

‘Problematic nominations’

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Comments welcome

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Summary: Research Question and Findings

The key question for this research project was; how did local authorities (LAs) and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) resolve the tensions that arose through ‘problematic nominations’?. Problematic nominations we took to be those households whose behaviour and/or life-style might be thought to pose problems for the landlord. Through in-depth interviews of front-line and senior staff in three case study areas, we hoped to understand how organisations negotiated issues of ‘problematic nominations’. Such problems were thought to be most acute in areas where a monopoly or near monopoly provider had been created through large-scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) or transfer to an arms-length management organisation (ALMO).

Observations and findings

- *The ‘disappearing household’* – the bureaucracy of the process tended to make actual people or households invisible, becoming instead statistics or cases.
- *Four points of tension* – whether RSLs are independent organisations; the importance of trust; the relationship between need and sustainability; and the well-known cherry-picking/dumping issue (although see next).
- *The problem of ‘exclusions’* – the cherry-picking/dumping tension almost disappears in the LSVT/ALMO study areas – instead the dispute centres on LA concerns about RSL **exclusions** policies and RSLs concern for financial and community **sustainability**.
- *Few ‘problematic nominations’?* – two of our three case studies came up with few concrete examples of nominees that had proved to be problematic – instead, problems for both RSLs and LAs were organisational, problematic *practices*.
- *Relationships are key* – personal relationships between front-line and management staff were seen as the main mechanism for making the nominations system work.
- *Local knowledge in decision-making processes* – informal local knowledge that RSL housing officers acquired about families and areas, knowledge that came from working in an area, or contacts with staff in the LA or with local police, was often used in decision-making.
- *The importance of support packages* – all nominations arrangements relied on the existence of agencies to provide support to vulnerable households. There is some concern about the vulnerability of these agencies and their reliance on Supported People funding.
- *Do common housing registers and choice-based lettings remove problematic nominations?* – there are different views but our case study areas suggested that problematic nominations can continue and or change focus.

Background to research

The research questions were devised in consultation with our partners the LGA and Shelter – the NHF were brought in as partners once funding had been received. The original questions were;

- (a) To what extent is there a mutual understanding about 'public service values' framed in local authority-RSL nominations agreements?
- (b) To what extent have current approaches been influenced by previous understandings and experiences of the local authority and RSL sectors?
- (c) How are local breakdowns in trust negotiated and to what extent is there resort to legal procedures, from re-negotiation of the contract/agreement to court action?
- (d) To what extent are the needs of current and potential end-users (current and future occupiers) taken into account in the decision-making process?

The first part of our research involved: a literature review; interviews with policy-makers and national organisations; interviews and a focus group with senior housing staff in LAs and RSLs. This part helped us decide on the location of the case studies and also began to shift our thinking about the research questions. In the three case study areas, we carried out interviews with those responsible for nominations and those who negotiated nomination agreements in RSLs, LAs and other organisations with responsibility for care and support and homelessness. Our questions were framed to seek out the understandings which lead to problematic nominations. We also sought to find “stories” of problematic nominations. To maintain the anonymity of those involved in the research we have changed the names of people, organisations and the case study areas.

About the Three Case Study Areas

At an early stage in our research, two factors were identified as being crucial in the construction of nominations: locality and history. We highlight these factors in relation to each of the case study areas.

Springfield: Springfield is located in the south of England. It is an area with high demand for social housing, although there are pockets of difficult-to-let properties, as well as an over-supply of sheltered housing. The council has retained its housing stock and is the majority provider (75 *per cent*). Over the past 15 or so years, the council's housing stock has reduced in size; the amount and proportion of RSL stock has increased. There are 38 RSLs operating in the area, varying in size and scale; only some have a development programme in Springfield. Since the 1990s, greater attention has been paid to the ways in which the RSL sector could assist in meeting housing need. Most recently, the need for RSL assistance has become more acute in order to meet government targets especially as regards the use of bed and breakfast.

For some time, Springfield council has had a common housing register (CHR) through which all council, and the relevant proportion of RSL lets, are made. Until 2007 the council used a points system to determine priorities between households. From 2006, households were placed into one of five bands depending on their level of need. Priorities within bands are determined on the basis of length of time on the register. This prefaced a shift to choice-based lettings (CBL) which was due to go

“live” after our fieldwork had been completed. A specific team of officers is responsible for allocations. They are divided geographically (North, South and Central), with a manager, administrator, and a person responsible for monitoring overall general performance.

