> | <b>Female %</b> |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| White                    | 10.7          | 6.3             |
| Minority Ethnic          | 20.3          | 15.6            |
| Born in Ireland          | 15            | 7               |
| Born in Northern Ireland | 12.2          | 6.6             |
| Born in Irish Republic   | 19.3          | 8.3             |

*Source: Owen 1995*

The CRE Report noted that women are highly represented in associated professional occupations such as nursing and personal services with domestic and catering work predominating, as does other services work. The pattern has altered to some extent, however, owing to the migration in the 1990's of more highly qualified young people from Ireland to Britain. The report also found that women are under-represented in clerical and secretarial work. Two clear groups emerged, highly qualified nurses for example and lower skilled personal services workers. Irish born men's occupations are similar to those of the population as a whole, they are under-represented in white collar occupations but *not* in professional work.

The older group, 45 to 59, were still strongly clustered into occupations traditionally associated with the Irish population particularly domestic work for women and general labouring for men.

Lower rates of car ownership have been accepted as an indicator of poverty. The 1991 Census revealed that while 33% of white people were without a car and 40.8% of minority ethnic groups this figure rose to 45.5% for those born in Ireland [24].

The statistics on new lettings by housing associations (CORE data) show that Irish households remain worse off when compared with other BME groups. Table 2.6. shows their position in relation to income for new tenants of general needs housing in London.

**Table 2.6 Average weekly income of new housing association tenants in London by ethnic group**

| <b>Year</b>     | <b>Irish</b> | <b>British/European</b> | <b>Other BME</b> | <b>All</b> |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------|
|                 | <b>£</b>     | <b>£</b>                | <b>£</b>         | <b>£</b>   |
| 1998/1999       | 122          | 134                     | 137              | 135        |
| 1999/2000       | 124          | 137                     | 138              | 137        |
| April –Dec 2000 | 137          | 147                     | 152              | 148        |

*Source: CORE data*

The number of Irish tenants of housing associations in receipt of housing benefit is also higher as illustrated by Table 2.7. This suggests higher levels of poverty for this group.

**Table 2.7 RSL tenants - households in receipt of housing benefit**

| <b>Year</b>                | <b>Irish</b> | <b>Other BME</b> | <b>All</b> |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|------------|
|                            | <b>%</b>     | <b>%</b>         | <b>%</b>   |
| 1998/1999                  | 75.4         | 70.3             | 68.5       |
| 1999/2000                  | 73.7         | 69.5             | 67.6       |
| April 2000 – December 2000 | 69.1         | 66.0             | 65.7       |

*Source: CORE Data*

## 2.6 London Community Studies

There have been a number of published studies of the Irish community in London [25]. These studies support the assertion that the Irish community faces greater hardship than the indigenous population.

The themes that emerge mirror the national picture. Surveys have found that in comparison with the population as a whole:

- Twice the number of Irish people live in hostels
- The Irish are over-represented in council housing and under-represented in owner-occupation.
- Many still rely on the private rented sector for housing
- The community experiences worse housing amenity and conditions
- Irish people lack information on services available
- There is a high degree of social isolation
- There is a strong desire to maintain independence
- There is a lack of awareness of service needs by providers

This was the case for the second generation too, who “*found that their identity and position in society was doubly compromised by their inability to identify fully with British society or with the Irish born in Britain.*” The report goes on to note that the characteristic lack of security and poor condition of privately rented housing means that “*insecure accommodation in poor conditions remains a fact of life for many Irish people well into their old age.*” [26].

### 3. Health Issues

The link between housing and health is long established. Access to good quality affordable housing is a key factor that impacts upon the health of a community. Homelessness, including temporary accommodation, has been shown to produce increased risks of respiratory disease, including tuberculosis, poor child development, poor peri-natal health and increased risk of mental illness, including drug and alcohol problems. Drug misuse may also lead to HIV infection.

For those with permanent accommodation the quality of this housing and its environment also impacts upon health. Overcrowding leads to higher rates of infectious diseases. Damp conditions and inadequate heating can also contribute to respiratory diseases and, in the case of older people, hypothermia and high rates of death in winter. Poor housing contributes to stress, which can lead to depression and other forms of mental ill-health. These issues were recently highlighted by a study of housing and health in London [27].

The CRE report noted that the Irish in Britain experience more ill-health than the host population and that their mortality rates are higher. According to the 1991 Census long term illness was higher than average amongst middle aged Irish women and men. Recent research shows that poor health amongst the Irish population persists into the second generation especially cancers and respiratory disease. The causes are a complex set of relationships between diet, work, alcohol and tobacco. Poor housing is also a contributory factor [28]. The state of health of many Irish people in Britain has led to a situation where life expectancy decreases on average by up to 10 years rather than improve as a result of migration [29].

Specific studies show a similar picture in London.

The themes emerging include:

- high mortality rates from a range of illnesses - up to 30% higher for Irish men and 20% higher for Irish women than the population as a whole
- disproportionate rates of limiting long term illness;
- low expectations of health care by individuals owing to perceptions of attitudes towards them [30].

HIV infection is also an issue for this community. One study comments that migrants can be isolated from the host society and that those with HIV infections may be also marginalised by their own communities. It also notes the effect of Irish identity on the risk of transmission. This may be higher owing to the conflict between cultural and religious beliefs, in some sectors of the Irish community about the use of contraception for example, and acting on HIV prevention information. [31].

### **3.1 Mental health**

A number of studies have shown that more Irish born people in Britain suffer from poor mental health and have the highest rate of first and subsequent admissions to a mental hospital of any immigrant group [32]. The causes of these high rates are explained in a number of ways. One report notes that Irish people are often mis-diagnosed by British psychiatrists who do not have the cultural perspective to enable them to understand the social and spiritual dimensions of the Irish psyche and the effects of being migrants, in an often hostile community [33]. Alcohol misuse by some Irish migrants, arising from their response to home sickness, discrimination, poverty or homelessness can inflict huge psychological distress on a person's wellbeing and may lead to ill-health as well as other related social issues [34].

Irish psychiatric admissions are concentrated in the 25 to 44 age band. Irish in-patients are significantly more likely than other groups to be living alone. The majority of Irish people admitted for depression had attempted suicide.

In London the borough studies have also echoed these findings [35].

### **3.3 A holistic approach**

The links between housing and health are now well recognised at a policy level. The needs of the Irish community, like many communities, cannot be met by decent housing or health services alone but by a holistic approach to the provision of culturally sensitive services. It is vital that the *supporting people* regime incorporates Irish housing and related health needs and that progress in this area is closely monitored by the Government Office for London. More London boroughs are beginning to recognise the community care needs of this community and provision needs to be made to respond effectively. The Irish voluntary sector is well placed to advise on the nature of services required and could also galvanise itself to develop its own independent care sector to meet very specific needs. A similar approach could be adopted to social and home care requirements to assist those who are able to maintain independent living and who may be isolated in the owner-occupied or private rented sector. Older people and those with health problems in could also benefit from more advocacy support.

## 4. Housing and Homelessness

The previous chapters have illustrated that despite the great success achieved by many Irish immigrants to Britain, the community is over represented against certain indicators of deprivation and suffers disproportionately from poor health. Less than adequate housing conditions are a function of, and have contributed to, this state of affairs. Current policy demands solutions that involve more than the simple provision of more or better quality housing as touched upon in the previous chapter. This chapter explores housing needs in some detail but also recognises in the final section that the solution to the communities needs lies in a more holistic approach to service needs.

### 4.1 Housing Needs

Over the last twenty years research has shown time and again that housing is the most pressing problem facing the Irish community. This is particularly so in London.

The national picture is highlighted in Table 4.1. Rates of owner occupation are lower amongst Irish born people. This is partly accounted for by low income and high unemployment making owner occupation inaccessible to many members of this community. In addition, the majority of migrants to London in particular, are young and are less likely to have the capital for owner occupation or indeed to inherit a house. There is over-representation in the private rented sector, which is traditionally associated with insecurity and poor conditions. Rates of overcrowding although lower than other ethnic groups are higher than the indigenous population. Lack of amenity is also high as demonstrated by Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Housing tenure and conditions by ethnic group in Britain (%)**

| Tenure                        | White % | People Minority Ethnic Group % | Born in Ireland % |
|-------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Owner Occupied                | 66.6    | 59.5                           | 55.4              |
| Private Rented                | 7.0     | 10.8                           | 10.9              |
| Local authority Housing       | 21.4    | 21.8                           | 26.3              |
| Renting from housing assocns  | 3.0     | 5.9                            | 5.1               |
| More than one person per room | 1.8     | 13.1                           | 2.9               |
| Lacking/Sharing Bathroom/w.c. | 1.2     | 2.1                            | 2.2               |

*Source Owen 1995*

## 4.2 Housing and the London Irish

### 4.2.1 Tenure

In London the position is different as highlighted by Table 4.2. In the case of owner-occupation 13.5% of the Irish community own outright compared with 20% owning outright for the rest of the population. 30.5% of Irish people are repaying a mortgage compared with 39.2% non-Irish born whites. The CRE report noted these findings and advanced reasons for these lower levels including discrimination by mortgage lenders, low pay, feelings of impermanence amongst a migrant population.

In London the Irish are over-represented in private renting. Once again this arises from their migrant status, low pay and large numbers of single person households. In London in 1991, 16.8% of Irish headed households were in private rented accommodation compared with 12.1% white non-Irish. This is despite a fall in the number of homes in this sector.

