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The Contested Politics of Residential Space

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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Much of public policy aims to diminish or eradicate social evils or harms: Beveridge’s “five giants” – idleness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want - spring to mind. But one of the problems with such policy aims is that it is very difficult to know how to measure and benchmark progress. In social policy many benchmarks are essentially arbitrary. The widely used poverty line of 60 per cent of median household income, adjusted for household composition (“equivalised”) and measured before or after housing costs is a case in point. It has little rationale, and consequently may lack public resonance. This has prompted the development of “consensual” approaches to measuring poverty – or in the case of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, a Minimum Income Standard (MIS). Groups, recruited from the public and informed by experts, agree on a basket of necessities, and experts cost the budget required.

A crucial aspect of MIS is its method of developing a negotiated consensus among these socially mixed groups... While participants do not always start with identical ideas... through detailed discussion and negotiation they commonly converge on answers that the groups as a whole can agree on. (Davis et al, 2022, p. 5)

Such an approach is not possible with housing costs, as costs vary so much between and within different locations. Of course, housing costs are only meaningful in the context of a minimum standard. But even if it were possible to cost housing, what should a minimum standard be? This was addressed by Shelter which sought to establish a Living Home Standard in 2016. The Standard marked an advance in approaches to housing standards but is also limited in its application, and likely now to be out of date.

1.2 Research aim

There are many reasons that residential space standards are necessary, but a key concern is the impact that the availability of space has on residents’ welfare. Evidence suggests that a lack of residential space can have an impact on overall wellbeing where basic lifestyle needs are not met. Governments in the UK have been concerned with minimum space standards since the early 20th century as a means of tackling health and social issues associated with substandard housing (Carmona, Gallent and Sarkar, 2010). Revisions to accepted space standards have tended to follow changes in the political and economic climate, which is sensitive to the changing attitudes and needs of the public.

Expressed formally, the aim of this research was therefore to seek to advance understanding of current attitudes towards residential space standards in the UK and to compare these with the moral values underpinning three contested policies that influence levels of housing consumption: the single occupant Council Tax discount, the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Shared Accommodation Rate, and the removal of the spare room subsidy (popularly known as the “Bedroom Tax”). In doing so, our aim was also to establish a consensual view on what a minimum residential space standard should be.

It is not our intention to prescribe a minimum space standard in terms of floor space or internal room layouts, but rather to use these three contested policies to explore moral values underpinning questions about the extent to which the state should support the consumption of residential space.

1.3 Three contested policies

As the housing crisis has sharpened in the context of fiscal austerity, so too has the politics of residential space become contested politically. After 2010 Housing Benefit rules were tightened to slow the growing costs of the social security benefit. From 2013, Housing Benefit was cut for social tenants deemed to be under-occupying their accommodation. This “removal of the spare room subsidy” became known popularly as the “Bedroom Tax”. The previous year, the age at which the eligible rent for Housing Benefit claimed by single private tenants based on self-contained accommodation was raised from 25 to 35. In other words, under the Shared Accommodation Rate single private tenants aged under 35 would be expected to share accommodation with people they were not related to. Meanwhile, the Council Tax discount for households with only a single adult resident, introduced when the Council Tax was introduced in 1993, continued. We provide more detail on each policy below:

- The single occupant Council Tax Discount. The Council Tax was introduced in 1993 and is a partial property tax and service charge. The Council Tax is levied annually by local authorities on domestic property and is used to help pay for local services. Where an occupant of a property is the only person aged 18 or over living in the property, that person is entitled to a discount of 25% from the Council Tax amount applicable to the property. That same person will still be eligible for the discount even if there are other resident adults but only where the latter are full-time students, professional or unpaid full-time live in carers, or mentally incapacitated individuals. The discount was applied because when the Council Tax (the full rate of which is based on two or more adults being resident in the property) was introduced as a replacement for the Poll Tax, the payments of single occupiers would have increased dramatically.
- The LHA Shared Accommodation Rate. This policy applies only to private tenants. It was first introduced in 1996 when it applied to single people aged under 25. The age threshold was raised to 35 in 2012. The policy sets the maximum amount of rent that can be used in a recipient's Housing Benefit or Universal Credit calculation based on the cost of renting a room in a shared house or flat in their area, even if they live in a self-contained property. This rate is therefore lower than the normal LHA rate. Prior to the extension, an Equality Impact Assessment stated that around 20 per cent of the one-bedroom LHA caseload (at March 2010) would receive, on average, £41 per week less benefit than under the previous rules. The extension to under 35s was expected to affect around 63,000 people. There are some exemptions whereby a claimant can receive more than the Shared Accommodation Rate, if they, for example, live with someone who's dependent on them; are a care leaver under 25 (2021 amendment); have previously lived in a hostel for homeless people for at least 3 months in total (2021 amendment); or, where they are in receipt of disability related benefits. The policy was introduced principally to help contain growing Housing Benefit expenditure.
- The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (popularly known as the “Bedroom Tax”). This policy applies only to social housing tenants. It was introduced on 1 April 2013 and continues to affect almost half a million households. The policy reduced entitlement to Housing Benefit if a working age tenant in social housing is judged to be under-occupying their home. The policy allows for one bedroom per person or couple, except children aged 15 and under who are expected to share with another child of the same gender, or children of 9 and under who are expected to share with another child aged 9 or under regardless of gender. There is no exemption or account taken of children whose main residence is elsewhere (i.e., parents live apart). However, a bedroom is allowed for a non-resident carer where they provide overnight care. Housing Benefit is reduced by 14% for one “spare bedroom” and 25% for two “spare bedrooms”. The main exemption applies where the claimant or their partner is aged 66 or over. The policy was again introduced to contain growing Housing Benefit expenditure and reduce the budget deficit, but it was also intended to provide a financial incentive for social housing tenants to leave accommodation which was too large for their needs and thus free up social housing for families on waiting lists who will fully occupy the housing. It should be noted that people in Scotland and Northern Ireland are not affected by the “Bedroom Tax” which is mitigated by both devolved governments.

We have chosen to focus on these three policies because they send mixed messages. Two are designed to encourage people to limit their consumption of housing, whilst one (Council Tax discount) serves to encourage people to consume housing. It is not just possible, but likely, that many people are subject simultaneously to a policy

designed to limit their housing consumption (e.g., the “Bedroom Tax” or Shared Accommodation Rate) whilst benefiting from the Council Tax discount which encourages them to consume more (or at least supports the continuation of current levels of consumption).

This maze of conflicting signals presents a challenge for researchers. How do we decide whether these policies are ethically justified? And – since public money is scarce – how should we prioritise between them? Researchers will frequently employ household surveys to establish the impact of policies on different income groups or household types. But who is to say that the values implicit in these exercises are those held by the public?

1.4 Report structure

The report is organised into four sections as follows:

Section 2 analyses existing academic and grey literature on residential space standards and traces the evolution of standards and related debates in the UK, drawing on international examples and comparisons where useful. It considers how far existing literature has attempted to understand the moral values underpinning space standards or sought to articulate what a minimum space standard should be. It finds that the existing literature has been generally quite vague on the topic (with the exception of research conducted by Shelter, Ipsos Mori and British Gas in 2016, see Burkitt et al., 2016). This report thus contributes to addressing this gap in the literature, using deliberative methods.

Section 3 presents the methodology. The contested politics of residential space seemed like an ideal arena to explore whether deliberative methods – an approach that aims to establish informed consensus among the public – can help to advance understanding of public attitudes towards space standards and how these attitudes compare to the values underpinning policies that regulate the consumption of residential space. In this section, we provide an account of our use of deliberative workshops and deliberative polling.

Section 4 presents the outcomes of deliberative workshops in Glasgow and London, respectively. In each case, we look at each housing policy – the Council Tax discount, the Shared Accommodation Rate, and the “Bedroom Tax” – in turn, and the extent to which participants were able to reach a consensus on determining the relevant underlying values. We used lived experience examples and “disrupters” (i.e. hypothetical scenarios designed to elicit more or less sympathy from participants) and encourage participants to prioritise between different cases in order to tease out the values underpinning attitudes towards policies that regulate the consumption of residential space. We also examine the extent to which participants’ values were transformed over the course of the workshops through the use of deliberative polling at the start and end of the workshops.

Section 5 presents the discussion and some final conclusions. In this section, we attempt to organise our findings into categories of moral value in line with widely used concepts. While our findings show that there was no overriding value that all participants agreed on, most responses can be organised under the category of the right to housing. Concepts frequently associated with this category of moral value include rights, fairness, respect, and justice. Participants frequently referred to the “right” to “home”, “choice”, “dignity”, as well as a right to be treated “fairly” and for policies to be applied “consistently” (i.e. in a non-discriminatory way). We found that participants used arguments that were essentially consequentialist and utilitarian in nature, and that these arguments appear at least to hold an important place in the public’s mind, especially when prioritising between policies.

2. Literature Review

In this section, we analyse existing academic and grey literature on residential space standards. We examine the progression of space standards and related debates in the UK, and draw on international examples and comparisons where useful. We also consider the extent to which existing literature has attempted to understand attitudes towards space standards or set out what a minimum space standard should look like.

2.1 Why space standards?

There are varying views on how the quality of people's homes can be improved. One suggestion is to introduce a minimum residential space standard (Clifford and Ferm, 2021; Kearns, 2022). A minimum space standard typically deals with internal space within dwellings and is, at least in theory, applicable across all housing tenures. Carmona, Gallent, and Sarkar (2010: 23) highlight several benefits associated with having sufficient residential space, including health and wellbeing benefits arising from well-designed homes; as well as benefits to family life and work-life balance, increased educational attainment and productivity from having sufficient space to study and work, and a reduction in anti-social behaviour that might otherwise result from overcrowding. Flexible residential space that can be adapted to different needs and future uses is also seen to have positive wider social and market benefits (ibid). Yet, it appears that the UK performs poorly in terms of space standards when compared to other European countries (Clifford and Ferm, 2021).

Our review of the literature revealed a focus on residential space standards in England but a lack of evidence on space standards in other parts of the UK. Lund (2020), for example, notes that, despite house price increases, the amount of space available in English homes is generally declining, with England performing poorly in comparison to continental European countries. The term 'rabbit hutches' is used to describe some new-build homes in England (ibid: 2). Jones (2017, cited in Lund, 2020: 2) found that '[i]n 2014, the average UK home size was 87m² compared to 109.2 (Germany); 137 (Denmark); 112.8 (France); 96 (Austria) and 82.2 (Portugal)'. In another study that compared 16 countries within and outside of Europe, the UK ranked 12th based on a measure of the relationship between house size and occupancy (Shrinkthatfootprint, 2018; cited in Lund, 2020: 3). Only Hong Kong, Russia, Italy and China performed less well on this measure (ibid). Moreover, a Guardian article from 2018 reported that '[t]he living rooms of newly built homes in Britain are nearly a third smaller than equivalent homes built in the 1970s' (Collinson, 2018: n.p.). Despite these unfavourable statistics, Kearns (2022: 725) states that '[i]n general, governments [in the UK] have been reluctant to apply space standards to private sector housing developments, and in contrast to other countries, dwelling size is not a common currency in the [UK] housing market'.

Morgan and Cruickshank (2014) aimed to quantify the extent of space shortages in English homes by comparing English Housing Survey 2010 data on 16,000 homes against the London Housing Design Guide 2010 internal space standards (also referred to as the Greater London Authority (GLA) standard; more on this in section 2.2). They found that 'between 21% and 55% of housing [in England] does not meet the [GLA] space standard' (ibid: 722). The authors further note that '[b]uilding type was found to be a significant determinant of size, with flats and small terraced houses being most commonly undersized, while households with children were most likely to be overcrowded' (ibid). Referring to the "Bedroom Tax", Morgan and Cruickshanks (2014: 711-12) also note that 'three-quarters of the households that would lose some of their [housing] benefit due to having a "spare bedroom" are small or very small [i.e. dwellings]... which suggests that in some cases the "spare bedroom" may be making up for a general lack of space in the house'. The authors are therefore critical of the "Bedroom Tax" and suggest that encouraging an increase in the occupancy of undersized homes may result in negative health and social outcomes.

The relationship between minimum space standards and positive housing market outcomes is however not universally accepted. In other words, while minimum space standards have positive welfare outcomes, imposing standards may not produce optimal outcomes in the absence of sufficient supply and consequent higher prices. Breach (2020: n.p.), for example, argues that 'Minimum Space Standards make the housing crisis worse' by 'forc[ing]

people to consume more space than they can afford and reduc[ing] the supply of new homes.’ Writing prior to the introduction of a national space standard in 2015 (see section 2.2), Gallent, Madeddu, and Mace (2010: 1) also argued that the introduction of minimum space standards in England ‘would not address the market fundamentals – speculative production and investment consumption – that, alongside land supply constraints, determine the amount of space in homes.’ This line of argument is a useful reminder that there are no silver bullets for tackling complex housing problems.

Indeed, in a different paper, Gallent, Madeddu and Mace (2015: 75) ask whether space standards can really deliver ‘better, more functional and more liveable homes’. They conducted in-depth interviews with architects, builders, estate agents and regulators in Turin, Italy, where space standards are applied, to critically review the case for regulation in England. Respondents reported that minimum standards can ‘enhance the living environment’, help to ensure ‘a level of privacy conducive to “family life”’ and ‘a basic level of “decency” in new homes’, and ‘prevent less scrupulous developers from providing substandard housing’ (ibid: 83-4). There was therefore an acceptance that minimum standards can produce some positive outcomes, however respondents appeared to place a greater emphasis overall on the quality rather than quantity of space. It was argued that rigid standards can be a ‘threat to change and innovation’ (ibid: 89-90) and that ‘an appropriate, context-sensitive, balance between flexible regulation and innovations in design... is often the more effective route to achieving greater functionality and liveability in new housing’ (ibid: 73).

Likewise, in a more recent study, Özer and Jacoby (2022) suggest that residential space standards can be effective but that they have not been consistently applied in England and, echoing Morgan and Cruickshanks (2014), must take account of internal layouts as well as overall dwelling size, as indeed has been the case since the mid-20th century. Özer and Jacoby (2022) argue that further research is needed on the role of design and consumer preferences if the effectiveness of space standards is to be fully assessed: ‘[w]ithout this diverse knowledge of how occupants live in and perceive their homes in relation to the space offered and its quality and design, it is impossible to fully assess if space standards are effective and can meet changing housing needs’ (ibid: 706).

Overall, therefore, the literature indicates a need for absolute space standards, while also emphasising the importance of the quality of space within homes, suitable internal room layouts, and consideration of occupancy rates.