Trumpton: Trumpton is located in the north of England. In 2001 the council transferred the ownership and management of its entire housing stock to a specially set up RSL (“RSL 11”). At the time of transfer, it was also agreed that RSL 11 would deliver the homeless and housing advice service under an agency agreement, and would manage the housing register. The majority of the Council’s housing department staff transferred to the new association, leaving a small number at the council responsible for the strategic housing functions. Subsequently, the homelessness and housing advice service was transferred back to the council. RSL 11 has run a CBL scheme for some time. A small number of other RSLs operate in the area but do not operate CBL.

RSL 11 was established as a group structure, with five housing companies each managing housing in five localities in the borough, corresponding to the area-based organisation previously operated by the council. From the outset it would appear that these local housing companies were regarded as not only geographically distinct but also had considerable local discretion. The local housing companies make decisions on allocations. The Group contains a separate company running centralised functions, which includes a team that acts as the link with the Council on nominations and carries out initial checks on nominated households.

There are tensions within the area between the council and RSLs, with the council concerned that it is not receiving the required level of nominations from RSLs. Three particular local changes have affected social housing allocations. First, RSL 11 began a stock regeneration programme; the resulting impact on nominations - fewer properties available for nominations as large numbers of properties were required as decants - had not been planned. Nor had the impact of replacing rented homes with mixed developments of properties for rent and sale. Second, at the time of transfer, Trumpton was perceived to have a housing surplus and social housing organisations had programmes to demolish hard-to-let properties. In common with other areas in the north of England, changes in the housing market have reversed this and there is now a deficit of social housing. Third, the council has given greater attention to the role RSLs can play in meeting the needs of homeless households, arising from concern at the numbers of homelessness acceptances as well as the use of bed & breakfast.

Camberwick Green: Camberwick Green is also in the north of England. The council set up an ALMO to manage its stock of housing in 2004. The ALMO is responsible for homelessness and housing allocation, which is all carried out through CBL. Most of the council housing staff transferred to the ALMO, the council retaining its emphasis on strategic housing management. Housing management has been split into six geographical zones with a seventh responsible for sheltered housing. Recently there have been a number of small-scale transfers of individual estates, from the ALMO to existing RSLs. A number of other RSLs operate in the area.

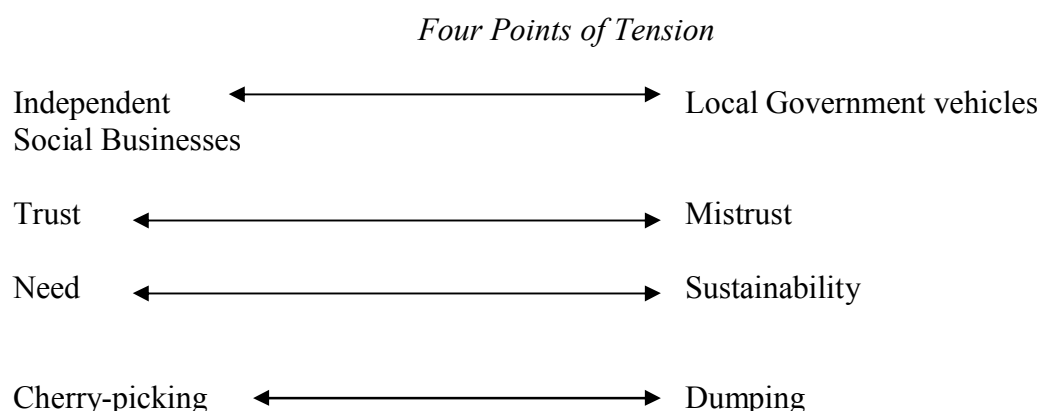
Camberwick Green has traditionally been a comparatively cheap area for rented or privately owned housing. However, following several years of decline, the city is

now seeing something of a revival, particularly as a result of regeneration money. Social housing stock is also declining numerically due to both demolition and right to buy. Households already in social housing tend to remain in the property longer, with a resultant impact on stock turnover.

In some parts of Camberwick Green, as a result of the small-scale transfers, RSLs are the dominant landlord. The council regards its role as ensuring that that investments are being made in ways which best support the council's strategic agenda, thus requiring a strong relationship with the RSLs.