**Table 4.2. Housing Tenure in London by ethnic/birth place group**

| Tenure                                 | Irish Born | White Non-Irish | Indian | Black Carib. | Black African | Pakist. | Bangl. | Black Other | Other Ethnic |
|--|------------|-----------------|--------|--------------|---------------|---------|--------|-------------|--------------|
| <b>Owner Occupied / Owned-Outright</b> | 13.5       | 20              | 11.9   | 6.8          | 2.7           | 10.1    | 2.5    | 4.4         | 8.7          |
| <b>Buying</b>                          | 30.5       | 39.2            | 66.9   | 37.4         | 21.4          | 56.9    | 23.8   | 29.0        | 42.1         |
| <b>Privately Rented</b>                | 16.8       | 12.1            | 7.3    | 5.4          | 16.5          | 11.2    | 6      | 11.6        | 21.8         |
| <b>Renting Housing Assoc.</b>          | 8          | 5.1             | 2.6    | 10.5         | 11.7          | 3.5     | 8.3    | 13.6        | 5.9          |
| <b>Rented Local Authority</b>          | 28.9       | 21.9            | 9.7    | 39           | 46            | 16.9    | 57.6   | 40          | 19.1         |

*Source: AGIY Census 1991 – The Irish in London (1995)*

#### **4.2.2 Housing Quality**

Table 4.3 shows that households in London with Irish born heads have poorer facilities than average in the majority white population. Twice the proportion lack or share a bath/shower and/or inside wc. This proportion is higher than for the other large ethnic minority groups, black Caribbean 1.4%, Indian 1% and similar to the 'black other' category at 2.4%. 22% of Irish headed households lack central heating compared with a white average of 18.9%. Again this is higher than for the other ethnic groups. Table 4.3 also shows the high levels of non self-contained accommodation exceeded only by Black Africans in London.

#### **4.2.3 Local Authority Housing**

22% of women and 21% of Irish men live in local authority accommodation compared with 17.4% and 15.7% of the total population [36]. In London this rises to 28.9% of all Irish born compared with only 21.8% of white non-Irish.



**Table 4.3 – Measures of housing quality in London by ethnic birth place group of head of household 1991**

|  | <b>Irish Born</b> | <b>White Non-Irish</b> | <b>Indian</b> | <b>Black Caribbean.</b> | <b>Black African</b> | <b>Pakistani</b> | <b>Bangladeshi</b> | <b>Black Other</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|--|-------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Overcrowded 1.5 plus people per room         | 1.6%              | 0.8%                   | 3.2%          | 1.8%                    | 6.9%                 | 6.1%             | 23.9%              | 3%                 | 4%           |
| Lack or share bath/shower and/or inside w.c. | 3.6%              | 2.3%                   | 1.4%          | 1.6%                    | 5.3%                 | 2.9%             | 2.2%               | 2.9%               | 3.9%         |
| No central heating                           | 22.0%             | 19.8%                  | 7.6%          | 14.8%                   | 14.8%                | 13.5%            | 12.1%              | 17.9%              | 12.8%        |
| Not self contained accommodation             | 5.2%              | 2.4%                   | 1.5%          | 2.5%                    | 6.8%                 | 3.0%             | 1.5%               | 4.2%               | 4.9%         |
|  |                   |                        |               |                         |                      |                  |                    |                    |              |

*Source: AGIY Census Briefings 1995*

#### **4.2.4 Housing Associations**

Nationally, the CRE study showed that housing association tenure is relatively greater for those from the Irish Republic, with women at 4.2%, and men at 4%, compared with the total population at 2.7% and 2.4% respectively and northern Irish born women at 3.3% and men at 2.2%. Again the proportions are higher in London. Table 4.2 shows that that 8% of Irish headed households compared with 5.1% of white non-Irish headed households rent from housing associations.

A study by MORI for the Housing Corporation of 10,000 housing association tenants in 1999/2000 was questioned for this report in relation to Irish households. As only 111 households identified themselves as Irish, MORI did not consider the sample sufficiently large to include in the tabulations of the main report. Why so few failed to identify themselves as Irish remains a question for further research, as CORE data discussed in part 2 of this report for the same period, shows that many more households did identify themselves as Irish.

The report shows that Irish tenants are more likely to live alone (57% compared with 37% for all housing association households) and that they are more likely to live in older and retired households. These findings reflect the demographic data considered in chapter 2.

The MORI survey notes that Irish tenants are more likely to say that they expect to be renting rather than owning in ten years time (66% and 18% respectively compared with 54% and 32% for all housing association tenants). These differing expectations were also noted by the CRE report and by Innisfree Housing Association in their Tenant Survey 2000 [37]. This may be best explained by the sense of impermanence of a migrant community combined with experiences of discrimination leading to lower expectations of home ownership.

### **4.3 Housing Preferences**

A study commissioned by Innisfree Housing Association noted that of potential applicants who were referrals from four Irish agencies, many were still in insecure housing despite a long stay in Britain [38]. Of these individuals, 50% expressed a preference for social housing. Only 20% expressed a preference for owner-occupation mirroring other studies. A small proportion, 4%, wanted private rented housing. One third had no preferences, which the report notes, reflected a lack of knowledge of their options. Most of the respondents expressed a preference to live near the community as they felt that contact with the community was very important and this of course led to preferences for certain geographical areas. Some households require proximity to Catholic schools and churches when expressing housing choice. Many of these respondents wanted support and help with bills. 38% felt isolated, over one quarter needed employment opportunities. Two thirds had encountered difficulties in obtaining housing highlighting the discrimination they faced. A third preferred to have housing managed by an Irish agency making them feel more secure, and 42% felt it was important to be able to talk to Irish staff who would better understand their needs.

Interestingly, Innisfree's survey found that 62% expressed a preference for owner occupation, perhaps having had their aspirations raised as a result of obtaining permanent and culturally sensitive social housing.

Although the main need is for self-contained, affordable housing, the Irish housing associations have found that older single people especially single men and some young vulnerable people require shared housing. Some older Irish men may have spent much of their lives moving around from one construction site to another and from one part of the country to another. Others may have turned to alcohol to overcome loneliness. These people need the support of others. For these groups the cluster flat or shared housing scheme is ideal as it offers a degree of independence but the security of group support. Housing providers have moved away from this model in favour of self-contained housing for all households. But for these groups this remains the preferred housing solution.

### **4.4 The London Studies**

A London-wide survey noted that housing is the most common problem dealt with by Irish advice agencies and confirms again a higher proportion of the Irish born population in poor housing conditions than British people. Two thirds of the applicants surveyed thought that Irish people in London encountered particular difficulties in finding housing highlighting the discrimination which they often experienced [39].

Some recent London Borough studies show that similar themes emerge at a Borough level:

- there is an unmet need for housing and housing support services in the Irish community

- there is a particular need for move on permanent housing.
- The need is greatest for self-contained especially for tenants aged 30 and over.
- Irish people are not accessing services for a complex web of reasons.
- Racial harassment and anti-Irish feeling were regularly reported.
- There is a sense of isolation in the population with needs that are all too easily overlooked.
- Irish headed households fare worse than most other ethnic minority groups in relation to housing quality, the rate of lack of facilities was higher.
- a lower proportion of Irish headed households were owner occupiers and a higher proportion of Irish people live in privately rented accommodation
- Higher than average numbers of Irish headed households were overcrowded.
- A number of high risk groups were identified including elders, children, people with disabilities, young people and travellers [40].

#### **4.5 Irish Homelessness in London**

The 1991 Census and several more recent research reports have shown the extent of poor housing conditions of Irish born people prevailing in Britain and in London. However, this community is also over-represented amongst the homeless, those living in hostels and those sleeping rough. This is particularly so amongst the old and the young.

The Department of the Environment reported in 1993 that the largest minority group using severe weather shelters in London was Irish . Crisis at Christmas reported that Irish people accounted for one third of its users over Christmas 1994. In 1998 CRASH reported that of 1494 winter shelter users 13% were white Irish, 10% black and 3 % Asian.

An early report found evidence from many front line agencies in London that disproportionate numbers of Irish people remained resident in temporary hostel accommodation for long periods. Moving on was a problem. Irish residents represented 32% of all hostel residents but only 4% obtained permanent accommodation. 45% of residents were non-Irish white people and of this group 43% obtained permanent housing [41].

Research undertaken by Arlington House in Camden, (the largest hostel for homeless men in Britain) revealed that 43.7% of its tenants were Irish. These men spent on average twice as long as residents in other community groups in the hostels. They were also older than the average age for other groups.[42]

The Piccadilly Advice Centre is located in the heart of London's West End and provides advice and information to single homeless people in London and agencies working in the field. In a survey of callers to the centre it was found that overall, Irish callers were more likely to be sleeping rough, staying with friends or relatives or in a long-term hostel. They were less likely to be staying in emergency accommodation in bed and breakfast or in the private rented sector. There were proportionately more Irish callers in the 16 to 17 age group and aged over 25 years. Irish 16 to 17 year olds were six times more likely to be sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation. Irish callers aged 25 plus were significantly more likely to be sleeping rough, staying

in temporary hostels than in the private rented sector. It is also of concern to note that significantly higher numbers of Irish callers indicated they suffered from a disability.