2.2 The evolution of space standards in the UK

In this section, we briefly outline the evolution of residential space standards in the UK, which can broadly be separated into four distinct phases: the early 20th century, the post-war years to the 1970s, the neoliberal turn in the 1980s, and the late 1990s into the 2000s, culminating in the introduction of a national space standard in England in 2015. More recently, the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, may well mark the start of a new phase in which a renewed concern for space standards has resulted from rethinking the meaning of ‘home’ and space due to the risk of disease transmission in overcrowded households and for mental health reasons where people spend a lot of time at home (Kearns, 2022; Jacoby and Alonso, 2022).

After the First World War, and especially from the 1930s, governments promoted council housing as a means of addressing overcrowded and sub-standard private rented housing (Wilson and Barton, 2021). This focus on the role of housing made it ‘necessary to define how much space would be needed by households: to set floor space minimums linked to levels of occupancy’ (Carmona, Gallent and Sakar, 2010: 1). The Tudor Walters Committee was thus established to define this benchmark and its 1919 report recommended ‘maximum densities of 12 dwellings per acre (just under 30 per hectare) and floor space minimums of 855 square feet [79.4m²] for a three bedroom non-parlour house and 1,055 square feet [98m²] for the parlour type, with a separate sitting room and upstairs WC’ (ibid). In 1944, a Housing Manual was produced, recommending an 800-900 square feet requirement for three-bedroom homes (74.3-83.6m²) (ibid: 2).

Carmona, Gallent and Sarkar (2010: 2) note that government policy later shifted from a focus on floor space minimums to ‘the wellbeing of families and the way in which households function over the life-course’, with particular concerns about the needs of children. Following the Second World War, there was recognition that ‘housing occupants – and particularly “families” – needed more space for storage, for cooking, for quiet study’ and for the ‘general unity of the family’ (Carmona, Gallent and Sarkar, 2010: 2; see also Milner and Madigan, 2004: 730). The aforementioned Housing Manual was thus updated in 1949 to recommend an additional 100 square feet (9.3m²) (ibid). These authors note that this was a period of significant welfare reform intended to improve people’s lives but that standards began to fall again in the 1950s due to changes in political priorities (ibid). The Parker Morris Committee was therefore established in response to declining space standards, particularly in family housing (ibid: 2-3). The report, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, was published in 1961, and provided ‘standards relating to floor space’, which became known as the Parker Morris Standard (MHLG, 1961: 35; cited in Carmona, Gallent and Sarkar, 2010: 4). Design Bulletin 6 later supplemented this document, providing ‘practical advice on room layout to ensure maximum usability... of minimum acceptable space’ (ibid). The Standard applied across public and private housing but was successfully resisted by private housebuilders at least until building societies began to refuse to lend on homes that failed to meet the standard (Madigan and Milner, 1999: 401-2).

The Parker Morris Standard remained in place for 20 years but, as the neoliberal turn brought in a period of deregulation, it was abandoned in 1981 (except in Northern Ireland where such a move was thought to be “short-sighted and a false economy which would require more expensive rehabilitation and improvement in future”) (CIHNI, 2004). Madigan and Milner (1999) suggest that standards in council and housing association homes declined during this period. Tunstall (2015) analysed relative housing space inequality in England and Wales from 1911-2011, and found that, ‘[u]sing inequality definitions more sensitive to the bottom of the distribution... [h]ousing space inequality reduces steadily from the 1920s to the 1980s’ but then increases again so that ‘by 2011 inequality had returned to levels not seen for fifty years or more’ (Tunstall, 2015: 105). Concern regarding residential space standards thus re-emerged in the mid- to late 1990s, partly triggered by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which ‘helped to reopen the debate about housing design, and the role of building regulations in setting minimum standards’ (Madigan and Milner, 1999: 396). The National Housing Federation and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, for example, published a *Guide to Standards and Quality* which aimed to ‘reintroduce mandatory quality controls for all new housing association homes in the UK’ (ibid: 404-5). JRF also led work to improve housing standards specifically for people with disabilities, resulting in the development of a Lifetime Homes Standard which ‘aimed to ensure that new homes were designed to adapt to the changing needs of occupants, particularly in later life’ (Park, 2017: 29; also see Madigan and Milner, 1999).

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s there were concerns about poor space standards and comparisons with European countries fuelled calls for a national space standard to guarantee ‘a basic level of domestic functionality and liveability’ (Madeddu, Gallent and Mace, 2015: 73). The debate intensified during the term of the Coalition Government which introduced new policies seeking to impose greater restrictions on the use of space, most notably via the removal of the spare room subsidy, popularly known as the “Bedroom Tax”. As Tunstall (2015: 107-8) argues, this led to a ‘renewed “politics of housing space”’.

London was the first region to reintroduce space standards in 2011 through the London Housing Design Guide (London Development Agency, 2010), which apply only to housing developments on public land or with public subsidy (Özer and Jacoby, 2022: 694). Park (2017: 3) describes how the then Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, ‘set a bold precedent by officially extending his new housing space standard to all tenures’ in 2012. This was followed by the introduction of a national minimum space standard in 2015 in the form of the Nationally Designed Space Standards (NDSS) (DCLG, 2015). Until this point, the UK was ‘the only remaining part of the EU where legal minimum space standards for residential development remain[ed] absent’ (Gallent, Madeddu and Mace, 2010: 1).

The NDSS draws on the London standard and is implemented via planning policy, subject to ‘certain circumstances’ (Clifford and Ferm, 2021). The NDSS suggests the following standards:

39m² for a one-bedroom, one-person flat (and 37m² if a shower room is provided instead of a bathroom), 50m² for a one-bedroom, two-person flat, and so on. A two-storey, three-bedroom house intended for four people to live in should be a minimum of 84m², and one for six people a minimum of 102m² (DCLG, 2015, cited in Clifford and Ferm, 2021: 539).

Park (2017: 3) describes the NDSS as ‘the first national minimum requirements that in principle apply to all housing sectors,’ with the view that the NDSS ‘is arguably the closest we have ever come to a national, universally applicable space standard.’ This ‘is now the only space standard that can be applied by any local authority in England’ (ibid).

In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on housing standards as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdowns during which people were mandated to stay at home to help stop the spread of the virus. For example, Kearns (2022: 722) notes that ‘the mediating and moderating roles of domestic space upon the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic show the crucial importance of space and occupancy standards for health, wellbeing and learning in a future where more time is spent at home’. Similarly, Holliss (2021) discusses the impact of COVID-19 and home-working on people’s experiences of their homes, as well as highlighting the challenges that those in social housing face, with restrictions on the amount of residential space they are allowed to consume, and what it can be used for. Moreover, Özer and Jacoby (2022: 694) note that COVID-19 lockdowns ‘revealed fundamental failures in spatial equity and dwelling usability, raising questions about the effectiveness of space standards after more than 110 years but also how the usability criteria that inform them might have changed.’

2.3 Understanding attitudes towards residential space standards in the UK

There have clearly been several attempts over the past 100 years to define, in policy terms, a minimum space standard for English homes, but these have tended to focus on technical guidelines (i.e. minimum floor spaces, internal layouts) or on the needs of specific groups (e.g. people with disabilities). Several studies recommend that standards should take account of the number of occupants rather than bedrooms (Morgan and Cruickshank, 2014: 723) and/or internal layout and distribution of space (Madeddu, Gallent, and Mace, 2015: 90; Özer and Jacoby, 2022: 704), rather than simply the overall dwelling size. However, none of the literature we review above seeks explicitly to examine public attitudes towards residential space standards. Gallent, Madeddu and Mace (2015) come closest with their study of Turin, where respondents believed that a home should provide ‘quality of life’ and ‘privacy’, but this does not examine attitudes to residential space standards in the UK.

In the studies we reviewed, the values of the authors themselves were sometimes implied (e.g. where emphasis is given to factors such as adaptability and accessibility; see Madigan and Milner, 1999) and at other times more explicit (i.e. in critiques of the “Bedroom Tax”; see Morgan and Cruickshank, 2014; Tunstall, 2015), but none seeks explicitly to assess the extent to which their values or those underpinning policies that regulate the use of residential space reflect the values held by the public at the time. There is however one notable exception.

In 2016, Shelter sought to establish a Living Home Standard. It reads:

...until now there has never been a definition of what the public expects an acceptable home should provide. The Living Home Standard fills this void by bringing to life what the public believe we should all be able to expect our home to provide, in order to secure our wellbeing and provide a foundation from which we can build and live our lives. (Burkitt et al. 2016: 12).

The research used discussion groups and surveys to establish a list of “essential” and “tradeable” attributes under five themes – affordability, decent conditions, space, stability, and neighbourhood (ibid: 9-10). By definition, all essential attributes must be met in order to meet the Living Home Standard, while only a proportion of the tradeable attributes must be present (the precise number of tradeables that must be met for each theme or category is indicated in the

table below). The Standard therefore consists of a total of 19 essential and a proportion of desirable attributes.

Table 1: The Living Home Standard

Dimension	Essential attributes	Tradeable attributes
1. Affordability	<p>Can meet the rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly having to cut spending on household essentials like food or heating.</p> <p>Not worried that rent or mortgage payments could rise to a level that would be difficult to pay.</p>	<p>Must meet 1 of the following to meet the Living Homes Standard:</p> <p>Can meet rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly preventing participation in social activities.</p> <p>Can meet the rent or mortgage payments on the home without regularly being prevented from putting enough money aside to cover unexpected costs.</p>
2. Decent Conditions	<p>The home can be heated safely and effectively.</p> <p>The home has hot and cold running water.</p> <p>The home is free from safety hazards such as faulty wiring or fire risks.</p> <p>The home is structurally sound with no important defects to the roof and/or walls.</p> <p>The home has a toilet, and a bath and/or shower.</p> <p>The home feels physically secure (for example with adequate locks on doors and windows).</p> <p>The home is free from pest problems.</p> <p>The home is free from mould or damp problems.</p> <p>The home is suitable for the current age and/or disability related needs of everyone in the household.</p> <p>There are electrical sockets in the main living areas, kitchen and bedroom(s).</p>	<p>Must meet 2 of the following to meet the Living Home Standard:</p> <p>The home is free from outside noise that regularly disrupts sleep or daily activities.</p> <p>The home has enough natural light in the main living areas, kitchen and bedroom(s)</p> <p>Able to dry laundry in the home without causing mould or damp problems.</p> <p>It is possible to access the internet from the home or get an internet connection if needed.</p>

Dimension	Essential attributes	Tradeable attributes
3. Space	<p>The number of bedrooms in the home is adequate for all members of the household.</p> <p>There is enough space to allow all members of the household to have privacy, for example when they wish to be alone.</p> <p>There is enough space for all members of the household to comfortably spend time together in the same room.</p> <p>There is adequate space to prepare and cook food.</p> <p>There is adequate space to store essential items, such as a reasonable amount of clothes, towels and bedding.</p>	<p>Must meet 3 of the following to meet the Living Home Standard:</p> <p>There are enough bathroom facilities for everyone living in the household to be able to use them at a time suitable for their needs.</p> <p>The home has access to outdoor space, for example a private or shared garden, or balcony.</p> <p>There is enough space to have visitors during the day or evening.</p> <p>There is enough space for members of the household to study or do work or homework if they need to.</p> <p>There is enough space for a guest to stay overnight, for instance on a sofa or sofa bed.</p> <p>There is enough space to store domestic items like vacuum cleaners and ironing boards to keep them out of the way.</p> <p>There is enough space to store some personal belongings, such as books or children's toys.</p>
4. Stability	<p>The household has enough control over how long they can live in the home.</p>	<p>Must meet 1 of the following to meet the Living Home Standard:</p> <p>If ever given notice to leave the home, the household feel they would be given enough notice to secure somewhere else suitable to live.</p> <p>Able to stay in the home long enough to feel part of the local community if wanted.</p> <p>Can make changes to the interior of the home such as decorating, if wanted.</p> <p>Able to keep a pet in the home or garden if wanted.</p>

Dimension	Essential attributes	Tradeable attributes
5. Neighbourhood	Feel reasonably safe and secure in the local neighbourhood.	<p>Must meet 1 of the following to meet the Living Home Standard:</p> <p>Amenities such as grocery shops, schools and/or a doctor's surgery, are within reasonable reach of the home.</p> <p>The home is close enough to family, friends or other support networks.</p> <p>Anyone in the household who works outside the home can usually reach their place of work in an hour or less.</p>

Source: Burkitt et al. 2016: 9-10

The Standard marked an advance in approaches to housing standards, but is also limited in its application and may well be out of date, especially since the advent of hybrid and home working following the COVID-19 pandemic. The numbers of “tradeables” introduces an arbitrary element, whilst some standards cannot be operationalised into policy because they are expressed as a capability not a commodity (e.g., “The number of bedrooms in the home is adequate for all members of the household”). Some attributes may also be a matter of choice (e.g., “There is enough space for a guest to stay overnight, for instance on a sofa or sofa bed”). Most acutely, the Living Home Standard seemed to lack policy application at the sharp end where difficult choices must be made (e.g., in the context of a housing crisis and fiscal austerity). We seek to build on the work undertaken by Shelter in order further to advance understanding of attitudes towards residential space standards in the UK.

3. Methods

We explore public attitudes to space standards and how these compare to the values underpinning three contested policies that influence levels of housing consumption in the UK: the single-occupant Council Tax discount, the local housing allowance Shared Accommodation Rate, and the “Bedroom Tax”. We have chosen to examine these three policies specifically because they send mixed messages. Both the Shared Accommodation Rate and the “Bedroom Tax” are designed to encourage people to limit their consumption of housing, while the Council Tax discount encourages people to consume housing (or at least supports people’s current space consumption, or prevents them from having to share). Many people are subject simultaneously to a policy designed to limit their housing consumption (e.g., the “Bedroom Tax” or Shared Accommodation Rate) whilst benefiting from the Council Tax discount.

Some research has questioned the effectiveness of using survey methods to generate public consensus on poverty and related issues (Fahmy, Sutton and Pemberton, 2015). Instead, we adopted a deliberative approach involving a combination of deliberative workshops – one in Glasgow and one in London – and (some limited use of) deliberative polling. This approach is outlined in more detail below, beginning with some reflections on deliberative approaches to research, more generally.

3.1 Deliberative approaches to research

Deliberative approaches first emerged in the late 1980s in response to concerns that research was not sufficiently participatory, and that researchers had too much power and influence over the research process compared to participants (Scottish Government, 2009; Burchardt, 2014). The use of deliberative methods in healthcare research in the UK has grown in recent years (Scurr et al., 2022; Walker et al., 2020; Vicary and Bailey, 2018; Canham et al., 2018; Degeling et al., 2017). Deliberative approaches have also been used in several other fields including research in planning (Murphy and Fox-Rogers, 2015; Fainstein 2009); poverty and inequality (Hecht, Burchardt, and Davies, 2022; Davies et al., 2015); education (Schneider et al., 2018); climate action and sustainable development (Thompson et al., 2021); and in science and technology studies (Evans and Kotchetkova, 2009).