Analysing the data

The initial interviews and literature review identified four 'analytical vectors', which operate to describe points of tension around nominations. These vectors are sometimes expressed as opposites but it is better to see them as part of a spectrum, as is suggested below:



These create points of conflict which interact with each other in complex ways and cannot be compartmentalised. Nevertheless, they assist us with our analysis of our case study data. In our LSVT case study area, cherry-picking/dumping was a non-issue, with concerns instead focused on the RSL's exclusions policy.

Independent social businesses/Local government vehicles

This refers to the tensions inherent in the operation and management of RSLs. To what extent can and should they be independent of local government, and to what extent should they be businesses (and thus shift away from the social purpose of the sector)? The Housing Corporation has a clear view, particularly as regards LSVTs, that RSLs are independent social businesses and LSVT documentation must reflect this. Such a view may be challenged by the officers involved in the transfer who wish to continue to have a strong engagement with the council's role and understandings; and also by a general understanding at ground level that the new LSVT RSL is effectively the council (Focus Group and LA Housing Manager 3).

This tension was one which was the subject of considerable interplay over time in our case study areas in relation to nominations. The local council sought to exercise some form of control over the RSLs and the RSLs sought to retain independence. In Camberwick Green, this was a tension felt between the council and the ALMO, which shared the same offices, but, as the ALMO developed over time, the question was raised *“how long is that arm?”* and *“...there were occasions when it wanted to operate at a longer arm than we wanted and we had, we had disagreements”* (Council Officer).

Negotiating nominations agreements could also provide an opportunity for the council to exercise some form of control over RSLs. In Camberwick Green, a ‘protocol’ had been negotiated between a number of RSLs and LAs covering a range of issues including nominations. This ‘protocol’ was in place prior to establishing the ALMO. This agreement then became imposed on the RSLs who took stock from the ALMO (*“...it is more or less if you take the stock, you take the nominations agreement with it”*: RSL 17). Similarly, in Springfield the council negotiated an LA-wide nominations agreement at the time of setting up the CHR and re-negotiated it in 2003, prior to the move to banding, in part because its newly developed systems could monitor nominations more effectively.

Although in Springfield the nominations agreement was regarded by some as a kind of unenforceable ‘gentleman’s agreement’, in which there were few effective sticks, monitoring performance brought an opportunity for the council to engage RSLs in the its strategic mission and responsibilities to households in need (what was referred to in Camberwick Green euphemistically as *“accepting responsibility”*). RSLs in our study areas felt that they had less room to deviate from that mission. Monitoring meetings in Springfield were held at the same time as development meetings, possibly as an implicit threat. In Camberwick Green, the linking of nominations performance to future development opportunities (particularly concerning rehousing priority need households) meant that RSLs saw the nominations agreement as an enforceable contractual arrangement – poor performance = no development. (Linking nominations performance to development also meant that the housing management and development sides of RSLs had to work more closely together).

However, enforcement could work both ways. When one RSL wanted to withdraw a property from CBL because the first four households had refused the property, they were able to use the nominations agreement to back up their argument. RSLs could also emphasise their independence through, for example, the development of local lettings policies – which the councils in our study areas were generally happy to accept, despite the existence of the nominations agreements. This of course is not new: for example, councils have always accepted that charitable associations may not be able to accept certain households due to their charitable objects. A particular method of emphasising independence was through the development of policies by which nominee (and other) households would be excluded from RSL stock. These appeared to be accepted in Camberwick Green but were a point of tension in Trumpton (discussed below). A further method was to request more than one household to be nominated for properties – which was written into the nominations agreement – and which would enable the RSL to exercise its choice from that list (two households in Camberwick Green and Trumpton, three in Springfield).

Trust/Mistrust

Although originally conceptualised as trust and betrayal, our research suggested that the term ‘betrayal’ was too strong and the tension here can be better expressed by reference to the trust and mistrust between the RSLs and councils in our study. Three particular issues arose here in relation, first, to performance monitoring, second, in relation to information sharing, and third, relations between front-line staff.