The report expressed real concern about the high level of young and alone Irish callers. It also highlighted the plight of the old, especially those with a long history of casual work and insecure accommodation [43].

**Table 4.4 Number of Irish single homeless people and percentages of totals**

|       | <b>Rough Sleepers</b> | <b>Hostel Residents</b> | <b>Resettled</b> | <b>Day Centre Attenders</b> |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Men   | 426 (11%)             | 336 (11%)               | 163 (10%)        | 194 (20%)                   |
| Women | 51 (9%)               | 24 (3%)                 | 42 (7%)          | 27 (12%)                    |
| Total | 477 (11%)             | 360 (11%)               | 207 (9%)         | 221 (19%)                   |

*Source: Findings from Single Homeless People in London 2000.*

The most recent survey was undertaken in 2000. Information was gathered from 67 direct access and first stage hostels, covering some 3,295 residents. The findings about Irish homeless people in London showed that one in ten rough sleepers and temporary hostel residents were Irish. The Irish were also more prevalent amongst day centre attenders. The numbers increased with age. Only 7% of those under 20 were from Ireland compared with 13% for those aged 40 to 49 and 21% of those aged 60 or more. The same applied to day centres where the comparable figures were 2%, 19% and 29%.

Once again the study shows that residents of hostels tended to be older than people from other ethnic groups. More than two thirds of the hostel residents from Ireland have mental health, alcohol or drug problems. Alcohol affected 50% of Irish residents. 16% had mental health and 9% drug problems. Again this report showed that Irish hostel residents have exceptionally long duration of stay, one third had been resident for more than two years including one tenth over ten years. Only 11%-14% of other ethnic groups had been resident for more than two years. Men and women of Irish origin tended to be in the largest and probably therefore the most outmoded hostels. 71% of Irish residents compared with 49% of British residents are in hostels with more than 75 beds [44].

Very few Irish men and women were allocated housing through the Clearing House. Between April 1999 and March 2000 just 6% of the men and 2% of the women who benefited were Irish. Among the Irish day centre attenders 50% of the men and 54% of the women were in permanent housing. The report notes that "this suggests that problems such as isolation and loneliness quite widespread among vulnerably housed Irish people in London" [45].

The reasons for stays of such longevity of hostel residents are complex. This could be because the existence of a handful of organisations in London working with Irish

homeless and vulnerably housed people leads to other service providers expecting these dedicated organisations to provide services for all single homeless people. Clearly this is not the case and assistance is needed from all social landlords in London if the problem of Irish homelessness is to be properly addressed.

Furthermore, although rehousing chances appear low relative to the population of hostels it is also likely that some hostel residents fear being on their own again after a long period of institutional living. Some may also face the risk of dropping back into alcohol or substance misuse. There is a very real need to increase the provision of housing which is supportive, such as cluster flats for this group and indeed for younger vulnerable migrants who also express a preference for a degree of sharing.

Recently, Shelter has also examined housing needs and homelessness amongst the Irish community in London. Its findings include:-

- an estimate that one in ten people sleeping on the streets in Greater London are Irish;
- almost a quarter of day centre users in London are Irish;
- Irish people make up 10% of users of winter shelters;
- one in four Irish advice centre users were homeless;
- Irish people are over-represented in the private rented sector.

Shelter concludes that the evidence shows that homelessness affects a disproportionate number of Irish people and in particular they are over-represented amongst single homeless people. It states however that the extent of homelessness and housing needs within the Irish community is difficult to assess owing to lack of monitoring. It notes that this should be remedied to some extent by the 2001 Census. The Report recommends that this change to Census status should be reflected in the monitoring systems of local authorities and housing associations too [46].

The CRE noted that in many local authorities 'leaving Ireland' was seen as a cause of intentional homelessness which of course has exacerbated homelessness problems. They also noted the problem with moving on from hostel accommodation in London. Between 1991 and 1993 local authority nominations for single people from housing associations were running at 500 per annum with 62% to minority ethnic groups but only 7.8% going to Irish people. These findings have led to numerous calls for standardised monitoring procedures as discussed later in Part 2 of this report.

## **4.6 The Needs - Summary**

The overriding housing need of London's Irish community, like all communities, continues to be for ordinary self-contained homes. The need is particularly great given the over representation of this group in London's poorer and more overcrowded housing. The need for decent, affordable housing has been shown time and again to be the main concern of those approaching both statutory and voluntary agencies for help.

There is also a particular need for housing single people and young migrants which may in some cases be shared and offer additional support. In addition, there is a need for the development of more sheltered and supported schemes for older Irish people. Further reports have called for more culturally sensitive services across the board as provided by Irish agencies. This is particularly so for the older generations. Poor housing conditions have contributed to the comparatively poorer health of this community and national and London based studies have concluded that the position is exacerbated by anti-Irish discrimination.

## **Part 2: THE RESPONSE**

## **1. Great Expectations**

Part 2 of this report considers the response of the London boroughs and housing associations to the housing needs of London's Irish community and in particular how these organisations have reacted to the recommendations of the CRE and the Housing Corporation.

In the wake of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the Macpherson Report a new emphasis is being placed on the elimination of racism and institutional racism in particular. The Race Relations (Amendment Act) 2000 which stems from the Lawrence Inquiry, also imposes new duties on a wider range of public authorities including the Housing Corporation. In its consultation document on the Act, the Home Office has stated that "the Government believes that public authorities have a special responsibility as employers, policy makers and service providers to deliver race equality. They should set the pace on race equality and lead by example" [47].

The report makes brief mention of both Irish immigration and to anti-Irish discrimination. The Guidance to the Act draws on the experience of implementing equality policy (in its widest sense, including gender and religion, sexual orientation and age too) as experienced in Northern Ireland.

### **1.1 Importance of Ethnic Monitoring**

Part 1 of this report has highlighted the findings of the 1997 CRE report and others in relation to anti-Irish discrimination. One of the key tools in preventing discrimination is the maintenance and active monitoring of ethnic records to assess and act upon the outcomes of processes and policy. This is particularly the case in relation to the Irish community. Despite the extensive evidence of need discussed in Part 1, many social landlords appear to be unaware of the relative disadvantages of much of the Irish community. This may stem partly from a failure to record this community as a separate ethnic group or, if they do, through a failure to monitor and act upon the results.

Since the 1980s, the importance of ethnic monitoring records in the provision of services and employment has been recognised as a basis for assessing whether or not members of minority communities are gaining access to services and are receiving fair treatment. The Irish community has suffered through not being included in this process. Many reports have argued that lack of effective monitoring systems have contributed to the failure to meet Irish housing needs. An early report by Cara Housing Association identified the absence of widespread monitoring which made it difficult to measure or to respond to the issues. In 1990 Cara found that most social landlords had few links with Irish voluntary agencies. Only 11 of the 33 London boroughs responded to a survey on access to housing for single Irish homeless people. Of these only one could provide records of applications to the Homeless Person Unit by Irish single homeless people. No recorded information was available on the numbers of single Irish people who had been housed. Housing associations fared little

better. Of the 60 who responded only 8 could provide an accurate analysis of recorded applications by Irish single people seeking accommodation: 16 housing associations (approximately one in four), monitored the number of Irish residents housed [48].

A further study by Cara HA in 1994, found that matters had improved to some extent; on this occasion 80% of the London boroughs responded. There was a marked improvement in the awareness of the issues evidenced by the higher level of response but the need for a standardised monitoring policy in local authorities on ethnicity and gender remained [49].

The CRE report found in 1995 that 16 of the 33 London boroughs carried out some sort of ethnic monitoring which included an Irish category. A further three were planning to do so. They noted however, that where statistics were collected, there was very little further use made of them. The CRE report also found that of the 66 largest housing associations that responded to their survey, 70% monitored the Irish as a separate group. However, recent research by the De Montfort University for the Corporation shows that 7% of housing associations were still not keeping ethnic records and 19% were undertaking no ethnic monitoring [50].

In relation to housing association lettings, the category Irish was dropped from CORE data in order to match the 1991 Census categories. They were reinstated on Housing Corporation advice in 1996. But for more than a decade the Irish community lacked the advantage afforded by being considered as a minority ethnic group with specific needs.

A recent report by the London Research Centre notes that there are still limitations to the monitoring data collected by the London boroughs. The first problem is the incompleteness of the data. Not all boroughs undertake ethnic monitoring and even where they do not all boroughs analyse data on a regular basis. There is inconsistency between the boroughs in the ethnic minority categories used. The categories do not always reflect the BME communities in the borough. The research also found that there was insufficient analysis of the figures to gauge the fairness of lettings to these communities [51]. As discussed below, it is likely that matters will improve in future given new duties arising from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

As noted at the outset of this report, after more than 20 years lobbying by Irish agencies the CRE included 'Irish' as a recommended ethnic monitoring category from 1995 and the category 'Irish' was also included for the first time in the 2001 Census. Clearly, it is important that this category features in all borough and housing association monitoring data in order that accurate analysis can be made in future. The results of the survey for this research are detailed in chapter 2.

## 1.2 The Recommendations of the CRE report

Almost five years have passed since the Hickman and Walters report *Discrimination and the Irish community in Britain* was published by the Commission for Racial Equality.

