

**Cambridge** Centre  
for Housing &  
Planning Research

# Identifying housing need in the horseracing industry

Research for the Stable Lads Welfare  
Trust Housing Association (trading as  
Racing Homes)

Executive Summary

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UNIVERSITY OF  
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## 1. Aims

The aim of the research was:

- To establish the degree and nature of current unmet need for affordable housing amongst racing staff.
- To make recommendations as to how that need may best be met.

## 2. Methods

The methodology for the research comprised:

1. A background review of existing evidence and literature, including previous studies of racing staff.
2. National online survey of racing staff.
3. Case study field visits in Middleham, Newmarket and Lambourn with approximately 60 qualitative interviews.
4. Housing need analysis.
5. Overall analysis.

## 3. Summary of key findings

### 3.1 Lack of existing data

The initial discussions with industry stakeholders showed that housing is an issue about which there are strong opinions, but where robust data and coherent evidence are lacking and knowledge is informed by personal experience and anecdotal evidence. Previous research found that housing was considered to be the second most common welfare issue (Public Perspectives Ltd, 2013), but did not explore why this was the case or what the issues with housing were. This research aimed to provide evidence about the scale and nature of housing need in the industry.

### 3.2 Housing arrangements in the industry

The survey conducted for this research showed that most respondents have only one main home. Most people live in a bedroom in a shared property or with their partner but no children. The next most common housing arrangement is to live alone in self-contained accommodation or live with a partner and children. Probably reflecting the relatively young age profile of staff in the industry, 10 per cent live with parents. Only a very small proportion live on their own with children or in accommodation with shared bedrooms. Staff are overwhelmingly likely to be living in a permanent structure.

It is most common (36 per cent) to rent from a private landlord. In total 30 per cent of respondents live in some form of employer provided housing (14 per cent paying rent, 16 per cent provided for free). Owner occupation accounted for 19 per cent. Two thirds of

respondents thought that owner occupation was the preferable tenure. People were generally satisfied with their current housing and this was likely to be close to work, both in terms of distance and journey time. Overall, the analysis of the survey suggests that the current housing circumstances may be not ideal for some in the industry, but the majority were satisfied with their accommodation and were living in a suitable property close to their workplace.

### **3.3 Reasons for leaving the industry**

The survey sought views from people who have worked in the industry, but are not currently doing so. The most common reason for leaving the industry was poor pay, followed by a career change, injury and the hours of work.

At the end of the survey, all respondents were invited to make any comments on issues specifically relating to housing for people in the horseracing industry. The most common issues raised were that housing is of a poor standard, is expensive compared to wages and there is a lack of accommodation.

### **3.4 Lack of affordable housing**

The quantitative housing need analysis showed that, if we consider affordable housing to be spending 35 per cent or less of net income on housing costs, then for a high proportion of staff in the racing industry there is a lack of affordable housing. There is some regional variation, but housing is least affordable for singles, particularly young singles, and lone parents. The greatest proportion of households finding housing unaffordable are in Epsom, followed by Lambourn, then Newmarket and the South West. The smallest proportion of households finding housing unaffordable are in Malton and Middleham.

However, these results need to be considered in the context of the broader research findings. Some households will be spending more than the benchmark of 35 per cent of their net income on housing costs. The survey and interviews showed that some households will be living with their family, living in employer provided housing, sharing housing to reduce costs, or more generally living in the lower end of the housing market.

### **3.5 Variety of housing options**

The qualitative interviews showed that staff make a range of choices, have different options, and take different strategies in making decisions about their housing situations. The housing decisions made by stable staff often took into account their personal resources, aspirations, commitments and career stage. About one in five are already home owners. There were numerous diverse examples of how people have managed their housing. This includes applying for social rented housing, taking a lodger, living in employer provided housing, sharing with friends, living with parents, purchasing through shared ownership, renting in the private market, and purchasing a property in a cheaper area as an investment for the future.