Performance monitoring was suggested to be emblematic of mistrust. Our early interviews suggested that performance monitoring systems are inadequate: LA data is often inaccurate; RSL data is perceived to be capable of manipulation. Its focus on numbers as opposed to outcomes was also regarded as problematic. In Trumpton, performance monitoring often produces arguments “behind the data”, a concern that households referred direct to the LSVT RSL who would, the RSL feels, have been accepted as in priority need by the council. In Camberwick Green, the amount of work involved in submitting quarterly returns was regarded by some RSLs as prohibitive with one RSL referring to the monitoring process as a ‘numbers game’ in which it seemed impossible to get their own figures to tally with the ALMO’s figures, despite the comparatively small number of properties involved. In both Camberwick Green and Springfield, an increased emphasis on performance monitoring was regarded to be at the expense of creating sustainable communities.

Performance monitoring meetings in Springfield could become sites of contestation in which institutional mistrust became prominent, particularly in respect of the alleged failure by some RSLs to re-house homeless households. One research participant referred to their meeting as feeling like “two hours with the head-teacher”. Such meetings were also the opportunity for RSLs, if necessary, to defend their performance. RSLs in both Camberwick Green and Springfield also expressed some concern that, whilst they were being closely monitored, this was not a two-way process and the council did not open up their processes in the same way.

The second problem concerned the lack of information sharing between the council and the RSL regarding the nominated households, illustrated by Story A.

Story A

The council nominated a single person to a property. There was no mention on the paperwork from the council of any issues with the nominee. On the second screen on the computer, it was noted that the nominee had a support worker. The housing officer contacted the support worker to make an appointment for an interview at the RSL’s office. The support worker asked if there was appropriate security at the RSL’s offices because of the nominee’s history of violence. They did not have that security and then raised the question whether a general needs tenancy was appropriate for this person. The offer was withdrawn:

in all honesty we have a responsibility to our current residents and if that person is that volatile to then allocate a property in a general needs scheme where you don’t know, he could meet the postman or whatever ... I mean it was felt that there was a definite need for more support than we would be able to offer. (Springfield/RSL 4/Housing Officer)

One RSL interviewee in Springfield summed up the opinion of most of our interviewees:

“You’re only as good as the information you get on the application form. And that’s where the system falls down”

Across all study areas, there were complaints from the RSLs that they received little information beyond the basics about the households nominated to them. This could cause problems in itself, for example, the situation where a household with a violent person was nominated without that information being provided to the RSL, as occurred in both Springfield and Camberwick Green. There could, therefore, be impacts on staff health and safety:

And I think it’s a bit of a worry to send you know an employee out to do an accompanied viewing with someone what we’ve only got their name, date of birth, ethnicity and a telephone number - because we’ve got nothing else on them ... I remember having a nomination form pass through and it said in small, right on the bottom ‘Beware female person going out to visit this chap because of previous history’. And that’s all it said, but it could have been easily missed and I would have had a female housing officer go out to visit this person and could have easily have missed that sort of small print which obviously could have been crucial. You know I mean health and safety.

In Springfield, the council housing allocation manager said that the RSLs should trust their assessment, although most RSLs participating in the study felt that they had reason to go “behind” the information. In Trumpton, by contrast, a council homeless officer felt that the more information that was provided to the RSL concerning particularly homeless households, the more likely they were to be rejected. Too much information is also part of the problem in Story B.

Story B

Housing Officer, ALMO: *We had an applicant and there was a note on their file that in a previous housing interview, this applicant had become violent and there was a note saying “please ensure in future that this applicant is always interviewed by two members of staff”. We, as you do, passed this information on and the RSL refused it specifically on those grounds. Because they said although ‘yes’ they could have two members of staff interviewing the applicant actually in the office when they went for a let or even on the accompanied view but later on when they were maintaining that tenancy when the Housing Officer went out, that Housing Officer worked on his own and there was no way that they could arrange for a second person to go with that Housing Officer so they refused it on those grounds and although they have still refused that applicant, the actual incidence of that and the circumstances behind are actually still in discussion at a higher level now. That is still going on because it isn’t like in a way that they are prejudiced against somebody just because they need to have a second member of staff there but on the other hand you can see from their point of view that the way that they run their estates, having Housing Officers working on their own, they say that they can’t provide a second person for the Housing Officer. So how that will resolve, I don’t know because its way above my head now I’m afraid*