The Scottish Government (2009: 1) defines deliberative research as ‘a hybrid approach between consultation and research’, with the aim of ‘involv[ing] the public in decision-making’. They recognise a range of deliberative methods, including citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, deliberative workshops, deliberative polling, and deliberative mapping (ibid). Given this variety, Burchardt (2014: 357) defines deliberation as an approach rather than a single research method, with the overarching aim of not only involving the public in decision making but also ‘uncover[ing] the public’s informed, considered and collective view on a normative question’. She identifies several features that distinguish deliberative approaches from more conventional research methods such as focus groups (ibid: 357-9).

In short, unlike opinion polls, deliberative approaches encourage people to think, consider and discuss rather than merely respond. Deliberative approaches involve:

- Reaching people’s informed and considered judgements on a given subject, through a process of public reasoning;
- Providing information and evidence to participants, both written and oral, for use in the deliberative process; and,
- An expectation that participants’ beliefs and values may be transformed through the process of deliberation (ibid).

Despite the growing use of deliberation as a research tool, Burchardt (2014: 356) argued that ‘Deliberation as

research is significantly under-theorised'. She highlights several underlying assumptions, including 'a strong fact/value distinction, an emphasis on "outsider" expertise, and a view of participants as essentially similar to each other rather than defined by socio-demographic differences' (ibid: 1). Some have argued that the latter assumption can make it difficult to implement deliberative approaches in a fully equitable manner in unequal societies, such as the UK, with unequal power relations between both researcher and researched but also the general public and policy professionals (see e.g., Fainstein, 2009; Barnes, 2008), despite the emphasis on challenging traditional power hierarchies between researcher and researched (Crocker, 2007).

Three further criticisms are evident in the literature. First, Barnes (2008: 468) points to evidence to suggest that the 'deliberative ideal' is largely 'unachievable in practice', with the term 'deliberation' often being 'used loosely in referring to a range of participatory practices, many of which are not designed explicitly to follow the tenets of deliberative practice'. Second, Evans and Kotchetkova (2009: 627-8) add that deliberative approaches may result in unrealistic portrayals of 'consensus', with the risk that the outcome largely 'reflect[s] the values and interests of some stakeholders more fully than others and may even contradict the concerns and priorities that some expressed privately before the event'. Third, Evans and Kotchetkova (2009) also describe a potential shift in the researcher's role from being 'an analyst who synthesises and interprets data' to 'little more than a facilitator who enables citizens to synthesise and interpret experience in their own terms' (ibid: 625) all 'without any reference to social science theories, concepts or research' (ibid: 640). They suggest that this may have the 'unintended consequence' of disempowering the academy (ibid: 625; also see Burchardt, 2014), while noting the risk that 'the more successful social science is in promoting deliberation as public engagement, the less relevant social science itself becomes as a source of expertise about the public' (Evans and Kotchetkova, 2009: 604-1).

More recently, Wouters, de Fraine and Simons (2019) undertook a systematic literature review of empirical research to better understand the underlying assumptions of deliberative research methods. While they found a range of uses of, and rationales for, deliberative approaches to research, they note that 'the primary goal of all manifestations of deliberative inquiry is similar: to contemplate a practical problem in a systematic or collaborative way, to weigh arguments for possible solutions and to make (even temporarily) a decision' (ibid: 193). While deliberative approaches may well result in unrealistic portrayals of consensus, several studies involving deliberative approaches understand consensus to mean 'general agreement' rather than 'unanimity' (e.g., Smithson and Diaz, 1996; Urfalino, 2006, Moore, 2012; all cited in Davies et al. 2015: 21) and 'decisions are often the result of a convergence of opinions' (ibid). In the deliberative process, 'elite groups' may 'dominate the deliberation', but critics also concede that 'traditionally excluded others will take (and be granted) the opportunity to assert their claims in the new forum' (Evans and Kotchetkova, 2009: 628). Finally, short of being reduced to mere facilitators, researchers still have to make value judgements when it comes to the processes of deliberation (e.g., setting parameters for the debate, deciding what information to provide participants with, etc.), as well as interpreting the findings albeit it in a way that is as transparent as possible to reduce the risk of 'simply reflecting the researcher's own values' (Burchardt, 2014: 366). The advantages and disadvantages of deliberative approaches in research are further summarised and contrasted in the table below.

Table 2: The advantage and disadvantages of deliberative approaches

Advantages	Disadvantages
Provide opportunity for the public to consider different options and make more informed decisions than is possible from traditional consultation methods.	Planning and design are time consuming and resource intensive and as deliberative events often need to be run by independent organisers, they tend to be expensive.
Help the public engage with the more complex issues.	Can lack robust sampling strategies and if small numbers are involved, the views expressed can't be said to represent the views of the public at large; also recruiting those in "hard to reach" populations can be challenging.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Attempt to recruit representative groups of the public. They have the potential to gain insight from a more considered group of citizens than traditional consultation methods – which tend to attract the already politically engaged.	Sometimes perceived as “show trials” used by those in power to attract publicity rather than meaningful engagement.
Provide more detailed understanding than conventional surveys.	The effectiveness of deliberative methods is partly dependent upon the information from policymakers being communicated clearly and in a manner that will not bias the outcome.
Can create dialogue/ engagement with citizens over a long period of time.	Careful thought needs to be given to what will be done with the research findings so that the research meets its original commitments (e.g., to really influence policy).
Can provide policy makers with an understanding about how the public might change their opinion and/ or behaviours if provided with relevant information	Given the high-profile nature of some deliberative methods it may be difficult for policy colleagues/ Ministers to decide how to proceed if they disagree with the public’s recommendations.
Provide a platform for specialists and lay people to discuss and debate issues together.	Representative and participatory democracy should reinforce each other rather than conflict – but this can be difficult in practice.

Source: Scottish Government (2009: 1)

In short, the approach ‘has the potential to provide uniquely considered, insightful and well-justified solutions to the problem of defining a collective position on normative questions in social science, such as a poverty threshold or capability list’ (Burchardt, 2014: 366). The contested politics of residential space thus seemed like an ideal arena to explore whether deliberative approaches can help to establish a consensual view (or at least a collective position) on what a minimum residential space standard should be.

3.2 Deliberative workshops and polling

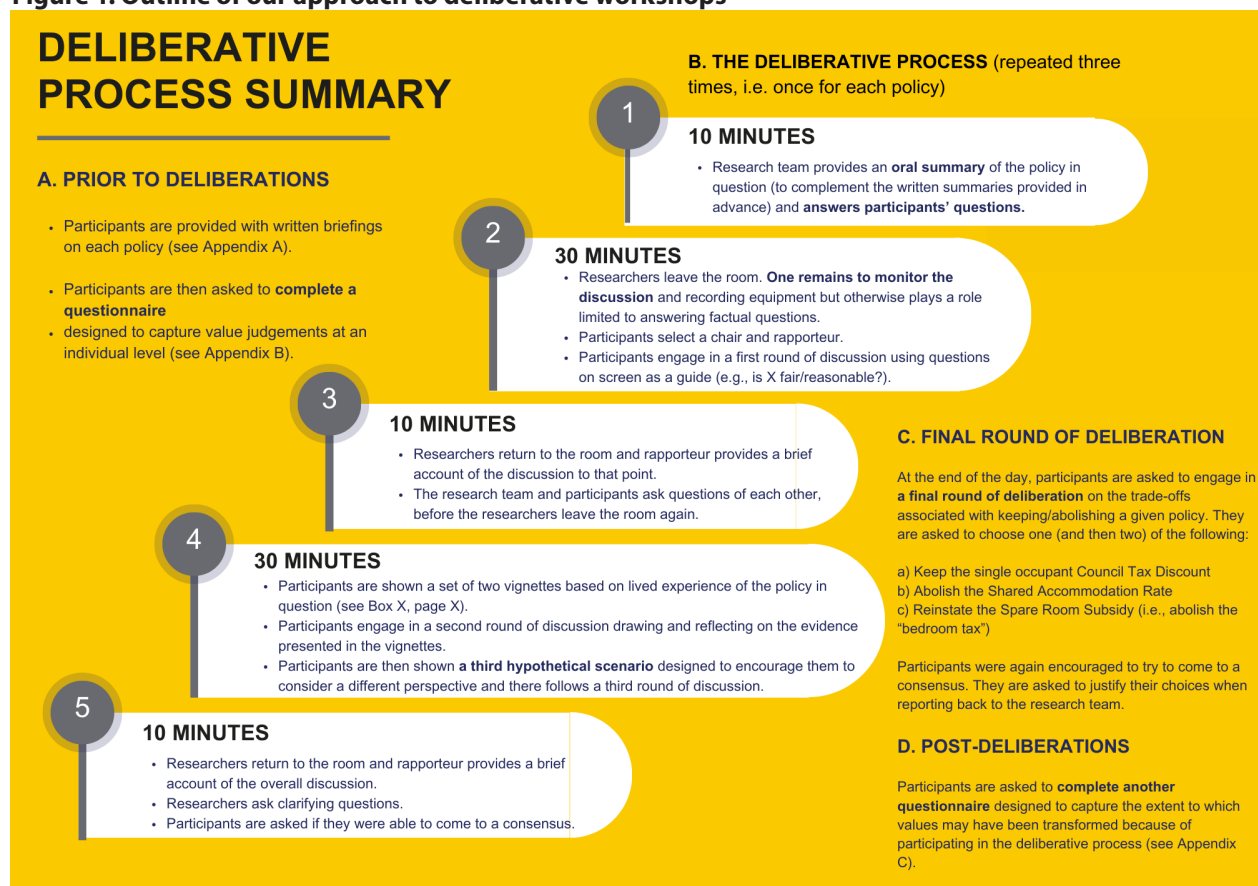
The Scottish Government (2009: 1) provides a useful summary of several deliberative research methods, from which we opted for a combination of deliberative workshops and deliberative polling. Deliberative workshops are ‘similar to focus groups’ but with ‘more emphasis on deliberation’ and establishing a collective position, typically vary in duration from ‘a few hours to several days’, and the number of participants can range from 8 to 16 (ibid). Deliberative workshops can also be combined with deliberative polling to measure participants’ opinions before and after the process of deliberation. We held a two-hour pilot workshop in Glasgow on 11 July 2022, followed by two one-day workshops - one in Glasgow (21 July 2022) and one in London (26 July 2022). These cities represent the two largest (by population) in Scotland and England, respectively, and were chosen because they each have housing markets with different housing pressures, the supposition being that London’s tight housing market might mean that participants took a ‘harder’ or ‘stricter’ view of space standards in London than in Glasgow.

The pilot workshop, which focused on one of the three contested policies (the LHA Shared Accommodation Rate), allowed us to test the deliberative approach and obtain immediate feedback from participants which we used to refine our approach. The pilot workshop was attended by six people who were recruited through existing CaCHE networks locally in the East End of Glasgow (where the CaCHE headquarters is located). Despite attempts to ensure some degree of diversity in age, gender, and housing tenure type, all six participants were female, aged 50 or over, and lived in social housing. This proved problematic because none of them was familiar with the Shared

Accommodation Rate, and so the discussion tended to focus on issues relating to social housing. However, the exercise was useful because it prompted us to rethink both our approach to providing participants with information in advance and our role in facilitating the discussion during the workshops, as well as our use of “disrupters” or hypothetical scenarios designed to encourage participant’s to consider things from a different perspective. Figure 1 below outlines our approach (the revisions prompted by the pilot are indicated in bold).

Each workshop thus consisted of three 90-minute deliberations (one for each policy), ending with a 30–45-minute discussion on policy priorities and associated trade-offs. The changes we made to our approach helped to ensure that participants were better equipped to provide their informed and considered judgements on each policy while also ensuring that they remained on topic. The introduction of questionnaires at the beginning and end of the workshops (a form of deliberative polling) also enabled us to capture the extent to which participants’ values were transformed because of participating in the deliberative process. The results of these questionnaire are reported in section 4.3.

Figure 1: Outline of our approach to deliberative workshops



3.3 Recruiting and selecting participants

Our aim was to recruit 8-12 participants for each deliberative workshop. In designing the workshops to facilitate deliberation in small groups we placed a greater value on the diversity of experience across age, gender, and housing tenure (since these are all factors in the operation of the chosen policies) than the representativeness of our sample. After all, deliberative research does not attempt to be representative. We also looked for people with and without knowledge and/or direct lived experience of the three housing policies in question. There was therefore

some screening of participants in advance.

Through the CaCHE network and with the assistance of organisations local to the venue spaces used for the workshops, we recruited 10 participants in Glasgow and nine participants in London. The tables immediately below summarise the composition of the two groups by gender, age, and housing tenure. Overall, the workshops comprised of nine men and 10 women; most age groups were represented save for those aged 18-24 and 55-64; and there was an even spread across housing tenures.

Table 3: Gender of participants

	Glasgow	London	Total
Male	5	4	9
Female	5	5	10
Total	10	9	19

Table 4: Age of participants (grouped)

	Glasgow	London	Total
18-24	0	0	0
25-34	3	0	3
35-44	1	3	4
45-54	2	2	4
55-64	0	0	0
65+	4	4	8
Total	10	9	19

Table 5: Participants' housing tenure types

	Glasgow	London	Total
Private tenant	3	3	6
Council of Housing Association tenant	3	3	6
Owner occupier	4	2	6
Other	0	1	1
Total	10	9	19

Eleven of the 19 participants reported having some experience of at least one of the three housing policies being discussed. Of these, six participants had direct experience of the Council Tax discount only, one had experienced the “Bedroom Tax” only, while two people reported direct experience of both policies. One participant had experience only of the Shared Accommodation Rate, and only one person had experienced all three policies at different points in time. The remaining eight participants reported no direct experience of any of the three policies. The results are shown in Figure 2, below.