The CRE report recommended that the Commission should include an Irish dimension in all its future investigations of discrimination in public institutions or private companies. Specific policy recommendations included that the CRE should actively encourage all government agencies, statutory bodies, voluntary sector organisations, agencies and companies to consider and implement the following as appropriate:-

1. An Irish category to be included in all forms of ethnic monitoring including Census ethnic categories.
2. All service provision by local authorities, the DSS, health authorities and other statutory and voluntary bodies should:
  - process collate and publish as a distinct category all Irish data collected as part of ethnic monitoring;
  - include an Irish dimension in all equal opportunities policies;
  - recognise the specificity of Irish migrant experience for instance in housing applications, claiming benefits, care of elderly people, health and the welfare of children;
  - include an Irish dimension in any resource allocation which specifically targets ethnic minority groups;
  - include an Irish dimension in any training of staff who are concerned with identifying ethnic differentiation or racial discrimination in access to and receipt of services and in employment.
  - include an Irish dimension in all plans for contracted service provision in community care.
  - The Housing Corporation should review its plans for future procedures for assessing need in order to ensure that the Irish are not disadvantaged.
  - Health Authorities should include an Irish dimension to their provision given the Census findings about the poorer health status of Irish people in the large numbers of old Irish born people in Britain.

The report noted that there needs to be recognition of anti-Irish hostility as a form of racial harassment in a wide variety of situations, including work places, neighbourhood relations, schools and policing. Finally it recommended that the Irish

should be included as a category in media standards relating to representation of minority groups particularly in television entertainment programmes.

The response of social landlords to these recommendations is considered in chapter 2 of this report.

### **1.3 The Expectations of the Housing Corporation**

The Housing Corporation has operated a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) strategy since 1986. The Irish community was excluded from this framework until 1996. Irish organisations therefore did not benefit from the investment in BME associations that formed the main plank of the strategy until 1998. The position was rectified in 1996 however, as noted above.

The London Region Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy 2000, flows from The Housing Corporation's 1998 Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Policy [52]. Its overall aim is summarised as:

*All Registered Social Landlords working in Greater London are able to demonstrate that they promote a culture which empowers individuals and organisations from BME communities in order to identify BME housing needs and meet them through high quality and culturally sensitive management services and investment [53].*

The Corporation has statutory obligations to prevent unlawful racial discrimination and to promote racial equality which flow from Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976. Local authorities also have the same obligations and the requirements on all organisations have been strengthened by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 as discussed below. More recently, the Housing Corporation has also signed up to an Equality and Diversity Strategy.

In its consultation document, which incorporates a new Regulatory Code, the Corporation states:

*“housing associations must demonstrate, when carrying out all of their functions, their commitment to equal opportunity. They must work towards the elimination of discrimination and promotion of good relations between people of different racial groups and demonstrate an equitable approach to the rights and responsibilities of all individuals”*

In its London BME Statement the Corporation notes the following:

- Members of black minority ethnic communities are still under-represented on registered social landlord management boards and as senior officers.
- Black minority led housing associations house 10% of all BME clients in the housing association rented housing sector, the remaining 90% are housed by main stream housing associations.

The Corporation's policy statement notes that it is therefore the **main stream** housing associations, which have the greatest impact on meeting the needs of BME communities in most local areas. The Corporation has adjusted its strategy from one of promoting BME housing associations to looking at how they could enable all housing associations to meet the housing needs of communities in the areas in which they work. The Irish housing associations are small in comparison with some other BME housing associations, highlighting the need for positive action by the mainstream housing associations in meeting Irish housing needs.

The London policy document makes some reference to the Irish community. It notes the numbers born in Ireland from the 1991 Census but does not project these figures forward to 2006 as it does for the other BME categories. It also comments that the size and composition of London's BME population can be affected by government policy and immigration and the relative prosperity of the English and Irish economies. In listing the key BME needs in London, the Irish are unfortunately omitted from this document, although it does note that one in ten people sleeping rough on the streets of London is Irish.

The London policy statement then goes on to mirror the 22 commitments contained in the Housing Corporation's national policy statement. These cover the following expectations of housing associations:

- Keeping the ethnic composition of governing bodies under review
- Keeping the ethnicity of staff and senior staff in particular, under review.
- Delivering equal opportunities for contractors from BME communities
- Working with local authorities in relation to local BME policies
- Encouraging the use of management agreements and stock transfers to assist BME housing associations
- Encouraging partnerships between BME and mainstream housing associations
- Implementing effective policies covering harassment and anti-social behaviour
- Identifying local targets for housing associations lettings to BME households which are based on local BME housing need

### **1.3.1 Race Equality Strategies**

Unfortunately, despite an apparent commitment by many housing associations, research for the Corporation by the De Montfort University has shown that housing associations' performance in this area continues to disappoint. Race equality strategies lacked depth and breadth; only 21% had an action plan and only 24% had compared performance against the Corporation's Standards [54]. Furthermore, lettings to BME households fell in the 1990s. By 1998/9 lettings had fallen from 14.4% in 1990/01 (excluding transfers) to 12.7%. The report notes that lettings to Irish households had also dropped over the same period.

## **1.4 Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 considerably strengthens the Race Relations Act 1976. In particular, it extends protection against racial discrimination

by public authorities and it places a new, enforceable positive duty on public authorities. The Housing Corporation is specifically listed as a public authority with particular duties to promote race equality policy and service delivery. Its duties are likely to be implemented *through* housing associations via the regulatory process. The duty upon local authority housing departments is direct.

The Act outlaws discrimination (both direct and indirect) in all functions of public authorities and captures the definition of such bodies very widely. It applies to any body carrying out public functions and this certainly includes social housing provision. The new positive duty gives a statutory force to the process of tackling institutional racism. It sets out what organisations *have* to do rather than *should* do – this includes taking steps to prevent racial discrimination before it occurs.

The CRE will soon publish guidance on what is expected in each of these areas. It is to be hoped that this legislation will add force to the recommendations that have been made by numerous agencies in relation to anti-Irish discrimination, although as this survey will show and others before it have noted, unfortunately there remains much to be done before the expectations of the Act can be fulfilled.

## **1.5 Current housing and regeneration policy**

Part 1 examined housing, health and homelessness in some detail. Current policy is however more holistic with an emphasis on social exclusion, community and tenant involvement and linkage between housing and health through community care, the ‘supporting people’ regime and other initiatives. The current Government is apparently committed to reducing social exclusion by narrowing the gap between the most advantaged and most deprived communities. Neighbourhood regeneration is central to that strategy.

### *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*

The strategy aims to tackle deprived areas with the local community and others, covering the full range of social and economic regeneration issues: crime, education, health, jobs, enterprise, housing, family policy, access to services, and information and community building. There are expectations of social landlords. The process could offer a range of opportunities to engage with the Irish community especially as the story of much of this community is that of social exclusion. Yet, the Irish community (in common with all white ethnic minorities) has been excluded from the reports and action plan relating to the Strategy itself. This is a major omission given the importance of this Strategy to the housing and social outcomes in these areas.

The National Strategy makes a specific recommendation for the establishing of local strategic partnerships comprising a range of organisations working with the community for neighbourhood management and renewal. Such partnerships are likely to be led by local authorities and a number of housing associations will be involved. The local Training and Enterprise Councils will be part of this process. Whilst the Irish agencies should explore these partnerships, conversely, the partnerships should involve the Irish community and representative organisations in consultations and their plans.

The solutions to Irish housing and health needs lie in joint working with a range of bodies including health authorities, Primary Care Trusts and regeneration partnerships in addition to social landlords and future research should address progress in this area too.

## **2. Resource Allocation – The Findings**

The response of social landlords to the housing needs of a particular group is measured in part by the numbers of people housed and the numbers of homes built to meet these needs.

### **2.1 Local authority lettings**

Unfortunately there is no London wide research on the annual numbers of council lettings to Irish people in the local authority sector; there is no central data base equivalent to CORE data for housing associations. Despite the fact that most boroughs have been keeping ethnic records for some time there has been no requirement to report the ethnic breakdown of lettings centrally to either the Government Office for London or to the DETR. From 2000 onwards, returns on the ethnicity of homeless persons rehoused will provide some limited information but unless Irish ethnicity is clearly reported, knowledge of the access that Irish people enjoy to local authority housing will not improve. There is a clear case for further research in this area. There is of course the issue of proportionality. The approach will vary from borough to borough with lettings targets and strategies reflecting the ethnicity of the local population, including the size of the local Irish population.

For this research, the nine boroughs with the largest Irish population were questioned on council lettings by the authority. Each borough was asked to give total lettings of council owned dwellings and the numbers of lettings to households identified as Irish where possible, from their internal year end statistics. The responses are detailed in Table 2.1 and a comparison against estimated population is also given.

**Table 2.1 Lettings to Irish households by London boroughs with largest concentrations of Irish people 2000/01**

| <b>Borough</b>       | <b>Irish Population as a % of total population*</b> | <b>Council dwellings total lettings 2000/01</b> | <b>Numbers let to Irish households</b> | <b>Total lettings to Irish Households %</b> |
|----------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Brent                | 22.5  | 639   | 32                                     | 5.00  |
| Islington            | 17.8  | 1471  | 66                                     | 4.48  |
| Hammersmith and Ful. | 17.0  | 570   | 42                                     | 7.40  |
| Camden               | 16.3  | 2232  | 155                                    | 6.90  |
| Westminster          | 14.0  | 762   | **                                     | N/A   |
| Haringey             | 13.0  | 1323  | 39                                     | 2.95  |
| Harrow               | 12.3  | 334   | 18                                     | 5.38  |
| Lambeth              | 12.0  | 1729  | 1                                      | ***   |
| Southwark            | 11.3  | 2722  | 81                                     | 2.97  |

\* Includes first and second generation by applying correction factor of 2.5% on 1991 Census figures (*Source AGIY 1995*).