The consequence of this lack of information sharing at the point of nomination was that most RSLs made their own checks on households. They might request references from previous landlords, interview the household face-to-face or by telephone, and discuss their needs with a support worker if such a person has been identified in the nomination. Such further enquiries, in themselves, might be sufficient for an RSL to gain a reputation as a “cherry-picker” whereas the RSL believed they were necessary, particularly to identify any support needs. In some areas of Trumpton, some RSLs routinely made police checks or checked with their tenancy enforcement officers about nominated households. Such checks used to be conducted relatively informally – tenancy enforcement officers and police shared offices – but police enquiries had become more formal. There were concerns that spent offences and general reputations were being disclosed to the RSL. In Springfield, the police telephoned an RSL and asked “you do know who you’re rehousing, don’t you?” (see Story C: it turned out that the relevant information about the household had not been passed on by the council). Another important outcome of the lack of information sharing is the prominence of local knowledge about certain households, particularly in Trumpton and Camberwick Green where such knowledge was a key tool in RSL decision-making.

Story C

The council nominated a single person household that *“they must have known would be an absolute nightmare”*. The person was an arsonist. There was no information provided on the nomination form, nor on the computer system (which allows for flashing signs for certain cases) about this person’s prior offences. The RSL found out about this person’s background by chance during a telephone call from the police:

Housing Officer: *in this case the police phoned us and said ‘you do know who you’re re-housing don’t you?’ We said ‘no, we don’t know everybody who we’re re-housing.’ And then we looked into it. And then we found out what they’d been up to, and the council hadn’t given us that information at all. And it was the police phoning us and saying ‘do you know what you’re doing here, do you know what you’re taking on?’ No, we didn’t. So, yeah, we got it from there really.*

I: *And how did the police know to contact you?*

Housing Officer: *I don’t know. The police had spoken to the [nominee] and they’d said we’re moving anyway, I don’t know how the police found out but... The police found out and gave it to us.*

The offer was withdrawn. The RSL subsequently had to rewrite their offer letter to make clear that it was not binding on them.

The third issue was around relations between front-line staff. Movement of personnel between RSLs, ALMOs and councils meant that officers tended to know each other well. These local relationships assisted in trust-building, which could then impact on the ways in which organisations dealt with each other. Alternatively, things could go awry where there was a sudden turnover in staff. Personnel movement also allowed local knowledge to impact upon decision-making:

I mean we're in a bit of a favoured position because ... because we've recently worked for the ALMO, there are perhaps names that crop up and you think 'Aye, aye, I remember them', you know, 'I'm sure they owed a lot of money' or 'I'm sure they were an antisocial behaviour family' or something. So you perhaps might dig a little deeper. But there's certain addresses that you know were in this area before but are now managed by one of the other two RSLs, so I mean we have made a few phone calls and said can you just check for us? ... Now in theory [the ALMO are] supposed to check for arrears, but in reality they only check if they owe arrears to [them], they don't check if they owe arrears to anybody else. So it's a bit hit and miss really.

Need/Sustainability

It can be said that there is a tension between providing housing for those in the greatest housing need and the sustainability of estates, but in initial interviews some suggested a tendency to equate homeless households with unsustainability. The issue focuses on the current vogue for RSLs to “*engineer communities people want to live in, and the fact that they are easier to manage is a by-product of that*” (CLG I2), as opposed to creating “*ghettoes of worklessness or vulnerability*” (NHF), as illustrated in Story D.

Story D

An RSL developed an estate of 28 two bedroom properties and requested nominations from the council for all of the properties. When they refused some of the nominees, they were accused by the council of cherry picking. The RSL said that they had to socially engineer a community from their point of view:

If I have 28 people with 28 two year olds, those 28 two year olds are going to grow up together. They're going to create havoc together. On my site. So what we try and do, we try to socially engineer. So what we do is we try and get some single mothers, some couples, we try and get families with cars and stuff like that, so that you haven't got a whole estate of people with the same kind of problems. But we were accused of cherry-picking, which is taking the best people often and doing it that way. Which I disagree with profoundly. But I think at the end of the day, you can't take 28 single mothers, because we had 4 single mothers there and one of them was 18. And she gave us no end of grief. Because an 18 year old with a child, with 18 year old, 17 year old, 20 year old friends, hanging out outside your house, it's not the healthiest of things for everybody.

The housing manager felt that they had to put the council in a position where the council did not have a choice about who should be accepted for the new development because they insisted that they were given a range of nominees (“You stand up and be counted”).