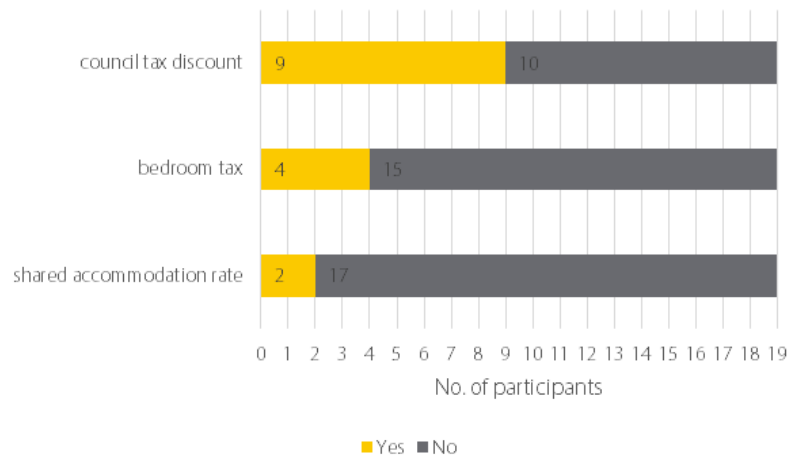


Figure 2: Number of participants with experience of one or more of the three policies (n=19)

In addition to direct experience, we also measured participants’ self-reported awareness of each policy prior to their participation in the research. The results are shown in Figure 3, below. These data show that, overall, initial levels of awareness were highest for the single occupant Council Tax discount (presumably because it is universally applied and several participants reported direct experience of the discount) and lowest for the Shared Accommodation Rate (which only applies to people under the age of 35, a demographic not well represented in our sample). Levels of awareness of the “Bedroom Tax” were more mixed, which may be due both to the fact that it applies to social housing tenants only and is fully mitigated in Scotland through Discretionary Housing Payments.

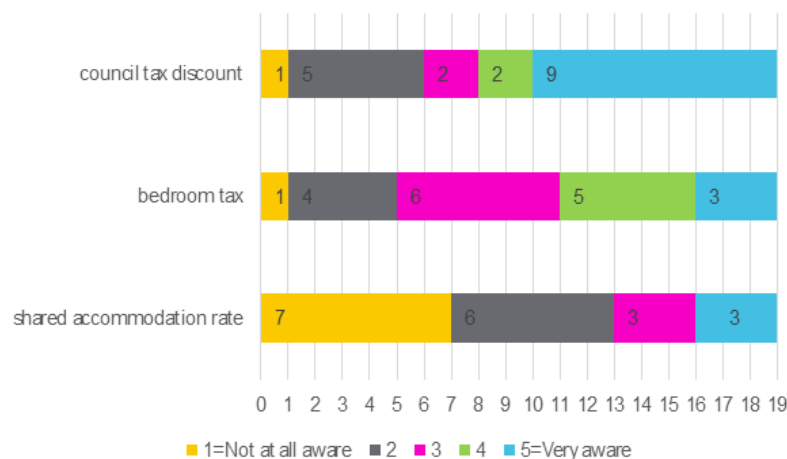


Figure 3: Participants’ initial levels of awareness of the three policies (n=19)

In summary, while our sample is relatively small and to some degree self-selecting, its composition by gender, age, and housing tenure, as well as the varying levels of lived experience and awareness of each policy, allowed us to tap into different viewpoints and experiences in two of the largest UK cities, each with very different housing market pressures.

3.4 Providing participants with information

Given that the deliberative approach aims to reach people’s informed and considered judgements we provided participants with information on each policy for use in their deliberations. This information was provided in the form of written and oral briefings, academic expertise, and examples of lived experience.

Written and oral briefings were presented to participants prior to commencing deliberations. Written briefing notes of 1-2 pages were sent to participants by email one week prior to the workshop and were available in hard copy for reference on the day. Participants also received oral briefings at the start of each discussion session (see Figure 1). In each case, the briefings provided answers to key questions about the policy in question, including:

- the name of the policy;
- when it was introduced;
- what it means in practice (with examples);
- exemptions (where applicable);
- why the policy was introduced (i.e., what it was intended to achieve); and,
- why some people oppose the measures.

We chose not to include information on the cost of each policy so that participants were focused on the values underpinning policies rather than cost-effectiveness. Participants also had access to academic expertise via the research team throughout the day. They were encouraged to ask questions, especially following the oral briefings at the start of each discussion session, as well as during and after each discussion.

We also made innovative use of vignettes to bring lived experience into deliberations. In advance of the workshops, we identified six individuals with current or recent lived experience of the policies in question (two people for each policy) and filmed short interviews with them. The edited recordings were presented to participants in the form of a series of 2–3-minute vignettes featuring accounts of the interviewees’ experiences and their own subjective assessments of the policy in question. We supplemented these six vignettes with an additional three hypothetical scenarios, or “disrupters”, which we used to encourage participants to consider the issues from a different perspective. As outlined in Figure 1, within each 90-minute session, the relevant set of lived experience vignettes was introduced following the first round of deliberations, and the hypothetical scenario was introduced following the second round of deliberations. The vignettes/scenarios for each policy are summarised below.

Table 6: Summary of vignettes/scenarios used in deliberative workshops

1) Single occupant Council Tax Discount
Helen is 73 and lives alone in a 3-bedroom house which she and her late husband bought from the local council through the right to buy scheme. She is a retired teacher who lives on a small pension. She receives a discount of about £300 on her annual £1,200 Council Tax bill (so pays about £900 per year).

Jess is 35. She is a single mother with 1 child. She and her child live in a 3-bedroom house which she recently bought on a mortgage after living in the private rented sector for some years. She works full-time as a social worker and receives a salary of more than £30,000 per year. She receives a discount of about £450 on her £1,800 Council Tax bill (and so pays about £1,350 per year).

Vishal (disrupter) is 35 and works as a bond trader in the City of London. He earns £250,000 a year – with bonuses on top of that. He lives alone in a new 3-bedroom apartment valued at £1.2 million. The full Council Tax on the property is £3,000 per year, but because Vishal lives alone, he received a discount of £750.

2) Shared Accommodation Rate

Martin is 34 years old and has been in receipt of the Shared Accommodation Rate since at least 2017. He was employed continuously until he lost his job in 2020 due to COVID-19 lockdowns and his ability to work is now limited by multiple disabilities and health conditions. He rents a 1-bedroom flat for £700pcm for which he receives £380 in housing support as part of his UC claim. Martin therefore must top up his rent by £320 per month. While he now receives an enhanced UC payment, Martin has waited 4 years for official diagnoses and the results of assessments which should exempt him from the Shared Accommodation Rate. However, he is 35 in four months, at which point he will no longer be subject to the Shared Accommodation Rate.

Georgina is 34 years old. She has moved from city to city and in each place has reluctantly lived in shared accommodation with up to 4 other people. She now lives in a 2-bedroom flat which she shares with one other person. She is in receipt of UC because she is too ill to work. Her rent is £350pcm (excluding bills). She receives £295 per month in housing support as part of her UC claim, a shortfall of £55 per month. This is likely to arise from a combination of the LHA ceiling for the area in which Georgina lives and the lower Shared Accommodation Rate that she receives. Georgina would not choose to live in shared accommodation but cannot afford to rent a self-contained property where the shortfall in rent support may be even greater.

Ken (disrupter) is 18 and recently left school. He lives with his parents on the outskirts of Sheffield. He has his own bedroom in a 3-bedroom house. But Ken wants to live independently of his parents and is looking for a studio flat closer to his place of work - a pizza restaurant in the city centre. He works 16 hours per week on minimum wage, and therefore does not pay income tax.

3) Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (the “Bedroom Tax”)

Louise lives with her partner and two young children – 1 girl and 1 boy – in a 3-bedroom property. Louise receives £440 per month towards her £545 rent because she is considered to have a spare room. However, Louise also has an older stepdaughter who stay on weekends, and she thinks that children of different sexes should not be made to share rooms. Louise therefore must top up her rent by £105 per month.

Karen is 55 years old. She used to share her home with her partner and her son, but they have both since left leaving Karen alone in a 2-bedroom house. She was working but left her job to care for a sick parent and moved onto Universal Credit. However, because she under occupies her home she so she was only entitled to £319 of her £380 monthly rent. She therefore must make up £61 per month.

Judith (disrupter) was married with three children, but her husband was killed in an accident at work. Judith could no longer afford the mortgage and became homeless. She is now living in temporary accommodation, which she says is damp and is worsening her daughter’s asthma. She will live there until a suitable social rented property becomes available – but that’s likely to be a long time.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The research was considered and approved by the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee as part of the CaCHE ethics approval. All participants (including the pilot and workshop participants

and the interviewees who shared their lived experience in the form of vignettes) took part in the research on a voluntary basis. They were all provided with participant information sheets, had a chance to ask questions, and gave their informed consent to data being used for the purposes of this research. To maintain anonymity, all participant names have been replaced by pseudonyms. Upon completion of the project, all personal data were deleted (including video recordings). Audio recordings and transcriptions are encrypted and stored on a secure drive and will be retained for 10 years in line with the University of Glasgow's Code of Good Practice in Research.

3.6 Analysis and interpretation

Both workshops were audio and video recorded and were transcribed professionally. The analysis was divided between three of the researchers so that each researcher took one policy and analysed the transcript for both Glasgow and London. This approach helped to ensure a level of consistency, as well as facilitating identification of any similarities and/or differences in the way a given policy was viewed in each location. Shorter written summaries were produced for each policy area, drawing out key quotes and observations. The same approach was used to summarise the discussions that took place in the final prioritisation sessions of each workshop. These summaries were then analysed together to identify key themes and draw out the values underpinning each policy.

3.7 Summary

The research adopts a deliberative approach to explore values underpinning three contested housing policies that influence levels of housing consumption in the UK: the single occupant Council Tax discount, the LHA Shared Accommodation Rate, and the "Bedroom Tax". Through participation in deliberative workshops and deliberative polling, participants in Glasgow and London used the information supplied, along with examples of lived experience, to attempt to come to a collective view on what a minimum space standard should be.

4. Outcomes

In this section, we present the outcomes of the Glasgow and London workshops. In each case, the three contested housing policies - the single person Council Tax discount, the Shared Accommodation Rate, and the “Bedroom Tax” – are dealt with in turn, followed by a summary of the prioritisation discussion that took place at the end of each workshop (see Figure 1). We begin with the Glasgow workshop.

4.1 Glasgow

4.1.1 Single occupant Council Tax Discount

Participants were asked to begin their deliberations by considering the following questions:

- Is it fair/reasonable that all single occupants are entitled to a discounted rate of Council Tax?
- Should all single occupants be entitled to the discounted rate regardless of (a) their income, (b) the value of their property?
- Are there any circumstances in which a single occupant should pay the full rate?

From the outset, there was broad agreement that it was fair and reasonable for all single occupants to receive the discounted Council Tax rate, regardless of their income or the value of their property. The rationale was that Council Tax is partly a service charge, so it is fair to give a discount to single occupants who typically use fewer services than larger households. This sentiment is captured in the following statement:

Council Tax discount is not a benefit... it's a rate you're paying for services and charges that the council provides, so I think the concept of thinking of somebody who's got money should be paying full whack is false: we're all paying for the services and it's a discount because there's only one of you as opposed to a pair (Arthur, 65+, owner occupier).

There were however some dissenting voices, particularly, it seemed, from younger participants living in private rented accommodation, as the following comment demonstrates:

if you're in social [housing] and you're on low income and you're single you should receive the discount, but if you're in a quarter of a million pound mansion, and you're on £100,000 a year, and it's your own property, or as I say, it's from a private landlord, then I think there should be a cap at least put on it [i.e. you should get a smaller discount or none at all]. (Jack, 25-34, private tenant)

Several participants advocated reforming the Council Tax system: Jack clearly felt that there should be some element of means testing based on income and/or the value of the property; while another participant, Amelia (25-34, private tenant) thought that some alternative mechanism could operate once a person is earning a “super high income”. In both cases, income and property value were important considerations. However, another private tenant of a similar age did not share their opinion: “I don't think it should matter about people's income because everybody's got their own personal struggles and we don't also know... how their income's going to be affected if things change” (Ava, 35-44, private tenant). Others highlighted the administrative cost of means-testing the discount.

The discussion of means testing was followed by some discussion on the transparency of the Council Tax (i.e. what services it is used to pay for), the complexities of claiming it (i.e. one participant spoke at length about being eligible for the discount but never having been able to claim it despite trying), and the wider role that social housing

providers increasingly play in terms of supporting tenants to claim benefits and entitlements. Some suggested that private landlords and other public services (e.g., GPs) could also support people in this way.

At the end of this initial round of discussion, the majority felt the discount is fair, while a few still thought that income (more than property values) should be considered with those on the highest incomes receiving no discount.

Participants were then presented with two examples of lived experience: Helen (a retired teacher living on a small pension) and Jess (a social worker and single mother with one child) (see Table 6). They were asked to consider the following two questions:

- Should Helen and Jess both be entitled to the Council Tax discount?
- If you had to choose one of them, who would get the discount, and why?

Participants generally agreed that both Helen and Jess should get the discount and struggled to choose between them. Despite some key differences in their respective situations, one participant argued: “There’s no circumstances that are different for the two of them. They’re both single, and they’re both in a property, so the entitlement is a single occupant discount on Council Tax. That’s the way I take it: it’s black and white.” (George, 45-54, social tenant). Likewise, another commented “...if you had to choose, you wouldn’t because the answer is they’re both entitled to it” (Arthur, 65+, owner occupier). This appears to suggest that other factors (e.g., income, age, employment status, number of dependents) were not as important as the fact that both are single adults using fewer services than larger households; they are both eligible, therefore both should get the discount.

A couple of participants suggested that Helen needed additional support. One participant implied that her circumstances (living alone on a state pension) suggest that she might need the 25% discount more than Jess (who is in full-time employment on above average pay albeit with one dependent). The same participant noted however that this was “not a problem to be solved by the Council Tax discount; that’s a problem with [the] welfare benefit system... if there’s issues with Helen’s income, that should be resolved through a different route than the Council Tax discount” (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant). In a similar vein, another participant suggested that Helen should be helped to downsize to a smaller home which could help to reduce some of her living costs (e.g., heating bills).

Similarly, it was noted that households with children will use more services which led one other participant to favour Helen over Jess:

if I really had to choose, I probably would choose Helen because older people have... some don’t have dependents, you know what I mean? Some people don’t socialise in the community; they keep themselves to themselves. If they can receive any sort of assistance, I really think that they should... I know that obviously people on low incomes really need the help as well, but if you’re saying, if you had to choose, I would choose Helen (Jack, 25-34, private tenant).

From this perspective, the presence (or not) of dependents was the key consideration, more so than age or income.

The focus returned to income when we introduced the first “disrupter”, the hypothetical case of Vishal, a bond trader with an income and property value significantly higher than the national average (see Table 6). Participants engaged in a third round of discussion and were asked if Vishal should be entitled to the discount. Several participants agreed that he should get the discount because he is eligible simply by being a single occupant. “If you want to follow the same standards as you’ve said before” argued one participant, “then, “yes [he should get the discount]” (Oliver, 25-34, owner occupier).