\*\* Westminster has only been collecting data on lettings to Irish households since 1.4.01

\*\*\* Lambeth has recorded only one Irish household since it started to offer the opportunity to self-record as White-Irish in August 2000.

Table 2.1 shows that lettings to people of identified Irish origin are low in these Boroughs. If the 1991 Census figures are used the picture improves but demographic analysis has shown conclusively that the 1991 Census understates the size of the London Irish population. Clearly, only when we have consistent monitoring data and the results of the 2001 Census will we be able to obtain a more definitive picture.

## **2.2 Housing Association Lettings**

In relation to recent lettings by housing associations, performance is easier to assess as data is maintained centrally on new lettings to all housing association homes. Three sets of CORE data were interrogated for this report and it was found that despite the needs clearly highlighted in Part 1, Irish households are under represented. Table 2.2 shows new lettings to general needs housing in London.

**Table 2.2. New Lettings by housing associations in London - general needs unit numbers and %**

| Year                  | Irish |     | British/Europe |      | Other BME |      | Refusals |     | All   |     |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|----------------|------|-----------|------|----------|-----|-------|-----|
|                       | Units | %   | Units          | %    | Units     | %    | Units    | %   | Units | %   |
| 1998/99               | 538   | 3.1 | 9930           | 56.6 | 6131      | 34.9 | 946      | 5.4 | 17545 | 100 |
| 1999/00               | 626   | 3.3 | 10986          | 57.9 | 6443      | 34.0 | 903      | 4.8 | 18958 | 100 |
| April-<br>Dec<br>2000 | 470   | 3.4 | 7796           | 56.3 | 4882      | 35.3 | 696      | 5.0 | 13844 | 100 |

*Source: CORE Data*

The Irish community accounts for between 9.6 to 11% of London's population, rising well beyond this in some Boroughs (see Part 1 Table 2.1 and Table 2.1. above). It is the largest ethnic minority, and yet Irish households receive only 3-4% of new lettings. Although some may argue that part of the discrepancy relates to the failure of agencies or individuals themselves to record Irish ethnicity, research by the CRE and others has shown that the tendency is for Irish ethnicity to be ignored by providers. Furthermore, the low levels of rehousing suggest that discriminatory practices are still impacting upon lettings as discussed in Part 1.

The research for the Housing Corporation by De Montfort University, which was concerned with an evaluation of how housing associations meet the needs of black and minority ethnic communities across England as a whole, highlighted similarly low levels of rehousing in relation to the Irish community, as noted above.

### **2.3. Capital Allocations to Irish Housing Associations**

Housing associations have been the major providers of new social housing since the 1980s. The Housing Corporation has been funding BME associations since 1986 both directly and indirectly. Indirect allocations are given to the developing agent who will either transfer ownership on completion to the BME association or hand them over to them for management. The CRE report notes that in 1995/6 allocations to the Irish housing associations amounted to 0.43% of the London programme some 11 homes. Table 2.3. shows a similarly bleak picture for Irish housing associations today.

**Table 2.3 Irish and Black and Minority Ethnic housing associations allocations to rent in London, (direct and indirect allocations) and %**

| Year    | Total (units)<br>London | All BME<br>(units) | All BME as %<br>of total | Irish<br>HAS<br>Units | Irish<br>HAS<br>% |
|---------|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1996/97 | 5524                    | 674                | 12.20                    | 41                    | 0.74              |
| 1997/98 | 3083                    | 383                | 12.42                    | 27                    | 0.88              |
| 1998/99 | 4596                    | 575                | 12.51                    | 45                    | 1.00              |
| 1999/00 | 4194                    | 389                | 09.28                    | 10                    | 0.24              |

|         |      |      |       |    |      |
|---------|------|------|-------|----|------|
| 2000/01 | 3880 | 418  | 10.77 | 18 | 0.46 |
| 2001/02 | 5034 | 989* | 19.65 | 86 | 1.70 |

\* Ujima HA had an unusually high allocation, the largest in England

*Source: Derived from Housing Corporation statistics*

Table 2.3 illustrates the commitment of the Corporation to maintaining the BME programme in accordance with the commitments set out in its policy statement. Whilst the allocation to Ujima HA was welcome, Table 2.3 also shows that allocations to Irish housing associations are unacceptably low. It appears that the local authorities with the Housing Corporation are ignoring the clear evidence of housing need in this community or are relying more on lettings through the existing stock of housing associations to meet the need. However as we have seen, the needs are not satisfactorily met through this route either.

Despite the good intentions of the Housing Corporation, the current position remains unacceptably low. In 2001, 40.1% of ADP investment for rent in London is targeted at addressing the needs of BME people broken down as follows: Asian 10.4%, Caribbean 21%, African 3.4%, other 4.8% and Irish 0.5%. Whilst it was clearly accepted earlier in this report, that the housing and related health needs of the London Irish community cannot be, nor should be, met by new housing through the Housing Corporation's ADP alone, surely the levels should be reviewed in the light of the needs highlighted in Part 1.

### **3. The Survey Findings**

For the purpose of this report, in addition to examining resource allocations, a survey was undertaken to assess the response of London's key social landlords to Irish housing and related health needs particularly in the light of the expectations of the CRE and the Housing Corporation as discussed earlier. A questionnaire was sent to all London borough housing departments (including those that have transferred stock), in April 2001. It was also submitted to 23 housing associations representing those associations, which are the major landlords and developers in London (the Group of 15), to three national associations operating in London and to other smaller housing associations operating in the boroughs with the largest Irish populations. 28 London boroughs and 21 housing associations responded. This represents a response rate of 84.8% from the London boroughs and 91% from the housing associations. A list of respondents is given at Appendix 1.

The questions attempted to capture the extent awareness of anti-Irish discrimination and the extent to which policies have been developed and are being implemented to tackle this. The survey was intended to assess whether the question of the 'invisibility' of the Irish community in London remains an issue.

#### **3.1 Race equality strategies**

The performance in relation to Race Equality Strategies was patchy and in some cases inconsistent. 68% of local authorities and 90% of housing associations had written race equality strategies. 7 boroughs and 2 housing associations had no written strategy, although in the case of three Boroughs this was in hand. The performance of the London housing associations is somewhat poorer than the national picture. The De Montfort research indicated a level of 98% of housing associations with written race equality strategies.

The strategies were however, broadly based and referred to black and minority ethnic groups as a whole rather than highlighting particular groups. Only 6 boroughs and 4 housing associations made any specific reference to the Irish as an ethnic minority within the race equality strategy.

When asked why the Irish were not identified as a separate group, the question of proportionality was raised inevitably. Those organisations operating in areas of lower Irish settlement do not recognise this group as a minority ethnic category for strategic purposes although they may have it as a category for collecting data on lettings. Interestingly, those boroughs that did specifically highlight the Irish community in their strategy were not all within the 12 areas of highest concentration.

It should be noted that some of the respondents that had not included an 'Irish' category commented that their strategy covered all BME groups and that none was separately identified.

82 % of boroughs were actively working with housing associations operating in their borough to develop local BME policies and strategies. All the housing association respondents were involved with local authority partners in this way. Only one third of

the boroughs indicated that the needs of the Irish community were taken into account as part of this process and comprised those with higher concentrations of Irish people. The housing associations listed Brent, Camden, Islington, Hammersmith and Fulham and Haringey as the boroughs with which they were working in partnership to meet the needs of the Irish community.

### **3.2 Resource allocation**

The Housing Corporation expects RSLs to review their current policies and their impact on BME communities. It also commits to continue working with housing associations and local authorities in investigating approaches to assessing housing needs and aspirations amongst BME communities. The housing investment programme guidance for local authorities 2000/2001 emphasises the need to incorporate BME needs and aspirations into local housing strategies.

Given the needs highlighted by a plethora of existing reports and the necessity to address anti-Irish discrimination, the Boroughs were asked to set out whether they match local population assessments of needs (e.g. Census, household surveys etc), to the distribution of capital resources in order to assess the basis on which resources are allocated. Only 16 boroughs, just over half, indicated that this was in fact done. Only 4 boroughs, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield and Haringey undertook this assessment in relation to the Irish community.

### **3.3 Meeting care and support needs**

As noted in Part 1, social care generally is a key area for this community which is ageing and has high rates of morbidity. Many young migrants also have special needs. In addition to community care plans, one of the key links between housing and social care is through the *Supporting People* arrangements. When asked if provision was to be made for ethnic minorities under this initiative 75 % of boroughs (21) and a similar percentage of housing associations 71%, (15) responded positively. Boroughs with large concentrations of Irish people reported that they were reviewing the special needs of the Irish community and were working with housing associations to ensure that the health related needs of the Irish community in particular mental health, elders, substance and alcohol misuse were being addressed. 8 housing associations, just over one third of the respondents, were working with the Irish community or Irish housing associations to meet these needs.