The tension between meeting need and sustainability also emerged in the nominations process itself, sometimes by reference to the “fit” of the household with the property on offer. Nominees could be rejected where they did not fit the property. Sometimes,

this could occur without the nominee knowing (for example, because they did not meet the age requirements for the property), or the RSL might make that decision after interviewing the nominee household. This occurred throughout our case study areas and was said to affect homeless households particularly.

Local lettings policies were one method of seeking to balance this tension, creatively engineering the type of households living in RSL properties. In Camberwick Green, on certain estates, specific types of property (e.g. one beds) were excluded from the nominations process as a result of a historic agreement, regarded as acceptable amendments to the general agreement as regards difficult-to-let areas, and written into the process through the nomination form. In Springfield, the process allowed RSLs to request a “sensitive letting”. Some RSLs were accused of abusing this by always requesting a sensitive letting or putting conditions on the type of household nominated.

Two particular problems raised in our case study areas (here) concerned new developments (estate sustainability) and re-housing those with support needs (individual tenancy sustainability). As regards the former, this was a particular tension in Springfield where it was felt by RSLs that they required a social mix in the new properties and that the council would only nominate them certain types of households, which would create management problems:

And they were very angry with us because we wouldn't accept them, it was a new block of 12 properties, and of the 12 people nominated 8 of them had alcohol problems ... and this was a general needs thing. ... This is not supported housing, this is 12 general needs flats and if we put people in here with that level of need this block will get stigmatised within a week and we'll never turn it round ever, ever. (RSL 4)

The tension was exacerbated in section 106 developments where RSL tenants would be living next to households who had paid a substantial sum for their property and who would complain about their neighbours. Re-housing households with support needs was regarded as problematic across our case study areas. There was particular tension over whether a support package for the household should be in place when the offer of a property is made and for how long it will continue. According to one council officer in Trumpton, this tension was resolved by the LSVT RSL automatically rejecting single person households who did not have such a package. In Springfield, RSLs had different policies to deal with this from outright rejection to negotiation with a support provider through to simple acceptance and arranging for necessary support to be provided. The importance and vulnerability of Supporting People funding was raised by Shelter and others in our initial interviews. Although in Trumpton it was explicitly said that they should look to fund tenancy support from elsewhere if Supporting People funding was cut, there must be a concern that RSLs and councils are relying on support agencies who themselves rely on an income stream that is under threat.

From Cherry-picking/Dumping to Exclusionary Practices

Historically, the tension here has occurred when it is said by RSLs that the council is dumping households on them who the council do not want to house themselves,

whereas the council says that the RSL is cherry-picking its tenants. These allegations are familiar enough to have become almost institutionalised in the sense that they were freely used by many research participants. Above we discussed that allegations of cherry-picking might arise as a result of RSL enquiries caused by an initial lack of information. In one circumstance raised in Springfield, it was said that there was a need for *more* cherry-picking and that was in relation to new developments where there was an immediate need to engineer an instant community.

If cherry-picking can be equated with policies on exclusions, then it is something of which most RSL participants in our study were guilty. The personal impact of exclusions is starkly illustrated in Story E. The most common reasons for exclusions by our participant RSLs was former tenancy rent arrears, especially where the household had made no arrangement regarding repayment, and anti-social behaviour. These were potentially the most vulnerable households (as conceptualised by the council). Indeed, the exclusions process had been written into the Camberwick Green nominations form which had a box to denote that the ALMO had made the relevant enquiries concerning former tenancy rent arrears and anti-social behaviour.

Story E

A couple had applied for housing. Their grandson and another relative were part of the household. They were found to be owed a statutory homelessness duty. They were nominated for a property with another RSL but were excluded after a police check on the basis of previous anti-social behaviour. The household were then nominated to the LSVT RSL. Their enquiries found that the female owed rent from about 10 years ago and her partner owed arrears from about 26 years ago.

The couple split up because of the stress of dealing with the problem. Subsequently, it was realised that the male partner was probably not the person who had owed rent from 26 years previously because he had never lived at that address. *“... and in the end I think we'll be only looking to rehouse only one person out of four”*.

Exclusions were justified in a number of different ways. First, there was the general duty that RSLs had to their local community of occupiers, who were conceived of as effectively having rights in the nominations process (and this, of course, links with the sustainable communities agenda). Second, there was the health and safety of housing officers, particularly when dealing with potentially violent persons.