As deliberations came to an end, the majority position appeared to be that all single occupants should be entitled to the Council Tax discount. However, at least one participant, who used to be employed by the local authority, disagreed, on the basis that income and property value should be taken into account, stating that “at some level,

there has to be a cut off” (John, 65+, social housing tenant); another participant noted the regressive nature of the Council Tax and again made the case for reforming it completely (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant).

4.1.2 Shared Accommodation Rate

Participants were asked to begin their deliberations by considering the following questions:

- is it fair that under 35s receive a lower rate of housing benefit (based on local room letting rates) than those aged 35 and over?
- are there some circumstances where exemptions should apply?
- is 35 the right cut off point?

There was immediate agreement that “age should not matter” (John, 65+, social tenant) and that the policy was “not fair in the slightest” (Olivia, 45-54, social tenant). One participant suggested that commitments tend to increase with age and over 35s should therefore be entitled to a higher rate of housing benefit (Oliver, 25-34, owner occupier). However, this argument was very quickly dismissed by several participants who clearly felt that the policy was unfair:

I get what you mean about commitments, but you can have commitments at 18 because you have a poor relationship with your parents, you have to move out... and there isn't exemptions for that... You're still going to have the same bills, particularly in relation to housing (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant).

I turned 35 last week and my outgoings are the exact same this week as they were last week. There's no difference at all! (Ava, 35-44, private tenant).

One participant drew a parallel with the housing needs of older people, referring to the earlier discussion on the Council Tax discount and whether older people should be encouraged or even forced to downsize. The same sentiment – that people should be able to exercise individual choice – was applied in both discussions. In other words, if an older person can choose to under occupy and benefit from a Council Tax discount, then younger people should also be able to choose to live in self-contained accommodation rather than being “forced” to share with “strangers”. The group appeared to place a lot of value on individual choice.

Words like “punitive”, “discriminatory” and “unfair” were used by several participants to describe the policy, one of whom stated “I don't understand how this has operated for so long without challenge. It feels really clearly like age-based discrimination, and I can't see a justification for it” (Arthur, male, 65+, owner occupier).

There was also some discussion about how a change in individual circumstances (e.g., becoming ill, unemployed, etc.) could force some people on to housing benefit where they did not need to claim before. It was felt that in such circumstances the higher rate of housing benefit for those aged 35 and over could effectively support them to stay in their home; while the lower Shared Accommodation Rate for those aged under 35 could result in them becoming homeless, if they had nowhere else to go. One participant, who previously worked as an allocations officer in social housing, said:

... when you look at the demographic of people under 35 that are single and they're looking for accommodation, I would think it's predominantly men separated from partners because traditionally it's women [who] would have kids in the household... I see the younger guys that are coming through looking for accommodation, you can't get anything in the private sector because of the restrictions on these rates, which then moves more pressure onto the social housing sector, so it's creating more problems than it's resolving. (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant).

Participants referred to specific groups (e.g., prison leavers, army discharges) who might find themselves more at risk of homelessness than others due to this policy. It was noted that those people who have been resident in a

homeless hostel for three months are exempt from the Shared Accommodation Rate (i.e., they receive the higher rate of housing benefit based on local room lettings rates), whereas so-called “sofa-surfers” or the hidden homeless fall through the gaps by virtue of being uncounted in official statistics. This was seen to be unfair.

The discussion on exemptions then broadened out again with one participant noting that “from what everybody’s saying, I’m taking it that the circumstances where you should receive more or less [housing benefit] are all of the usual circumstances. Like if you receive disability-related benefits or... if you’re earning a slight [i.e. small] amount... you’ll get less housing costs, so it’s not particularly an age-related thing” (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant). This appeared to imply that if judgements are to be made on whether a person receives more or less housing benefit then these should be means tested or at least determined by factors other than age.

The settled position at the end of this first round of discussion was therefore that age should not be a factor at all. One participant summarised the position as follows:

“The consensus is that it’s not fair. There shouldn’t be an age-related restriction at all. If there was a world in which the policy absolutely had to stay, then there is some issues in terms of the way the exemption for... homeless people [is applied] ... if [the policy] had to stay, that certainly needs to change. But we’d like it to go altogether”. She continued: “In terms of where finding the right cut-off point was, if we want it to go completely, then we’re looking at 16 is the point that generally people would be getting in a tenancy, so going from that age up. Minimum age, I suppose, would be the cut-off point.” (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant).

Participants were then asked to consider two examples of lived experience: Martin and Georgina (Table 6). However, neither Martin’s nor Georgina’s situation changed the group’s conclusions. If anything, the two scenarios seemed to harden opposition to the policy, as the following quotes from participants of different ages shows:

It probably reinforces it [my view]. I think it’s particularly dehumanising making this arbitrary line in the sand between people under 35 and over 35. I think people should get the rate regardless of age. I think it’s infantilising people that are 34 years of age, I think the two of them [Martin and Georgina] were, I mean, it’s illogical to me. But, yes, I find it quite upsetting watching them, to be honest, because they’re clearly paying out money that they don’t have to live. (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant).

I can relate a lot with Martin. I’m suffering from anxiety and depression, I’m signed off work at the moment, and it just kind of hit home, and I completely agree with everybody in the consensus that age should just be stopped altogether, and it should be the minimum requirement, you know, 16 plus. It’s crazy that this is a policy from the mid-90s and then updated in 2012. (Jack, 25-34, private tenant).

It just seems to be a piece of legislation where adults are treated like children... it’s a backwards piece of legislation, in many respects, and it’s a bean counter’s policy, that’s all it is. A binary approach, there’s no humanity in it. (Arthur, 65+, owner occupier).

We then introduced the second “disrupter” – the hypothetical case of Ken, an 18-year-old looking to branch out on his own but with limited income to support himself (see Table 6). This scenario generated more discussion and disagreement than in previous rounds.

On the one hand, a couple of participants raised doubts about Ken’s maturity and his ability to look after himself and sustain a tenancy. The same participant who had previously described the policy as “treating adults like children”, stated: “He’s only 18, he’s only getting minimum wage, he can’t afford to move into a flat. He wants to move out, a lot of kids do, but he can’t afford to, so why should the taxpayer subsidise him to do so?” (Arthur, 65+, owner occupier). On the other hand, several participants brought the discussion back to individual choice and the irrelevance of age:

I think it’s giving him individual choice, and the fact that he’s that age doesn’t mean that he’s not able to sustain a tenancy and look after himself. You know, I don’t think you can have a

sweeping judgment that at that age people aren't able to live an independent life. You can apply for a council house I think... for social housing when you're 16. (Ivy, 65+, owner occupier)

I think he's shown initiative because he wants to move closer to his work, so that's like if you invest a wee bit of time in him now when he's 18, then the chances are he might go onto further education, maybe get a better job than working in the pizza place, and then he'll become a higher rate taxpayer in the end. (Ava, 35-44, private tenant)

If you change absolutely nothing on that apart from change 'Ken is 18' and change it to 20, 30, 40, 50, I mean I could be 38 and have a bedroom in my parent's house and only work sixteen hours a week and earn minimum wage, would you think it's acceptable for me at 38 to be living with my parents... or at 28 to be living with my parents? It's entirely playing on views of people at 18, and people at 18 are perfectly capable and are legally capable so therefore should get an adult's entitlement. (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant)

Following these exchanges, the group remained more divided than before. There was a clear consensus for much of the discussion. The group felt that the policy was unfair, and that age should not be a factor. Several people noted that the policy treats adults as if they were children. However, as demonstrated above, the consensus began to fall apart somewhat in the final round of discussion when the focus shifted to someone aged 18. Here, other factors started to come into the discussion which simply did not feature when discussing the cases of Martin and Georgina. These factors included maturity, the ability to look after oneself, and the means to sustain a tenancy. Opinion was split between those who felt that an 18-year-old should be able to sustain themselves before leaving home rather than relying on the taxpayer to cover all or part of their housing costs, and those who felt that an 18-year-old should be treated the same as any other adult. There certainly appeared to be consensus however that, if entitlement had to be based on age alone, 35 was far too high a cut-off point.

4.1.3 Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (the "Bedroom Tax")

Participants were asked to begin their deliberations by considering the following questions:

- Is it fair that social housing tenants of working age have their benefits cut if they are judged to be under-occupying their home?
- Are there any circumstances in which a claimant might reasonably be expected to be exempt?

From the outset, it was clear that no one thought the policy was fair. Words like "punitive", "guff", "nasty", and "discriminating" were used to describe the policy. The "Bedroom Tax" evoked a stronger response from participants than the other policies. Everyone disagreed with the supposed rationale of the policy, which we explained was "to provide social tenants suitable housing with a financial incentive to leave accommodation which is too large" (see Appendix A). This may be because the "Bedroom Tax" attracted more media attention than the other two policies, although we do not wish to speculate too much as to why people hold the views that they do. One participant argued that "it's not really [an] incentive" (Olivia, 45-54, social tenant), while another added it is "a negative way of addressing a problem for the powers that be", adding that "in our local authority area, there's a financial incentive for people in social housing to downsize if they wish, so the power is with the individual in that case. Now, this [i.e., the Bedroom Tax] seems punitive" (Lottie, 65+, owner occupier). A third felt that the policy was tantamount to "bullying" and that the real incentive was to save the government money. He asked: "where are these people going to go because there isn't the housing available? It's absolute bollocks" (Arthur, 65+, owner occupier).

A key theme that emerged from the discussion was the disconnect between the policy's underlying assumptions and the realities of modern family life. Jack was critical, for example, of the stipulation that children under the age

of nine must share a bedroom regardless of gender. He added:

...it's discriminating against parents of older children. When that child moves out of the house and they will then have a spare bedroom, so they will eventually... suffer this tax, and if they have more than one child, that's a quarter of their rent that's being cut... that's quite a considerable reduction (Jack, 25-34, private tenant).

Several of the older participants said they were in such a position themselves, where their children had either grown up and moved out or only lived with them part-time, and they therefore required additional bedrooms for when their children came to stay. As one participant put it: "...as a mum with five kids, as they grow up, I want the spare bedrooms in case they have a relationship go duff and come back." (Olivia, 45-54, social tenant). Another summarised the situation as follows:

[there is] no exemption or account taken of children whose main residence is elsewhere... if you're in a broken family, it's basically saying you can't have a spare bedroom for your kids at the weekend or three days a week. It fails... the family... the children in that respect. (Arthur, 65+, owner occupier).

On exemptions, there was agreement that carers and those with a disability should be exempt. Several participants also suggested that the lack of suitable alternative accommodation should also be considered a valid exemption.

Jack (25-34, private tenant) effectively captured the consensus at the end of this first round of deliberation when he stated that the removal of the spare room subsidy "is definitely having a more detrimental impact on the most vulnerable in society... the vast majority of people in the UK are still suffering from this, and it's not even achieving the goals that it set out to achieve." He also stated, "so we are firmly of the consensus, no it's not fair at all... we're incredibly lucky in Scotland, that the Scottish Government has implemented discretionary housing payment [to mitigate the effects of the Bedroom Tax]".

Participants were then introduced to two examples of lived experience: Louise (who lives with her partner, son, and daughter in a 3-bedroom property and has a stepdaughter stay on weekends) and Karen (who has lived alone in a 2-bedroom property since her partner and son left) (see Table 6). Participants were asked:

- Does Louise's or Karen's story reinforce or change your views?
- Are there any circumstances in which the taxpayer should be expected to cover the extra rent for social housing that is under-occupied?
- Should those who have but do not need a spare bedroom be encouraged to downsize?

These real-life examples seemed to reinforce people's views rather than change them. As one participant stated, "That makes me so angry, both stories. I'm absolutely disgusted that a government would impose such a penalty on people. Like I said, the most vulnerable are suffering because of this... What right does the Government have to 'incentivise'... people to downgrade?" (Jack, 25-34, private tenant). Participants generally felt the decision on whether to downsize or not should be the choice of each tenant, although they did highlight the additional stress that can be caused for some people because of increases in bills or looking after a very large property. As one participant noted:

... if there was something a bit smaller that's desirable in the area where... support and sort of more facilities for example, you know, depending on what different people are looking for and need... it's about enabling, isn't it... it's about creating the environment where people have got a choice, rather than just getting told what to do. (Ivy, 65+, owner occupier).

There was some discussion on the importance of community, and it was generally agreed the policy aim of

“incentivising” people to move to smaller properties outwith their own communities was unfair. The potential for disrupting the education of school-age children who might be forced to move school or have little space to do homework because of having to move to a smaller home was also discussed. Several participants felt that no matter the economic “incentive”, they themselves would not be forced to move out of their home and community and did not feel that others should be made to either. This second round of discussion ended with a clear consensus that the “Bedroom Tax” is unfair.

We then introduced the third “disrupter” – the hypothetical case of Judith, a single mother with three children, living in temporary accommodation while awaiting a social housing allocation (see Table 6). Participants were asked what they would say to Judith. A third round of discussion focused on the housing crisis in the UK. Various issues were discussed including the nature of social housing, the shortfall in smaller one and two-bedroomed homes, the problem of second homes and short-term lets in Edinburgh, and the perceived failure of government to deal adequately with these issues. However, participants found it difficult to address Judith’s situation.

As Amelia (25-34, private tenant) summarised, “we were quite happy for [Louise and Karen] to not be subject to Bedroom Tax... there was no reason for them to have their housing benefit reduced or housing cost element reduced. That was pretty clear. In terms of Judith... I think we all came to the consensus it’s a wider problem... [Judith’s situation is] not a good enough reason to make someone move out of their home to free it up for someone else when there’s... 50,000 empty homes floating about... there isn’t a good reason to deduct someone’s housing benefit, we couldn’t find any need to do that”.

4.1.4 Priorities

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the role of the Treasury and, faced with limited resources, to choose just one of the following three options:

- A. Keep the single occupant Council Tax discount
- B. Abolish the Shared Accommodation Rate for under 35s
- C. Reinststate the spare room subsidy (i.e., abolish the “Bedroom Tax”)

The purpose of this part of the exercise was to encourage prioritisation as a means of eliciting from participants the values that were most important when considering what a minimum residential space standard should be.

All participants were unanimous in choosing option C – abolish the “Bedroom Tax”. This decision was justified on the basis that it was felt to be the “most punitive” (Arthur, 65+, owner occupier) and “has the biggest impact on the lowest income or the hardest hit people and families” (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant). Jack (25-34, private tenant) felt it would be a “unifying thing” to abolish the “Bedroom Tax” if it meant that people living in England and Wales were no longer disadvantaged compared to those living in Scotland and Northern Ireland where the “Bedroom Tax” is fully mitigated. It was also considered by some to be the least “flexible” of the three policies in question: for example, Olivia (45-54, social tenant) argued that people might have paid for adaptations to their home but that the “Bedroom Tax” might, later, force them to move to a smaller property not suited to their needs. The Shared Accommodation Rate, on the other hand, was seen to be more flexible because there it was felt that there is at least an element of choice associated with sharing accommodation.