### **3.4 Best value**

The best value approach to the delivery of services is a statutory duty for local authorities and a regulatory expectation for housing associations. As this is a relatively new area of policy and given the emphasis on consultation within the best value process; the respondents were asked whether their organisations had considered how they consult and communicate with and involve black and minority ethnic communities generally in Best Value reviews. They were also asked if this specifically included the Irish community. 86% of boroughs (24) and 95% of housing associations (20) did consider how they consult with and involve black and minority ethnic communities in best value reviews. However only 6 local authorities and 2 housing associations, involved the Irish community in these consultations too.

Furthermore, only 6 local authorities and 4 housing associations had taken the service needs of this community into account as opposed to involving it in consultations. Surprisingly, with one exception, these were not housing associations with a tradition of working with the London Irish associations or community. The boroughs that had taken Irish needs into account also represented a wide spread of inner and outer boroughs with varying concentrations of Irish people.

### **3.5 Ethnic monitoring of housing applicants**

Given the low levels of lettings to the Irish community highlighted earlier, it is important to assess whether these levels stem from a lack of awareness or knowledge of the needs, or from a failure in policy and/or allocations processes.

The performance of the boroughs and the housing associations has improved since the earlier surveys. Only one borough was unable to identify households on its waiting list by ethnicity for the purposes of letting accommodation and in a follow up interview it confirmed that work on this was underway. 95% (20) of the housing associations were also maintaining ethnic records in relation to lettings. An improved number confirmed that they would be able to identify Irish households from their waiting list for vacancies or nominations to housing associations. 24 boroughs and 16 housing associations, 86% and 76% respectively affirmed that they could do this. The lower response rate for housing associations appeared to arise from the fact that some respondents did not keep waiting lists of any sort and others still merged 'Irish' with 'other White' categories despite the fact that CORE data includes 'Irish' as a separate category.

However, the results of this survey were similar to others in finding that the statistics do not appear to be used to develop policy or to target resources towards this community. The indication was that in most cases where the data is collected, it is reported in some instances but is not used thereafter. Only 8 boroughs compared lettings levels to Irish households against the total number of Irish households in the borough. While 5 housing associations also undertook this exercise, three quarters of the respondents did not. Those organisations that did undertake this exercise were randomly spread across London and did not necessarily operate in areas of traditional Irish settlement.

### **3.6 Housing Management**

In addition to housing allocation and Best Value, the survey interrogated the respondents on two further areas of housing management that are the subject of policy development at present. The Housing Corporation in particular has made clear its expectations of housing associations in this area as part of its BME strategy. It notes that it will gather evidence of good practice in the empowerment of BME tenants and investigate possible improvements. It states that it expects housing associations to review existing tenant participation mechanisms and to pursue good practice.

In relation to harassment policies, the Corporation states that housing associations should ensure that they have effective policies covering harassment and anti-social behaviour and that these policies be implemented. This also includes support for

victims of harassment. The Corporation suggests that it may be most effective to do this in association with local authorities and other local agencies.

### *3.6.1 Tenant participation*

Although all respondents stated that they had tenant participation strategies only 2 housing associations confirmed that their strategies included consulting and involving members of the Irish community and Irish representative organisations. The local authorities fared a little better with one quarter confirming that Irish groups were involved in these strategies. When pushed a little more, however, only three boroughs could list the agencies or groups involved in this process.

### *3.6.2 Anti-harassment measures*

While 89% of boroughs, (25) and 95% of housing associations (20) have non-harassment clauses actually in their tenancy agreements only 1 housing association and 4 boroughs confirmed that specific reference is made to harassment against Irish people and anti-Irish discrimination. A further borough confirmed that reference was made to harassment generally in the guidance notes to the tenancy and two noted that this was not relevant as they had transferred their stock. Given the nature of anti-Irish discrimination discussed in Part 1 of this report, this response was particularly disappointing. When questioned further it appeared that this form of discrimination is not recognised as a major problem. In response to this position it is worth noting that CORE returns do show that reasons for rehousing Irish people do include harassment although levels recorded are lower than for other ethnic groups.

## **3.7 Governance and personnel**

Governance is a further area where policy and practice is currently under review. Local authorities and the Housing Corporation are engaged in modernising government and governance respectively. The Housing Corporation has stated repeatedly that housing associations should keep the membership of their governing bodies under review and consider ways to reflect the representation of people from the local BME communities if necessary. This may involve target setting. The Housing Corporation also expects housing associations to review the recruitment levels of BME staff particularly at senior levels and to develop and maintain opportunities for the career development of BME staff as appropriate. The Government has imposed new duties in this area upon local authorities flowing from the Race Relations (Amendment Act) 2000 as discussed earlier.

In the light of this, respondents were asked whether they monitored Irish members of the Council, or housing association Boards. Just under half the boroughs, 46%, confirmed that they do monitor this group. The response of housing associations was slightly better at 67%. The monitoring of this group however appeared to flow from the existence of standard CORE categories in the case of the RSLs, rather than a particular desire to target this group for Board member recruitment.

In relation to Irish employees, two thirds of boroughs (19) monitored the recruitment of this group and 90% of housing associations (all but 2). Difficulties arose however

when respondents were asked to state the number of Irish employees and grades if possible. Just 10 boroughs and 11 housing associations were able to supply actual numbers and about half this number gave detailed grades. The percentage of staff of Irish origin averages at about 5%. Very little is apparently done with this data. It was not reported regularly and if it was, no further action appeared to be taken in relation to it.

The survey indicated that 93% of boroughs and 95% of housing associations reviewed the recruitment levels of senior staff. A reasonable number of boroughs 71% (20) and 81% of housing associations (17) confirmed that they included an analysis of Irish people in this exercise. Responses were less satisfactory in relation to career development. Just under half the boroughs had a career development strategy for BME staff and 52% of RSLs had such a strategy in place. Given the expectation by the Housing Corporation that housing associations should develop career opportunities for BME staff, this figure is especially low. Of those organisations that had a career development strategy, only 6 boroughs targeted staff from an Irish background and no housing associations did so at all.

### **3.8 Consultants and contractors**

Only 3 boroughs and 4 housing associations could identify Irish led consultants and contractors on their approved lists. This is despite the fact that the Housing Corporation encourages housing associations to work with local authorities and others to identify and develop good practice and equal opportunities for contractors from BME communities. The Corporation's BME strategy specifically states that housing associations should review their current procedures on contract compliance to ensure they do not adversely attract BME contractors. Irish consultants and contractors clearly do not feature in the thinking of the respondents in relation to this expectation.

### **3.9 Partnership with Irish housing associations**

One of the ways in which both the boroughs and mainstream housing associations can meet minority ethnic needs is to work with BME housing associations. The Housing Corporation has expressed a number of expectations of local authorities and RSLs in this area.

11 boroughs (39%) confirmed that they are working with the Irish housing associations specifically to meet the needs of the London Irish community. However, over half did not.

The Corporation is also committed to drawing together the experiences of main - stream and BME housing associations, which use or have considered using management agreements to identify any barriers to good practice. They are also committed to working with BME housing associations to identify management opportunities and the potential for further stock transfers.

There are three registered Irish BME housing associations: Cara, Innisfree and Irish Centre Housing. 11 boroughs confirmed they worked with BME housing associations to meet the needs of London's Irish community. 8 housing associations (38%) had worked or were planning to work with the Irish housing associations in future in

relation to special needs. However the details of what might come of this were rather vague. 3 were considering stock transfers to the Irish housing associations and 6, (29%) reported that they were working with them with regard to management opportunities. Once again when asked for actual detail of schemes these were forthcoming in just two cases. 5 mainstream housing associations were also working with Irish led housing associations in relation to general needs schemes. 2 housing associations confirmed that they were developing schemes that they would manage directly for the Irish community. The picture is therefore rather inconclusive. The level of partnership is quite low except in one or two traditional areas such as Brent, Haringey, Hammersmith and Fulham and Islington where there was some evidence of good practice. It is to this that the report now turns.

## **Part 3: Moving Forward**

## 1. Some Issues of Good Practice

### 1.1 Introduction

The Irish are the largest ethnic minority in Britain, although this report has found that being white they are often not treated as such. Best practice means recognising the ethnicity of the Irish community and applying to this group the housing equality policies and practices that are more often in place for other black and minority ethnic groups. This and other research has also shown time and again, however, that such good practice is not always in place. Some of the key elements are therefore reiterated here.

The issues that need to be tackled in any effective housing equality strategy include the following, familiar but important list:

- Involving the stakeholders and the black and minority ethnic groups in the initial processes and design of the strategy.
- Consulting them throughout the process and in relation to communication of the strategy and in maximising opportunities for involvement
- Setting equality standards
- Implementing effective monitoring systems and obtaining data where gaps are apparent.
- Assessing the current position in terms of service, governance, employment and benchmarking against others and the local community and measuring outcomes;
- Ensuring that all aspects of service delivery, housing management, maintenance development and care services, tenant participation and partnership are covered by the strategy and informed through consultation with BME groups.
- Undertaking an annual assessment of performance considered by the governing body
- Implementing an action plan where improvements are needed

Indeed there is a wealth of good practice advice available, which is concerned with meeting the housing needs of black and minority ethnic groups [55]. With respect to the Irish community, the survey has shown that with one or two exceptions, these approaches are not adopted. There is a number of Irish agencies in addition to the Irish housing associations that are able to offer advice to policy makers on a range of issues that affect this community. Mainstream housing associations and local authorities need to develop closer working links with such groups.