The issue of exclusions was most prominent and contested in Trumpton. Several council officers described their understanding of the way in which a household is excluded from the date of application as opposed to when the actual act or omission occurred (which could have been some years before). This then affected their advice to households as to when they should seek to put their names on the housing register. In Trumpton, the LSVT RSL justified exclusions as necessary to protect property – they had spent considerable sums on increasing the quality of their housing stock and did not want them wrecked – and because they carried out community work, especially in schools, focused on education and changing behaviour.

We (and others) were told there was a formal policy on exclusions but it was not readily available to the public. Indeed, as previous research suggests, it is not so much the formal policy as what happens in everyday life that counts. LSVT RSL staff, for example, referred to established practices rather than formal policy with the consequence that it was not clear what type of action or omission counted for exclusion. Established practices, for example concerning rent arrears, could differ between offices. There was a spectrum from the formal (i.e. prosecuted in some way) to the informal, and our interviewees were unclear about what counts. As discussed above, what knowledge and whose knowledge counts is also unclear. Local knowledge appears to bear a high currency in some parts of the RSL. Housing management staff in the LSVT and another RSL said that it is not their decision to exclude but that of Tenancy Enforcement officers, who frequently have close relationships with the police. Whichever way, exclusions can have a devastating effect on people's lives and, as a senior council officer told us:

[The] whole exclusions issue [...] is one which [RSL 11] are reviewing because I think it's too punitive in many ways and it does exclude the most vulnerable in many ways, which is again difficult. Because if the largest social housing provider in the city isn't actually dealing with some of those most vulnerable, who is?

It was not clear whether dumping actually occurred in any of our study areas. RSLs certainly raised concerns about the types of households being nominated to them and their level of need/vulnerability. Some participants also complained about households being nominated who had been previously evicted. In one specific social housing sub-market, that of sheltered housing, there were suggestions of dumping in Springfield. Here there was an over-supply and the council had considerable stock. It was suggested here that the council creamed off the best households and nominated the remaining to RSLs.

Conclusions

Some of the messages contained in this report will be well-known to readers versed in housing. That, of course, does not make it any less interesting to find these problems still prevalent and, indeed, the search to find new ways to solve old problems. However, there are a number of issues arising from our research that does mark it out from previous work:

- First, we were told in the early phases by many of our interviewees that common housing registers and choice-based lettings solve problematic nominations. Our case studies, however, suggest that such views must be counter-balanced with a less positive message – whilst they may solve some problems it is possible that new problems may be created and/or new foci of attention.
- Second, our original idea that tensions would be most apparent where an LSVT created a near monopoly provider came out starkly from our interviews. It also became apparent in the inequality in negotiating positions between the LA and the LSVT RSL.

- Third, however, the lack of apparent tensions between RSLs and the LAs in other areas does not necessarily mean that the nominations process produces “better” results for households. In Camberwick Green, for example, exclusions are not an issue between RSLs and the LA because the screening out process takes place before households are put forward for nomination through the CBL system.

In the final analysis, we can reflect on how the nominee households are written out of many of the stories told by our interviewees and the nominations process. Problematic nominations were not people but institutional problems. Of course, some households are or become known as problems, but these are then re-focused on the interactions between LA and RSL. The nominee is, thus, mostly invisible in our data, as this last story F illustrates.

Story F

A wheelchair user, Mr A, was in bed and breakfast. The RSL requested his occupational therapist’s report and his housing history. The OT’s report could not be found for some time. The housing officer had to interview him and calm his annoyance at how long the process had taken.

So we managed to get him a property on our South Side, and then for some reason there was a bit of confusion ... the person who’s dealing with the case at the council will [sometimes] go direct to one of our housing managers, so they totally miss me ..and the allocations team out at the council. So there was this conversation going on between the person, who was responsible for the case, and one of our housing managers, and they decided between them that the property wasn’t really suitable, but they hadn’t told me, they hadn’t told the allocations team, and they certainly hadn’t told the gentleman. .. So eventually, I can’t remember who found out, the gentleman came back and of course he was irate because he felt the property was suitable. Although he hadn’t viewed it, it was in an area that he wanted, so in the meantime he said he would go off to the local paper and cause this big stink. And because he’d refused it, well because the council had refused it on his behalf, the property then got offered to somebody else, so we couldn’t even take that back and say we made a mistake you can have it. It was just an absolute nightmare which went on for a while.