When given the chance to select two of the options listed above, participants in Glasgow chose option C (abolish the “Bedroom Tax”) and then option B (abolish the Shared Accommodation Rate). Initially, there was some divergence of opinion with two participants favouring option A (keep the Council Tax discount), principally because they benefited personally from the discount. However, the group finally reached consensus on option B on the basis of the following argument: “[Option] A affects probably the most amount of people, but [option] C probably affects the lowest income group because it’s an element of full housing benefit, and B is probably the

next one after that in terms of the people that it does affect have the lower incomes again” (Amelia, 25-34, private tenant). This argument, and the suggestion that under 35s could be at greater risk of homelessness because of the Shared Accommodation Rate, saw the group reach consensus on prioritising the abolition of the “Bedroom Tax” and the Shared Accommodation Rate, even if it means that all single occupants had to pay more Council Tax.

4.2 London

4.2.1 Single occupant Council Tax Discount

Participants were asked to begin their deliberations by considering the same set of questions as their counterparts in Glasgow. There was general agreement that the taxation system in its current form is neither fair nor reasonable, and that the single occupant Council Tax discount is bound up with these wider inequalities in housing and taxation. As one participant put it: “the Council Tax system itself isn’t fair... so how can we expect any policy around it that tinkers with it to be fair and reasonable as well?” (Joshua, male, 35-44, private tenant).

Opinion was divided on whether all single occupants should receive the Council Tax discount, as the following quotes demonstrate:

I don’t think all single people should be entitled to a discounted Council Tax because somebody who works in the city and earns £650,000 in bonus alone, let alone whatever else, she would have twenty-five per cent Council Tax discount, what, they should pay twice as much, and so, no, it can never be [fair], that sort of one-size-fits-all [approach] is completely wrong when you’re talking about tax, completely wrong in every respect. (Florence, 65+, social tenant).

I think it is fair, because if you consider your earnings you get taxed in a different way about your earnings, so if you earn £650,000 a year you pay a huge amount of NI or national insurance, whatever else, you get taxed on that, I think here it’s just based on your occupancy and your residency, and I think if you use less of the council facilities and everything else I think you should pay less, and if you use more you should pay more (Mia, 45-54, owner occupier).

While income and property values were discussed in Glasgow, the emphasis on extremely high incomes and property values in London is perhaps a reflection of the economic context where both are, on average, much higher than in Glasgow.

The first round of discussion failed therefore to generate consensus. Participants were then presented with the lived experience examples of Helen (the retired teacher) and Jess (the social worker) (see Table 6). They were asked to consider the same questions as their Glasgow counterparts: should they both be entitled to the discount?; and if you had to choose between them, who would get the discount? As in Glasgow, some participants found it very difficult to choose between the two. It was felt that both were likely to need the extra financial support, given that Helen lives on a small pension and Jess lives with a dependent child: “...it’s a very unfortunate decision you have to make”, said one participant, “and I wouldn’t want to be in the position of choosing” (Archie, male, 65+, owner occupier).

However, opinion remained divided. Some participants came down firmly in favour of one or the other, as the following quotes demonstrate:

Helen shouldn’t get it and Jess should get it... Helen has three bedrooms, she lives on her own, she has the possibility to derive income from those bedrooms by letting them out, or she should downsize and move into a smaller home, or... she has a possibility of getting some cashflow going by re-mortgaging the property which is probably worth quite a lot of money by

now... Jess should [get the discount] because she has a child where her spend is going to only increase as the child gets older and so on and so forth (Florence, female, 65+, social tenant).

I think Helen was entitled [to the discount], Jess not sure... even the way she was talking it was like “well I’ve got fifty quid to buy this”, whereas I felt with Helen that [discount] was needed... if you can afford to own a house, a three bedroom house, that you are under-occupying, is forty-five quid a month really that much to you?... it’s all very judgemental, and I agree she’ll [Jess] most likely use more services having a child... I think Helen selling her house at this point in life would probably be a massive task (Lily, female, 35-44, private tenant).

Thus, while some found it difficult to differentiate between the two, others felt that one or other was more deserving based on factors including age, income, number of dependents, and perceived use of council services.

We then introduced the first “disrupter”, the hypothetical case of Vishal, the bond trader (see Table 6). Participants were asked if he should be entitled to the discount or not. To some extent, the group pre-empted this scenario (as shown in the quotes above), and there was general agreement that he should not be entitled to the discount based on his income, even if he uses fewer services as a single occupant.

As in Glasgow, there was discussion about how a means-tested Council Tax reduction could be administered. Equating the Council Tax discount with welfare benefits, one participant argued that “no benefit should be means tested... benefits should be universal” (Archie, 65+, owner occupier). Another qualified this argument, stating that: “if it means that Helen and Jess get it, and there’s no way to differentiate it [i.e. means test it] then, well I’m not saying that I think Vishal should [get the discount], but I think him not paying it [the full rate of Council Tax] makes it worth the other two getting it, if you know what I mean.” (Emily 35-44, private tenant). In other words, Emily was not prepared to see Helen and Jess penalised to prevent Vishal from getting a discount on his Council Tax.

In the end, all participants agreed that Helen and Jess should both receive the single occupant discount, but there was clearly a difference of opinion among participants if they had to choose between the two. There was a view among some participants that income and property value should be considered, and therefore most participants agreed that Vishal should not be entitled to the discount.

4.2.2 Shared Accommodation Rate

Participants were asked to begin their deliberations by considering the same set of questions as their Glasgow counterparts. Initial responses seemed to suggest that the Shared Accommodation Rate is unfair. There were several parallels with the discussion held in Glasgow. For example, participants used similar language to those in Glasgow (e.g., “unfair” and “ageist”) to describe the policy, as the following quotes demonstrate:

In my opinion it’s completely unfair because the needs [of under 35s] are just the same as anybody else’s [needs]. (Isaac, 45-54, housing tenure not stated, emphasis added).

I think under 35s have a particularly raw deal when it comes to not getting all their rent paid or whatever it happens to be when they’re struggling to get their life together. (Grace, 65+ social tenant, emphasis added).

I don’t think it’s fair, I’m surprised it passed an equality impact assessment because I think it’s ageist, because it just makes a massive assumption purely on your age. (Lily, 35-44, private tenant, emphasis added).

One participant (Joshua, 35-44, private tenant) even suggested that if eligibility was to be decided purely on age, then it would make more sense for those over 35 to receive a lower rate of housing benefit on the basis that they were perhaps also more likely to be earning more than those under 35. This did not appear to be a serious

suggestion but rather a way of illustrating that the policy did not make sense to him and was unfair.

Like their Glasgow counterparts, London participants put emphasis on a person's need rather than their age, as well as the importance of enabling individuals to exercise choice:

if somebody under twenty-five applies for housing benefit then their situation is looked at and if their circumstances warrant them getting housing benefit, I don't see what the difference is (David, 65+, social tenant).

Yeah, I'm with [David], I think it's totally unfair, both from the beginning to the end, I think each person is very much an individual and has got their own needs and requirements that are different to any others, and yeah, each of them needs to be looked at individually (Mia, 45-54, owner occupier).

Highlighting the circumstances faced by specific groups (e.g. young men, army leavers, those with mental ill health), one participant linked independent living to a "sense of self-dignity", adding that "you can't turn round to people like that and say well actually we're going to take twenty-five per cent of your rent off you, so you'll never get on an even keel, you'll never get level." (Grace, 65+, social tenant).

Another participant described the policy as "economically counterproductive" adding "when you're younger... people are much more work elastic... able to move from place to place... and if you're doing anything to prohibit that I think that has a counter effect on the economy so it's unfair and I don't think the policy works." (Isaac, 45-54, housing tenure not stated).

Another participant drew on her own experience to suggest that some young people could face a greater risk of becoming homeless because of the Shared Accommodation rate:

I've been on housing benefit before when I was under 25, and I think I must have had this introduced, and the rent I was paying on my house, the housing benefit did not cover it and I had no income coming in, so I didn't understand how I was meant to pay for my rent, so you can see how people do become homeless from it, and I still had all the same outgoings as I have now as someone who's 35, and, yeah, I couldn't go and live back with my parents, that isn't an option, they don't financially support me in any way, so yeah, I don't see why there's a difference. (Emily, 35-44, private tenant).

However, participants in London also discussed issues that received less attention in Glasgow. One participant brought the focus back to the policy goal of incentivising younger people to share accommodation by asking the group: "Do you think it's right that people have to share, or should everyone be able to live on their own no matter what age they are?" (Emily, 35-44, private tenant). This sparked some interesting exchanges about whether people have a "right" to self-contained accommodation. One participant thought this was an absolute right, "beyond question" (Grace, 65+, social tenant), while another participant suggested that no one should have the "right" to self-contained accommodation in the context of a housing crisis: "in the time of housing crisis, that's not obvious to me that that should be considered a right because we've got people living on the streets, we've got families in temporary accommodation in one room, it's not obvious to me that that right still, I mean currently is applicable." (Archie, 65+, owner occupier). Another participant stated: "If we had the right to do it [live in self-contained accommodation], and that right was enforced, we wouldn't have a housing crisis because the housing market would be focused on sustaining people in secure tenancies that were affordable." (Joshua, 35-44, PRS).

The consensus at the end of this initial round of discussion was that, in a perfect world, people should have the right to live in their own self-contained accommodation but that, even in an imperfect world, it was unfair that those aged under 35 received a lower rate of housing benefit than those aged 35 years and over, purely based on age.

Following this initial round of discussion, the group was asked to consider the lived experience examples of Martin and Georgina (see Table 6). Martin's situation led to some confusion about why he was on the Shared

Accommodation Rate while living in self-contained accommodation. Once this was cleared up, there was some discussion about the fairness of private rents, generally, and a suggestion that rents should be capped. There was not much discussion beyond this. Having heard both Martin and Georgina's situation the group still thought that the Shared Accommodation Rate was unfair. If there were any dissenting voices or different perspectives these were not heard at this stage.

The discussion quickly moved onto our second "disrupter" – the hypothetical case of Ken, the 18-year-old who wants to leave home (see Table 6). As in Glasgow, this scenario divided opinion. Initial responses to Ken's situation focused on his income, maturity, and ability to sustain himself:

I think that it shouldn't necessarily be applied to him, but not because of his age, it's because he's only working sixteen hours a week, and that's a significant difference... if you're working sixteen hours a week it might be a tall stretch to expect him to be kind of [self-sufficient] and then pay for your rent... this is distinctly different from the other two [Martin and Georgina] (Isaac, 45-54, housing tenure not stated).

...he could do with talking to somebody who's actually going to say to him something like "look, at eighteen why don't you stay with Mum and Dad, go to college, pick yourself up two or three A levels, think about what you want to do next, whether you want to be a carpenter or a surgeon or whatever". (Grace, 65+, social tenant).

However, another participant interjected: "I mean, he is an adult" (Emily, 35-44, private tenant). Another participant agreed, stating that: "age should not come into it so he should get [the same as] someone over 35 would get, doing the job, the same hours..." (Lily, 35-44, private tenant). Lily continued:

I think it's amazing at eighteen he is wanting to be independent, he is working, I get that it's in the city centre so probably more expensive than living on the outskirts, but I would encourage that independence, and looking at the job and looking at the location he's probably from a working class background where I think it is more common to leave your parents' house and seek that independence.

This argument attracted some support from other participants. The debate then briefly centred on the role of the state vis-à-vis family and the individual. One participant argued that "benefits should be universal" (Archie, 65+, owner occupier) while another suggested "he should be encouraged to stay with his parents" (Florence, 65+, social tenant).

Another attempted to qualify the situation:

the whole thing about 35/25 is absolute rubbish and it's unfair, but if somebody is at home and if there's not a situation of family breakdown and whatever, then I think that the situation here is that the encouragement should be for him to find his own way, either by the education thing or becoming an entrepreneur or whatever, but to actually encourage that standing on one's own feet. And I've been through this in my own life but also with children, so I ask myself the question, when my children were 18 would I have been happy that they were just suddenly supported by the state, and I thought hey, hold on a moment, they've got to stand on their own two feet, it's a value judgement. (David, 65+, social tenant).

Unlike in Glasgow, London participants also picked up on Ken's race (we used an image of a young black man in this scenario). It was noted that due to his race he might find it more difficult to rent a property and may also be more vulnerable than people of white racial backgrounds and one participant suggested that for these reasons he should be entitled to more support not less (Archie, 65+, owner occupier).

Ultimately, the consensus was that the policy is unfair. It was agreed that housing benefit should be based on the rent rather than the claimant's age. The cost of rent is the same for those aged under 35 years as it is for those aged 35 years and over. It was felt that everyone should therefore be entitled to the same help regardless of age. Individual circumstances should also be considered, but it was suggested more than once that this should, in some instances, lead to more support not less. However, opinion was divided on whether policy should enable the

achievement of independence or only assist people to sustain pre-existing independence. It was agreed that there should be a right to self-contained accommodation but that this is difficult to enforce in the context of a housing crisis where some people have no home or live in overcrowded or temporary accommodation.

4.2.3 Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (the “Bedroom Tax”)

Participants were asked to begin their deliberations by considering the same set of questions as their Glasgow counterparts: in short, is the policy fair and are there any circumstance in which a benefit claimant might reasonably be exempted? Unlike in Glasgow, opinion was divided from the outset. The majority – seven of nine participants – agreed that the policy is unfair, while the other two felt it was fair. Again, unlike their Glasgow counterparts, who have limited direct experience of the “Bedroom Tax” because of the Scottish Government’s mitigation through Discretionary Housing Payments, participants in London were able to draw on their own experiences (or the experiences of people they know) to support their arguments for and against.

One participant, who felt that the policy is unfair, described his own brief experience of housing benefit, to illustrate his point:

I’m a freelancer and for a period my work situation was less work, and it was quite untenable... I was eligible for housing benefit... and everything worked well, and I lived in an area which was quite okay. It was a small flat, it’s just got one bedroom... very well appointed, very nice, in this nice area. And then I moved to another which was less salubrious, but it’s a bigger house... in all essence it’s got two bedrooms, but really, it’s got one bedroom. I just live by myself, it’s got a bedroom, and on the top floor it is supposed to be a bedroom, but I use it as my home office, and I was still on housing benefit at the time, and I paid less for that house than I paid for my flat, and because I had two bedrooms my housing benefit was deducted. Fortunately, I’m no longer on housing benefit, it wasn’t for long, but it shows you the anomaly... (Isaac, 45-54, housing tenure not stated).