As previously stated, the first requirement of the Irish community, as with all ethnic groups, is that these practices are implemented and the outcomes monitored and acted upon. This is especially the case in those areas with larger concentrations of Irish people.

In undertaking this research examples of other good practice specific to this community came to light and they are detailed here in the hope that others will be

persuaded to reconsider their approach in the light of the findings of this research.

## **1.2 Cultural sensitivity**

One of the issues of most concern regularly encountered during this research, was the view, quite commonly expressed, that the cultural needs of the Irish are not special, or in any way different from those of the remainder of the white population. This view has been used for years to excuse, for example, the lack of ethnic monitoring of this community. On a number of occasions, for example, the view that the housing needs of young Irish people are not different was expressed. This, sadly, is unlikely to be the case as demonstrated in Part I of this study. Research suggests that second and third generations may have been ‘damaged’ by anti-Irish discrimination and that this often prevents them from accessing the services that they require. It also contributes to the ongoing high rates of mental illness amongst younger Irish people, also highlighted in Part 1.

Some of the housing practitioners (and researchers) contacted in the course of this research professed ignorance of the cultural needs of the Irish community. This stems in part, from the fact that most Irish people are white and speak the same language as the host nation. Clearly, like all ethnic groups, the Irish are a heterogeneous community comprising a diversity of individuals. All have their own specific needs greater or lesser, according to their individual age and circumstances and indeed their experiences of discrimination which, can take many forms and have a number of sources or causes.

### **1.2.1 Providing a culturally sensitive service.**

One of the strengths of the Irish housing associations and voluntary agencies is their ability to provide culturally sensitive services. There remains widespread failure to recognise the importance of cultural sensitivity in the Irish context for the reasons highlighted above and reluctance to commission culturally sensitive services for the Irish community. In relation to older people in particular, “the experience of the Irish community challenges the myth of assimilation” and urgent action is required now [56].

Examples of good practice in providing culturally sensitive housing and related health services include recognising the differences. The presence of Irish staff or staff trained in cultural awareness can assist in this process. This is particularly the case in relation to language. There are issues of language to be addressed especially in relation to the older client group. The formality of the English bureaucracy and the language used is unfamiliar in many cases and may account in part for under use of available services. Trained staff or staff of Irish background can help to overcome these barriers. Other aspects of cultural background that may also impact upon the willingness to access services include the effect of years of hostility or discrimination. Research shows that the tradition of “keeping your head down” or keeping quiet are the behaviour that results from this experience.

Irish agencies describe the importance of the spoken word to this community and the value of shared knowledge of cultural issues. There are clearly generation differences, however, religion may be more important to elders of the community for example.

The Irish housing associations pay great attention to issues such as diet and entertainment in both hostels and shared accommodation for young people and other single person households and in accommodation for elders.

### **1.2.2 Sheltered housing**

Clochar Court is a purpose built sheltered housing scheme for elderly Irish people in Harlesden, north- west London. It was developed by Network Housing Association in partnership with Innisfree Housing Association in 1992. The scheme has been a great success and has been constantly over-subscribed. The reasons for its success include:

1. Thorough research leading to a well-planned project.
2. Referrals from and links with Irish agencies working in the community.
3. The design and location gave good links to other Irish communities.
4. The cultural needs of the tenants were considered for example, the library contains Irish books and papers.

In other sheltered schemes Innisfree have also ensured that Irish sports are available on television which has been very successful. In a survey it was found that some tenants liked the scheme because of its facilities and its proximity to church and social networks. For others it was near to family and friends. They all commented on the importance of Clochar Court being an Irish scheme. They could speak to other tenants more easily because they had a common link through being Irish. Particular events such as St. Patrick's day celebrations were laid on where a musician came to play traditional music and favourite food and drink was laid on. The warden is also Irish [57].

The London Borough of Haringey has recognised the importance of culturally sensitive schemes for elders from a range of ethnic backgrounds. It has developed “Key Schemes” in which some of its sheltered schemes are dedicated to particular groups and culturally sensitive services are offered to residents, including Irish people. Such features are also required in supportive shared schemes for single people, particularly the young and older men.

Importantly, as services to elders and other vulnerable people are now provided more and more in their own homes as an aid to independent living, it is necessary to recognise the issue of cultural sensitivity in social and community care and other services accessed by the Irish community. Primary health care services also need to address these issues.

### **1.2.3 Assisting the homeless**

A project developed by Irish Centre Housing, *An Caislean* provides nineteen permanent shared units for older homeless men. It was developed in response to the needs of some of the long term residents in Conway House a direct access hostel for homeless men in Kilburn, and in response to the local community conditions where there are a large number of single men in traditional digs/landlady schemes.

The scheme was developed next to the hostel, church, and parish club. Whilst the scheme offers 24 hour support, access to a health worker, support worker and meals, people can choose the level of independent living they require, and many are totally self sufficient.

The importance of such a scheme is that it provides a community in the form of 'old Ireland'. The residents provide mutual support to each other and rely on each other having a role in the management of their daily living, for example, doing the gardening, cooking the breakfast, collecting the papers, and helping the less able to attend mass.

## **1.3 Development**

### **1.3.1 Islington BME Development Protocol**

This protocol forms part of the Islington BME Housing Strategy and in conjunction with other actions by the Council facilitates the provision of housing for the BME community by specialist providers. The form of the document draws on the good practice established by LB Brent and was developed in tandem with the LB Hammersmith and Fulham.

Islington aims to evolve a specific development strategy for BME communities, which reflects their particular needs. Formal research of BME needs will set the priorities for this programme. The overall target for BME development is 20%

It is intended that this document is agreed as a framework detailing the obligations to be included within individual scheme development agreements, by all developing associations within the borough, to promote good practice and partnership between housing associations in Islington.

The protocol covers a range of issue including:

- Consultation and communication
- Response times for all parties to the process to keep the development moving
- The opportunity to bid for and administer Social Housing Grant independently. This is important as many BME associations including Irish RSLs are capable of and keen to continue to receive direct and independent grant allocations.
- That Egan compliance is covered
- The BME association is referred to on the agent RSL's choice of consultants and may nominate others.

Islington Council expects all large RSL's to actively encourage or assist BME contractors to tender, or become partners of any scheme. The building contract takes account of BME specification items wherever possible.

Training in a range of skills is part of the scheme process and large housing associations offer free places to their BME partner on general in-house training courses. This is to ensure that staff of BME housing associations are able to learn and contribute to the development process. The protocol encompasses construction, housing management and financial management too.

## **1.4 Partnership**

### **1.4.1 Boroughs**

Recognition of the needs of BME communities, especially the Irish community, and the willingness to address these needs are dependent upon the local authority having the will and determination to ensure that these policies succeed. More boroughs are now beginning to recognise Irish housing and related health needs. Those boroughs that are working to meet Irish community needs consult with Irish agencies and involve the Irish housing associations and other voluntary groups in a number of local authority led forums. They monitor ethnic records, which include the Irish as a separate category and measure the outcomes. They attempt to ensure that Irish housing needs receive some recognition in the allocation of capital grants. They monitor their own lettings to this community. They are beginning to monitor staff numbers and to train staff in sensitivity to Irish culture.

Although the boroughs with largest concentrations of Irish people such as Brent, Camden, Islington Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey and other west London Boroughs such as Harrow and Ealing have a long tradition of recognising these needs, others have also begun to undertake studies to assess need and develop policy responses.

Barnet are working with The Safestart Foundation, which is part funded by the Irish Government. The scheme provides training and advice to young Irish people through a Foyer opened and managed by Safestart. Single people from other ethnic groups can also access the services of Safestart. Lambeth has started to collect data and has been monitoring the rehousing of Irish households since July 2000.

Job Powerhouse was established in 1994, in response to the high levels of unemployment of tenants of Irish Centre Housing. The service aims to get people into employment or training. Initially developed with European funding, the initiative is now supported by the Irish government and London Borough Grants and provides vocational guidance to over 300 people in housing need each year. The scheme operates satellite services at Irish centres and advice centres where many Irish people attend, as well as working with travellers on sites.

#### **1.4.2 Mainstream housing associations**

The Irish housing associations enjoy partnerships with a number of mainstream housing associations in London. Family, Shepherds Bush, Paddington Churches and Network have all supported the development of these BME housing associations for many years. Innisfree HA has worked with Network HA for over 14 years, in a partnership that precedes the advent of the Housing Corporation's BME strategy. Family HA has transferred stock to Innisfree at outstanding loan debt which enabled 3 flats to be produced, debt free and fully rehabilitated for £90,000. Shepherds Bush HA has made stock available for management.

These are all examples of approaches that other boroughs and housing associations could adopt to assist in meeting Irish housing needs.



## 2. Conclusions and recommendations

### 2.1 Conclusions

While thousands of Irish people have successfully integrated into the British way of life and have contributed enormously to professional and cultural life, this community remains over represented in terms of indicators of deprivation. Decent, affordable housing is the key concern, combined in many instances with lack of information and cultural and social isolation. These are the most common problems dealt with by Irish advice agencies.