Likewise, Grace (65+, social tenant) spoke of a neighbour with kidney failure who needs his spare room for a dialysis machine and has been penalised by the policy.

In contrast, the minority position was articulated by one participant who stated that “...in a better world I wouldn’t [say it is fair], but I do think it’s a fair policy.” (Lily, 35-44, private tenant). Lily cited the exemptions for those over 66 and those with carers, which she hoped would “protect the most vulnerable” (although she did also feel it was unfair in some very specific cases e.g., no exemption for space needed for storing large medical equipment). Referring more to the underlying principle of the policy, she explained further:

the stereotype of someone say 45 [years old], maybe their kid’s young or their child moves out... and then find themselves in a bigger property than needed, given our current state of housing, I sadly do think it’s fair, I’m not sure of just ultimately cutting someone’s benefit is the way to do it, maybe some better incentives to move and maybe a year’s grace before it comes in (Lily, 35-44, private tenant).

Another participant was more categorical in her response to the question of fairness. She stated that: “...if you are under-occupying your home and you cannot afford that home, you move, you shouldn’t be paid state transfers in order to stay in a particular place, whether that’s your home or not” (Florence, 65+, social housing tenant). However, when asked by another participant if she felt that the policy penalised people who could not downsize due to the shortfall in supply of smaller homes, she appeared to soften her position, accepting that a “one-size-fits-all” policy does not always work, stating that “I do think that benefits or support should be tailored to the needs of the individual”.

Several other participants again emphasised the importance of home. One noted the impact that being displaced from one’s home can cause, particularly for older people: “I’ve seen instances where as soon as you start telling an old person to move or do something, as soon as you introduce that change, you see them go downhill” (Grace,

65+, social tenant). Another highlighted the potential impacts of displacement on families: “[consider] the logistics, where’s work, because it will apply to people with children, it’s not all old families where the youngsters have gone, so then you’ve got [children moving] schools and then you’ve got the housing stock [shortfall] issue.” (Archie, 65+, owner occupier). In both cases, these outcomes were considered unfair and undesirable.

There was some discussion on the availability and quality of data on how many homes are over or underoccupied in each local authority area. One participant describing the policy as an “outrage” and the numbers of underoccupied properties as “a drop in the ocean” (Archie, 65+, owner occupier), while another added that “the council must know that they haven’t got the right housing for all these people to move around into, so how can they then penalise people who already don’t have any money and are on benefits... for something that they [the council] can’t actually provide?” (Emily, 35-44, private tenant). These arguments were accepted even by the hardliners. At one point, for example, Florence (quoted above) suggested that an exemption should exist in cases where the local authority is not able to offer residents a suitable alternative home, as well as for carers and people with disabilities.

As the first round of discussion came to an end, Lily again highlighted the plight of families living in overcrowded accommodation. While not necessarily supporting the “Bedroom Tax” as an effective mechanism for addressing these issues, she said:

...what I think’s missing from this [discussion], is the families that are overcrowded, that are desperately waiting for a bigger property to come up, and I get we don’t have the figures but... do we not want to disincentivise under-occupancy however it’s done to support those families...? Because I know in London, they have massive overcrowding problems. I’m not saying this is the answer, it probably isn’t, but I just think that’s the other side I guess of the argument that we haven’t [fully considered] ... yeah, it’s a home [for those under occupying], but then there’s someone else in a mould-infested two bed with four kids [which] is their reality of home. (Lily, 35-44, private tenant).

At the end of this initial round of discussion there appeared to be general agreement that people in social housing should be encouraged where possible to occupy housing suited to their needs, but that the “Bedroom Tax” is a blunt instrument for delivering such an outcome. There was also general agreement that policy can be detached from reality. In the case of the “Bedroom Tax”, for example, Joshua stated: “We are assuming that there’s enough housing stock to meet need, we’re assuming that there’s enough single one-bedroom houses for the amount of single people out there.” (Joshua, 35-44, private tenant).

Following this initial discussion, participants were asked to consider the lived experience examples of Louise and Karen (see Table 6). Again, as in Glasgow, participants in London were asked if these examples reinforced or changed their views. Participants expressed a great deal of sympathy for both Louise and Karen. One participant questioned how people already on a low income can be expected to find the additional funds to compensate for the shortfall in housing benefit (Emily, 35-44, private tenant). In a statement that seemed to capture the general mood of the room, another stated:

I can’t see any justification for them limiting the benefit to Louise at all, from a fairness point of view, having the accommodation that they have and then having a step-child coming to stay... that surely allows them to keep the full benefit... with Karen’s situation... it just reinforces for me the change in policy... what seems to have happened over the years with these policies is that that aspect of the right to live in your home in peaceful enjoyment or whatever and some sort of expectation that that would continue has been eroded, and instead there’s been put in place all of these policies and cuts and so on, and there seems to be something, well there is something that is completely wrong with it. (David, 65+, social tenant).

Most others agreed. In response to Louise’s situation, both Grace (65+, social tenant) and Joshua (35-44, private tenant) noted that her children would soon be old enough to be eligible for their own bedrooms, so it made little sense to uproot the family now when they would simply have to move again in future to access more space. Isaac (45-54, housing tenure not stated) said of Karen, “she’s invested in her house, and she’s done all these things, and

those things have a value”. Several participants felt that the “Bedroom Tax” is too focussed on economic savings and lacks compassion. As one participant put it: “it just doesn’t take into account any kind of real-world practicalities at all” (Joshua), while another asked “who decides whether someone needs a spare bedroom?” (Archie, 65+, owner occupier).

Lily, who on balance thought the “Bedroom Tax” is fair, drew on her own experience, stating:

...I’m in the private rented sector, I have two children, a girl and a boy that share a bedroom... because I cannot afford a three bedroom, and that is the rule of fairness if you ask me.... the only reason I’m going with the fairness [argument] is if you compare it say to other sectors where you are paying substantially more for worse quality. (Lily, 35-44, private tenant).

Florence responded by suggesting that the private sector “should aspire to move and to match” the quality of social housing, while David (65+, social housing tenant) highlighted the challenges of comparing the two sectors, adding that: “the essential point is that this is about a policy... and the implications of the policy can lead to unfairness, that’s I think the key point, rather than comparing private and social...”. To which Lily responded: “I mean with all of this my theory is most of it is BS because it’s like [we should] build more social housing, stop selling it off, rent caps, but, in the context of what we got, I still think it is fair that if [you are a social housing tenant of working age and] you’ve got a spare bedroom [you should have your benefits cut], because it [a spare bedroom] is a bit of a luxury”.

Participants were again critical of both central and local government and were generally supportive of policies aimed at building more social homes, ending the right to buy, capping private rents, and bringing empty properties back into use. However, at the end of this round of discussion, the group’s position on the “Bedroom Tax” remained largely unchanged. The majority felt that the “Bedroom Tax” is unfair. Minority hard-line positions for the “Bedroom Tax” softened somewhat but remained unchanged overall.

The group was then introduced to our third “disrupter”, the case of Judith, the widowed mother of three living in temporary accommodation (see Table 6). Participants were asked what they would say to Judith. One respondent, who lives close to a homeless families’ unit and has family who have experienced homelessness, started by saying:

Penalising the people before [Louise and Karen] is not going to help Judith at all, [not] one iota, and what we’re talking about today is really underpinned by a failure of housing policy since God knows when. So that’s all [I have to say]. I don’t see how any of the penalising things [i.e., Bedroom Tax] in all of the stuff we’ve spoken about is going to help Judith’s situation. (David, 65+, social tenant).

This sentiment was shared by many in the group who felt the problem was a systemic one, as reflected in the following quote:

...being able to move people on is not addressing the problem, the problem is bigger than that, the problem is that we are under-invested in housing and we’ve got countless policies which prevent us doing the right thing, to enable us to accommodate situations like this, so I might be able to find the solution for Judith, but it doesn’t mean the problem’s not going to continue... that just moves the problem elsewhere and creates other problems. (Isaac, 45-54, housing tenure not stated).

Participants again noted the lack of compassion in housing policies such as the “Bedroom Tax” and, as previously discussed, the Shared Accommodation Rate, with one stating that:

...we need to be a little bit more gentle and a little bit kinder with one another and say okay, how can we best accommodate this, and I’m not saying that there’s automatically going to be that accommodation available or indeed that I would be the one to say to Louise or [Karen]... look you’ve got to move because we’ve got a recently widowed lady with her three children, but I do think that there are ways in which you manage the stuff in such a

way where at least people see that you're doing your best. (Grace, 65+, social tenant).

Some solutions were discussed from the short-term (speaking to one's local councillor or MP) to longer-term policy options (supporting people to convert under-occupied properties to let out to those in need of housing; home-sharing schemes like the one for Ukrainian refugees; local councils working in partnership to find people suitable accommodation, and, of course, building more council houses). One participant claimed: "Bromley Borough... sends its homeless people out into Kent, Canterbury, and it costs so much that they've actually started building houses to house their statutory homeless people because the cost of putting people in temporary accommodation is so high, so it would be cheaper to build council houses." (Archie, 65+, owner occupier).

Once again, the question of means testing benefits arose and opinion was divided between those who felt that each case should be assessed on an individual basis (with some arguing for face-to-face, in-depth interviews for all benefit claimants to make sure they get what they need), while others again highlighted the costs of administering such a system.

Overall, opinion remained divided. The following arguments were put forward in what might be seen as an attempt to find some common ground:

"...is it fair that social housing tenants of working age have their benefits cut?" I can categorically say yes, it is fair [if they're judged to be under-occupying their home], but there is a caveat... they have to be offered alternative housing, those things need to be in place. If those things are in place...then yes, it's fair. If all of those other things are not in place, then it's blatantly unfair. (Isaac, 45-54, housing tenure not stated).

I think that we have essentially agreed that it would be fair to cut them [benefits], provided that the person... is in receipt of an offer of suitable housing, that's near their family, near where they want to be, near a hospital, near whatever it happens to be, maybe get some financial support with actually facilitating the move, making sure the place they're going to isn't damp, is well decorated... all of that stuff, in which case yes, it's a good thing to do, but if you're proposing to send Mary Jane from London to Scotland ...and into a studio flat on the twenty-seventh floor with damp and rats and whatever, then no, it's not acceptable. (Grace, 65+, social tenant).

If there was consensus in the end, it was mostly centred around the lack of justice and compassion in the housing policies discussed, the disconnect between policy and the lived experience of people on low incomes especially, and the need for broader reform of housing policy. Participants suggested several alternatives to the way in which the "Bedroom Tax" currently operates (e.g. increasing the supply of smaller homes and supporting people to find more suitably-sized accommodation in the same neighbourhood). They seemed therefore to support more efficient use of space, if that was enabled in a helpful not punitive way.

4.2.4 Priorities

In the final session of the day, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the role of the Treasury and, faced with limited resources, to choose one of the following three options:

- A. Keep the single occupant Council Tax discount
- B. Abolish the Shared Accommodation Rate for under 35s
- C. Reinstate the spare room subsidy, i.e., abolish the "Bedroom Tax."

Overall, seven of nine participants chose option B (abolishing the Shared Accommodation Rate). Several justifications were given for abolishing the Shared Accommodation Rate including, for example, that it would give those aged under 35 years "a chance to lead a more normal life" (Mia, 45-54, owner occupier). Others described

it as “the most totally brainless tax” (Florence, 65+, social tenant) and “the most... obviously discriminatory and unfair” (Emily, 35-44, private tenant). Despite her earlier assertions that the “Bedroom Tax” is a fair policy, Lily was torn between abolishing the “Bedroom Tax” and abolishing the Shared Accommodation Rate. Ultimately, she too settled on abolishing the Shared Accommodation Rate because “young people are the future, and they’ve got such a raw deal... let’s just try and make their life that smidgen easier” (Lily, 35-44, private sector).

The other two participants chose option C (abolishing the Bedroom Tax): one because of the impact it has on families (Archie, 65+, owner occupier) and the other because there are, in his view, “just so many exceptions to the Bedroom Tax” (Joshua, 35-44, private tenant).

However, both Archie and Joshua seemed to be won over by the argument that there’s more “room for manoeuvre” (Florence, 65+, social housing tenant) with the “Bedroom Tax” (i.e., several exemptions, possibility of appealing, etc.), whereas there’s no flexibility when it comes to a person’s age in relation to the Shared Accommodation Rate. In the end, there was general agreement if not full consensus that the Shared Accommodation Rate should be abolished because it was seen to be “unfair”, “discriminatory”, “inflexible” and “illogical”. One participant said it is “unhelpful to the one cohort that needs more help than anybody else at the moment” (Florence, 65+, social housing tenant).

When given the chance to choose two of the three options listed above, there was instant and unanimous agreement on options B and C – abolishing the Shared Accommodation Rate and the “Bedroom Tax”. When asked to explain why they would now also abolish the “Bedroom Tax”, one participant said: “it’s a piece of bad law, it’s illogical, I mean even though I agreed with it, I still think that it just doesn’t... do enough and it does huge amounts of damage, and it doesn’t actually produce all that much.” (Florence, 65+, social tenant). Others were of much the same mind. Mia (female, 45-54, owner occupier) said: “I don’t think it’s got anything positive about it [the Bedroom Tax], I think it creates more negativity in all sorts of areas... and it doesn’t give back to the government whatever they’re expecting to receive from it”. As for option A (keeping the Council Tax discount for all single occupants), one participant summed up the mood in the room by stating that “I just don’t feel we care enough about A” (Joshua, 35-44, private tenant).

4.3 Values transformed?

Lastly, we compare questionnaire responses to explore the extent to which participants’ values changed because of the deliberative process. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire at the start and end of the workshop. The extent to which they agreed with the principles of the three housing policies in question were captured and are summarised in Figures 4-6 below. First, Figure 4 shows the extent to which participants in Glasgow and London (combined) agreed or disagreed with the statement that all single occupiers should receive a 25% Council Tax discount both before and after deliberations.

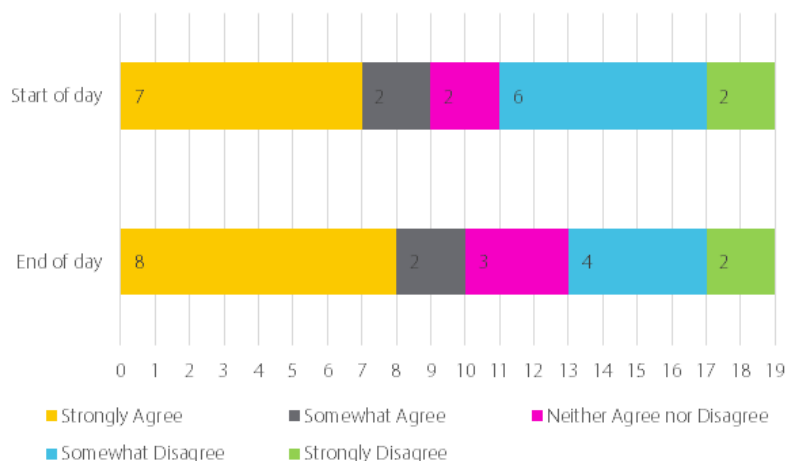


Figure 4: To what extent do you agree/disagree that all single occupiers should receive 25% Council Tax discount? [Glasgow and London combined]

The data show a move away from “disagree”. The number of people who strongly agreed or agreed with the statement increased from nine to 10, while those who disagreed or strongly disagreed was reduced from eight to six.

These aggregate data do however hide some other movements. Five of the seven people who strongly agreed with the statement that all single occupiers should get the Council Tax discount at the start of the day still agreed strongly at the end of the day; the other two were a Glasgow participant (George) who shifted to a neutral position and a London participant (Isaac) who moved to strongly disagree on that basis of “arguments made by my fellow participants” and the “example of the young man working in the financial sector with an annual income exceeding £200,000 per annum whilst benefiting from the single-occupant discount”. There were also three Glasgow participants who shifted their positions to strongly agree following the deliberations, two of whom (Olivia and John) started out in strong disagreement with the statement, but they did not provide an explanation for their change of mind.

Figure 5 below shows the extent to which participants in Glasgow and London (combined) agreed or disagreed with the statement that young single people without children should receive a lower rate of housing benefit (which effectively describes the Shared Accommodation Rate). Again, participants were asked this question before and after deliberations. The data show a clear move towards disagree, overall. The number who disagreed with the statement increased from 12 to 14, and the number agreed was reduced from four to two and no one strongly agreed with the statement.

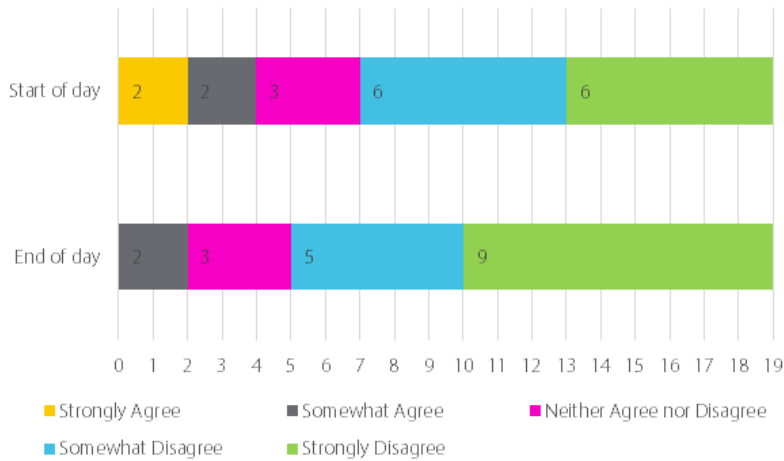


Figure 5: To what extent do you agree/disagree that young single people without children should receive a lower rate of housing benefit? [Glasgow and London combined]

In Glasgow, the number of participants who strongly disagreed with the statement increased from three to eight following deliberations, but in most cases this was simply a hardening of their initial position of ‘somewhat disagree’. Ava (35-44), who was the only one in Glasgow to shift from a neutral position to ‘strongly disagree’, explained: “after discussing it with the group I began to think about how a young person wouldn’t maybe be able to have a great quality of life if they were working just to pay bills because they had less help which would impact on their mental health and social life.” In London positions softened a little in so far as two of the three (Emily and Joshua) who strongly disagreed at the start of the day had shifted to somewhat disagree by the end of the day. Overall, therefore, there was a move towards disagree.

Lastly, Figure 6 shows the extent to which participants in Glasgow and London (combined) agreed or disagreed with the statement that social housing tenants who have a spare bedroom should have their housing benefit cut.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The research aimed to advance understanding of attitudes towards space standards in the UK and how these attitudes compare to the values underpinning policies that regulate the consumption of residential space in order to establish a consensual view on what a minimum residential space standard should be. The three policies were chosen to draw out the range of underlying moral values that might support or reject them, and to try to establish priorities where values come into conflict. The vignettes were also chosen to disrupt and challenge participants with scenarios that reflected competing claims and realism was attained where possible with videos of real people and their actual experiences.

Given the nature of these three policies, it is unsurprising that consensus was not possible. There is no overriding value that all participants agreed on, or indeed that any of the participants indicated should prevail.

The Council Tax discount provoked some of the most complex discussions, which reflected the hybrid nature of the Council Tax as a part property value tax, and as a part service charge. Overall, the discussions led to opinion shifting some way towards supporting the Council Tax discount, but opinion remained divided reflecting a plethora of values that came into conflict.

However, a value that did run through the workshops can be characterised as a right to housing (i.e. residential space). Thus, in the consideration of the Council Tax discount for single occupants, the notion of a house as a home was a powerful influence that could trump countervailing references to (all but extreme) income or wealth, or even need (where the widow's right to remain in the family home was ranked by some above the needs of a lone parent). Participants thus encountered the dilemmas that are inherent with taxes (partly) based on property values.

The deliberations concerning the Shared Accommodation Rate established some commonly held values. Again, the Shared Accommodation Rate was seen to undermine a right to self-contained accommodation (giving an indication of a minimal acceptable level of housing consumption) and sharing was characterised as an affront to a person's dignity. The London group used the terms "rights" and "dignity" explicitly. The Glasgow group referred to living in self-contained accommodation as an individual choice that people should be able to exercise and used highly emotive terms such as "dehumanising", "infantilising", and "punitive" to describe sharing. The London group did, however, acknowledge that the exercise of a right to housing might be problematic during a housing crisis.

And when it came to the "Bedroom Tax" applied to social tenants judged to be under-occupying their property – the policy that most directly pits household against household in a zero-sum game – again many participants saw the house as a home, something inherently personal that should not be subject to external interference. Not everyone took this view, and competing values were articulated, for example in relation to the "Bedroom Tax" where at least one participant did take the view that the policy was just because it was concerned with the fair allocation of scarce resources (i.e. residential space). So, the context of social housing being scarce could be appealed to in support of the "Bedroom Tax" but was faced with the countervailing context of a lack of smaller properties into which households could downsize.

Other values that were reflected included need and consistency. These appeared most clearly in relation to the Shared Accommodation Rate, where the needs of a single person aged under 35 were judged to be no different than an older person. Whilst there was a hypothetical argument that needs might vary with age (e.g., commitments), this was rejected. Both workshops thus attached value to consistency of treatment, and inconsistency seems to have been the principal reason for regarding the Shared Accommodation Rate as being "unfair" because it treated people with the same needs differently solely based on age. Similarly, the "Bedroom Tax" was seen as being unfair because it was targeted at social housing tenants judged to have spare bedrooms, whilst homeowners with spare rooms came under no such pressure. (Disappointingly, no one made the link with the Council Tax discount.)

The prioritisation exercises were designed to concentrate participants' minds and to elicit from them the values that are most important. The two groups diverged in their selection of the highest priority: for the Glasgow group it was the abolition of the "Bedroom Tax" whereas in London it was the abolition of the Shared Accommodation Rate. But both groups chose not to select the retention of the Council Tax discount as a second priority. This was revealing in that arguments that were essentially consequential and utilitarian seem to have been influential – more so than was the case when considering the policies in isolation from one another. Thus, there were references to the impact on people with low incomes or disabilities who had the least scope to absorb or adjust to a policy. The prioritisation discussions may have allowed participants to move from quite personalised discussions based (often) on real people and scenarios to a broader and impersonal canvass.

This exercise has clear limitations, not least of which was the small number of workshops. Although deliberative methods do not seek to select fully representative participants, it is entirely possible that other or more groups would have produced a greater diversity of views. The workshops did reflect broadly sympathetic views towards the subjects presented in the scenarios, and there was perhaps surprisingly little use of arguments relating to taxpayers' money that is being used or saved in each policy (one participant made the distinction between a benefit and a tax discount in relation to the Council Tax Deduction).

For applied social scientists, the exercise does have a powerful message. Policies are generally assessed within a utilitarian framework, often expressed in monetary terms. Such a framework employs economic analysis that is, using the example from the previous paragraph, blind to any qualitative difference between a tax rebate and social security benefit. The (limited) evidence presented here suggests that whilst utilitarian arguments have an important place in the public's mind especially when prioritising between policies, more qualitative values relating to the value of and the right to a home, reflecting people's right to dignity, provide what might be called bedrock values. Moreover, when considering individual examples, appeals to competing needs appear less likely to trump the individual's right to a home even that right is dependent on subsidy.

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Appendix A

Single occupier/person council tax discount

Name of policy:

Single occupier council tax discount.

When was the policy introduced?

It has always applied to the Council Tax, which was introduced in 1993.

What does the policy do?

If you are the only person aged 18 or over living in a property, then you are entitled to a discount of 25%.

How much is the discount?

- 25% from the council tax amount applicable to the property
- Only applicable to first home of the council tax payer

Are there any exemptions?

Even if there is more than one adult, the payer will be eligible for council tax discount if the other person(s) is exempt from council tax such as,

- full time students
- professional or unpaid full-time live-in carers
- mentally incapacitated individuals

Why was the policy introduced?

- Full Council Tax charge must be based on two or more adults being resident at a property - So, if there is only one occupier the charge must be less
- When council tax was introduced as a replacement for poll tax, the payments of single occupiers would have increased dramatically if not for the single person discount

Why do some people oppose the discount?

- The discount is applied regardless of the income of the occupant, or the value of their property.
- The discount is worth most to people living in the most expensive properties.
- It encourages people in all tenures to under occupy their houses when there is a housing shortage.
- Means-tested assistance is available for households with low incomes.

Local Housing Allowance Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR)

Name of policy:

Shared accommodation rate (SAR)

When was the policy introduced?

In 1996 when it applied to single people aged under 25.

The age threshold was raised to 35 in 2012.

What does the policy do?

The maximum amount of rent that can be used in their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit calculation is based on the cost of renting a room in a shared house or flat in their area even if they live in a self-contained property.

How much is the allowance?

- The allowance is based on prevailing rents in shared accommodation in each area.
- It is lower than normal local housing allowance.
- For example in Birmingham, the maximum housing benefit on a 1 bedroom flat is £525 per month. For shared accommodation it is £291 per month - a difference of £234.

Are there any exemptions?

The claimant can get more than the SAR, even if they live in shared housing, if they:

- live with someone who's dependent on them
- are a care leaver under 25 (amendment in May 2021)
- have previously lived in a hostel for homeless people for at least 3 months in total (amendment in May 2021)
- are receiving disability related benefits

Why was the policy introduced?

- To “ensure that Housing Benefit does not encourage young people to leave the parental home unnecessarily or to take on higher priced accommodation at the taxpayers’ expense than they could afford from their own earnings”
- To ensure greater fairness i.e. that those receiving Housing Benefit do not have an advantage over those who are not on benefit, but have to make similar choices about what they can afford
- To ensure that Housing Benefit rules reflect the housing expectations of people of a similar age but not on benefits
- To help contain growing Housing Benefit expenditure
- To remove a potential work disincentive

REMOVAL OF THE SPARE ROOM SUBSIDY (“BEDROOM TAX”)

Name of policy:

Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS), also known as the “bedroom tax”.

When was the policy introduced?

1 April 2013

What does the policy do?

It reduces entitlement to Housing Benefit if a working age tenant in social housing is judged to be under-occupying their home.

How many bedrooms are allowed?

- 1 bedroom for each person or couple except:
- A child of 15 or under is expected to share with another child of the same gender
- A child of 9 or under is expected to share with another child aged 9 or under, regardless of gender

There is no exemption or account taken of children whose main residence is elsewhere (e.g. parents live apart).

A bedroom *is* allowed for a non-resident carer where they provide overnight care.

By how much is the benefit cut?

- For 1 spare room: by 14%
- For more than one spare room: by 25%

Are there any exemptions?

The main exemption applies when the claimant or their partner is aged 66 or over.

Why was the policy introduced?

- To provide social tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit with a financial incentive to leave accommodation which is too large for their needs.
- To make savings to reduce the budget deficit.
- To bring social tenants in line with private tenants who have been subject to size restrictions since 1989.
- To free up social housing for families on waiting lists who will fully occupy the housing.

Appendix B: Questionnaire administered at the start of workshops

The Contested Politics of Residential Space

Questionnaire

[To be completed at the START of the day]

Name: _____

Please circle as appropriate:

Gender: Male Female Prefer not to say

Age: 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64
 65+

Tenure: Private tenant
 Council or housing association tenant
 Home-owner

1. Do you have direct experience of any of the three housing policies we're discussing today? Circle as appropriate. Yes No

If yes, please select:

- The Single Occupant Council Tax discount
- The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, aka the "Bedroom Tax"
- The LHA Shared Accommodation Rate for under 35s

2. How would you rate your awareness of the detail of each of the above policies prior to reading our briefing papers?

	1= Not at all aware	2	3	4	5= Very aware
The Single Occupant Council Tax discount					
The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, aka the "Bedroom Tax"					
The LHA Shared Accommodation Rate for under 35s					

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Young single people without children should receive a lower rate of housing benefit					
All single occupiers should receive a 25% Council Tax discount					
Social housing tenants who have a spare bedroom should have their Housing Benefit cut					

4. Please use the space below to explain your responses to question 3 above. Why do you think this?

End of questionnaire

Appendix C: Questionnaire administered at the end of workshops

The Contested Politics of Residential Space

Questionnaire

[To be completed at the END of the day]

Name: _____

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
My knowledge of housing policy has increased as a result of today's discussions					
I have changed my views about housing policies that influence levels of housing consumption					

2. To what extent do you **now** agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Young single people without children should receive a lower rate of housing benefit					
All single occupiers should receive a 25% Council Tax discount					

Social housing tenants who have a spare bedroom should have their Housing Benefit cut					
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3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
All single occupiers should receive a discount on their Council Tax bill <i>even if they live in a very expensive property</i>					
All single occupiers should receive a discount on their Council Tax bill <i>even if they have a very high income</i>					
No-one should receive a discount on Council Tax					
Young single people without children should be encouraged to live in their parental home if they cannot afford to live independently					
Young single people should be supported to live only in shared accommodation, unless there is a special reason why they can't share					
The state should support everyone to live in their own self-contained accommodation					
It is wrong to make anyone live with strangers					

Social tenants with spare bedrooms should be encouraged to move to smaller accommodation, to allow larger families to move in					
Social tenants should not be expected to move out of their homes even if they have spare rooms, and there are suitably sized families on the waiting list					

End of questionnaire