More Irish people endure poor housing conditions than the rest of the population. Many Irish people in London encounter particular difficulties in finding housing and suffer worse housing conditions when they do. They are over-represented amongst the homeless of the capital. Housing needs are compounded by the fact that many Irish people suffer from poorer health and have shorter life expectancy than the rest of the population. The needs of the young migrants and elders of this community require particular attention. Given this, it is all the more concerning that the Irish community (with other white ethnic minorities) was specifically excluded from the Government's report on social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal and its impact upon black and minority ethnic groups [58]. Social exclusion is the pattern of experience of much of this community. Many Irish people are living on those estates identified by the National Strategy for attention, which makes this an even more glaring act of omission.

Although the main need continues to be proper and fair access to self-contained, affordable housing, older single people especially single men and some young vulnerable people require shared housing. For these groups the cluster flat or shared housing scheme is ideal; providing a degree of independence while retaining the security of group support. Housing providers may have moved away from this model in favour of self-contained housing but for these groups this remains the preferred housing solution.

This research has assessed the response of London's social landlords to meeting these needs. It has examined the extent to which these bodies have responded positively to the recommendations of the CRE report *Discrimination and the Irish community in Britain* and in the case of RSLs also to the requirements of the Housing Corporation.

The study has found that although there is a growing awareness and commitment to race equality, the Irish community still faces a problem of recognition despite the fact that it is the largest ethnic minority in Britain. While more Boroughs and housing associations are aware of the needs of the Irish community there is much to be done. The Irish dimension is often absent from policy making and 'invisibility' remains an issue. In analysing the results of the survey the question of proportionality was considered. Expectations of local authorities and associations working in areas with very low concentrations of Irish people could differ from those operating for example, in Brent or Hammersmith and Fulham. Patterns of settlement are changing however, with communities growing in less traditional parts of London, so it is no longer appropriate for these needs to be ignored in these areas.

There is little evidence that Irish needs are taken into account in resource allocation. It is therefore unsurprising that lettings of local authority housing to households of declared Irish origin are low even in boroughs where the population is at its highest. Housing association performance presents an even bleaker picture. In the last three years new lettings to the best accommodation in the sector has averaged at around 3.2%.

Investment in new housing to meet Irish needs is unacceptably low given the scale of the need. There is an urgent need for this population to be mapped and monitored and a London wide assessment of needs developed particularly in response to the 2001 Census findings, once they become available. The community should not have to rely on the presence of a change champion in order for its needs to be met and recognised. The response should be built into strategy and policy. There seems to be a belief that this community's needs can be met by the Irish voluntary sector. This report has shown that the needs are too extensive for this to be an appropriate or possible response. What is required is an effective plan for tackling Irish specific needs backed by a proper level of resources.

The survey tested a number of areas relating to equality and housing management, which have prominence in the policy debate at present to assess the response to Irish needs. These included; written housing equality strategies, ethnic monitoring, tenant involvement, and anti-harassment measures. The response of the social landlords remains patchy in most of the areas tested. More needs to be done on collecting and using data to improve outcomes for the Irish community in both housing and employment. Housing associations and the local authorities need to follow the example of the Housing Corporation, which has recently assessed its own internal performance.

The failure to recognise this community and the validity of its needs is illustrated by minimal contact or consultation with the Irish community or Irish agencies in relation to Best Value or tenant involvement. Partnership programmes with housing associations and local authorities are limited. Further initiatives are required to meet the needs through stock transfers and management arrangements. *The supporting people* regime needs to encompass Irish housing and related health needs, particularly the provision of services relating to alcohol, mental health, young persons and arrival homelessness. This should be supported by the boroughs and the Housing Corporation.

The future of socially excluded communities and vulnerable people lies not only in procuring decent housing and culturally sensitive services however, but also through the holistic approach to community regeneration which considers health, care needs, employment and training too. Such regeneration is only achieved through a partnership that embraces all sectors and the communities in which they work. There are some examples of such partnerships highlighted in this report and it is hoped that more social landlords will consider the Irish dimension when formulating and developing such initiatives in future.

Social landlords should accept and value cultural diversity rather than expect

assimilation, but Irish agencies face an uphill struggle continually being told that there is insufficient evidence to support their claims that Irish needs are different or are unmet. This report brings together in one volume the facts that give the lie to that view. Many social landlords still appear to be unaware of the relative disadvantages of much of the Irish community and the scale of indifference is all the more astounding given the volume of evidence to the contrary. To assess whether the cause of this is ignorance, indifference, or discrimination was not the purpose of this study but its conclusion must be that this community is still considered by some to be 'beyond the Pale'. It is hoped that the recommendations that follow offer some means of redressing this situation in future.

## **2.2 Recommendations**

So much remains to be done. As always, what is needed is action and the implementation of policies rather than more rhetoric. Although the following recommendations are directed at the London boroughs, housing associations (including the Irish housing associations), and the Housing Corporation in particular, it is hoped that some will also be of interest to the Government Office for London and the Commission for Racial Equality as appropriate.

### **Race Equality**

1. Local authorities and housing associations should ensure that there is an Irish dimension to all race equality policies and schemes

This should include:

2. A separate 'Irish' category for all housing and employment data including representation on council and governing bodies where this is not already in place
3. Ensuring that the data is used effectively to monitor outcomes for the Irish community and redress inequalities in relation to housing opportunities.
4. Ensuring that the data is used effectively to monitor employment of staff of Irish origin and to evaluate the need for career development for them.
5. Involving the Irish community in arrangements for consulting on services and policies and in arrangements for assessing and monitoring any adverse impacts of these.
6. Recognising anti-Irish discrimination and the invisibility of this community as part of equalities training.
7. Recognising anti-Irish discrimination particularly in relation to harassment policies and procedures.
8. The use by the Housing Corporation of its regulatory powers ensure that its commitment to equality and diversity is delivered to the Irish community by housing associations.

## **Resource allocation**

### *Investment*

9. The needs of the Irish community should be properly addressed in existing and new funding programmes, both capital and revenue, especially *supporting people* and those aimed at reducing social exclusion and arising from the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.
10. Further research should be undertaken to map the current distribution of the Irish population across London and in individual Boroughs to enable a proper level of resources to be matched to needs, in the light of the 2001 Census data.
11. The Housing Corporation should consider an enhanced distribution of resources via the Approved Development Programme to both Irish led and mainstream RSLs to reverse the disadvantaged faced by this community to meet a range of identified needs including.
  - Increased move-on opportunities for Irish homeless people
  - the provision of ‘cluster type’ shared accommodation and dedicated sheltered housing for older people and single people
  - more general needs self-contained accommodation
  - working with local authorities to ensure Irish housing and related health needs are recognised
  - continuing to encourage the use of Development Protocols across London

### *Housing Allocations*

12. Local authorities and housing associations should review their allocation policies with a view to increasing lettings to Irish people to reverse the clear trend of disadvantage.

## **Service delivery**

13. Housing associations and local authorities should ensure that Irish people have access to information and equal access to services provided.
14. The Irish dimension should be included in any Best Value review of services undertaken by local authorities and housing associations.

15. Existing service delivery should be more culturally sensitive to the needs of Irish people particularly the old and young vulnerable people
16. Staff awareness of cultural requirements should be raised through training in this area.
17. Consideration should be given to assisting older people to access specialist services such as day centres, home care and the Home Improvement Agencies for example.

### **Partnership**

18. Local authorities and housing associations should work more closely in partnership with Irish agencies and Irish housing associations to develop new culturally sensitive schemes and services.
19. The Housing Corporation should use its commitment to partnership between main stream and BME housing associations to encourage more partnerships to meet Irish housing and related needs through stock transfers, joint scheme developments, and management arrangements with the Irish housing associations.
20. New partnerships for regeneration, care and health services including Local Strategic Partnerships and Primary Care Trusts should attempt to ensure that Irish interests are represented and Irish housing associations and voluntary agencies should seek to contribute to these.
21. The Irish agencies should also seek to ensure that Irish needs are reflected in Drug Action Plans and other similar initiatives

### **Care and Support**

22. The Irish dimension should be reflected in all community care plans and supporting people programmes. The Irish housing associations and voluntary agencies have a role to play in raising the awareness of local authorities and mainstream housing associations in this area.
23. The Irish voluntary sector should respond to the home care needs of older people and to other care and support needs such as mental health by attempting to develop an independent sector agency to meet these needs.
24. The Irish voluntary agencies and housing associations should work in tandem with the local authorities to enhance advocacy services for vulnerable Irish groups in particular.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **List of respondents to questionnaire**

#### **London Boroughs**

Barking  
Barnet  
Bexley  
Brent  
Bromley  
Camden  
Croydon  
Ealing  
Enfield  
Greenwich  
Hackney  
Hammersmith  
Haringey  
Harrow  
Hounslow  
Islington  
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea  
Lambeth  
Lewisham  
Merton  
Newham  
Redbridge  
Southwark  
Sutton  
Tower Hamlets  
Waltham Forest  
Wandsworth  
Westminster

#### **Housing Associations**

Anchor Trust  
Broomleigh HA  
Circle 33 Housing Trust  
Ealing Family HA  
East Thames Housing Group  
Family HA  
Home Group (Warden HA)  
Horizon Housing Group  
Hyde HA  
London and Quadrant Housing Trust  
Network HA  
New Islington and Hackney HA  
Notting Hill Housing Trust  
Paddington Churches HA  
Peabody Trust  
Place for People  
Southern Housing Group  
St.Pancras HA  
Shepherd's Bush HA  
The Guinness Trust  
Wandle HA

## **Appendix 2**

**Annotated bibliography to go in here –see separate file**