### **3.6 Stigma in the private rented sector – poor upkeep of properties**

The research highlighted issues with housing in the private rented sector. There was stigma from landlords who were reported not to want to rent properties to racing staff, particularly very young people. They were considered to be poor tenants, likely not to maintain

properties and with a high risk of non-payment of rent and leaving without notice. The interviews with staff and employers suggest that this concern amongst landlords was not completely unfounded. Employers who provided accommodation for staff said that poor upkeep by tenants was a problem and some had sold their housing stock in part because of the high maintenance costs. Some employers had tried to mediate with local landlords by paying rent directly and building networks with landlords to make finding accommodation easier. The problems with maintaining a tenancy in the private rented sector reflect some of the difficulties very young people entering the industry have in adjusting to independent living.

The research also found that for some staff having a tenancy in the private rented sector was not desirable. They wanted the freedom to move jobs and locations when they chose to do so, rather than be tied by a formal lease, and preferred informal arrangements such as sharing with a friend or being a lodger without a formal contract.

### **3.7 Split shift pattern and lack of driving**

Only a very small proportion of respondents were living on their own with their children i.e. lone parents. The housing need analysis showed that housing is particularly unaffordable for lone parents. The qualitative responses in the survey and the interviews also suggest that family housing is lacking. It is also hard to combine having a family with the split shift pattern common in the industry. The shift pattern posed challenges for finding suitable housing options as it means that staff have to live close to their place of employment. This problem is compounded by people not being able to drive or to afford a car.

### **3.8 Problems with sharing for single people**

There was generally a lack of housing for single people, particularly in Lambourn. The research highlighted some of the problems of shared accommodation, including the difficulty of sharing with different cultural groups, social problems such as drugs and alcohol, and the insecurity of losing housing through poor behaviour of some tenants. Housing can be insecure when living in informal arrangements, in employer provided accommodation that is tied to a job, and in shared housing.

### **3.9 Employer support**

The research showed the varying roles employers take in supporting their staff with housing. The duty of care towards very young members of staff, particularly those moving to a new area, varied. The racing industry is relatively unusual in that very young people often have to migrate for employment and in many cases move away from their family and support networks to live independently for the first time and may have to secure their own housing. New staff to Malton, especially if they were young, had their housing secured by their employer, either through the use of employer provided housing or use of the employer's informal networks to secure private rented housing. Staff in Newmarket could expect support for housing from employers, for example with loans for bonds, but this assistance stopped short of securing housing, unless this was in the minority of employer provided housing. Finding accommodation for new staff was particularly problematic in Lambourn.

### **3.10 Impact on recruitment and retention**

The shortage of affordable housing has a detrimental impact on staff recruitment and retention, particularly in Lambourn. Collective action had been taken by Lambourn trainers to provide housing, but there is still a lack of supply.

### **3.11 Managing housing options**

Whilst the qualitative case studies highlighted differences in the level and type of support offered by employers in relation to housing for staff, it also showed differences in the initiative and planning of staff for their own housing. For example, staff in Malton were inventive in finding solutions to their housing circumstances, taking lodgers, buying property to rent elsewhere to fund their own rent in the racing centre and entering shared ownership. There was both a higher level of support from employers but also sense of self responsibility for housing solutions. In contrast, there was a general sense in Newmarket that housing was 'someone else's problem'. Staff wanted their employers to find housing, employers wanted staff to be self-sufficient and staff and employers both turned routinely to Racing Homes for housing.

### **3.12 Tied housing and lack of retirement planning**

A further housing challenge identified in the research is the loss of tied housing once a staff member retires. This is particularly an issue in studs. Whilst some staff in this situation had made plans for their retirement, qualitative interviews with staff and employers suggested that others made no provision for their future housing needs. There was a strong reliance on Council and Racing Homes housing for staff in this situation.

### **3.13 Transiency and home ownership**

One key tension identified in the research is the aim and expectation of home ownership within a transient industry where there is a lack of future career and housing planning. The qualitative case studies highlighted the transient nature of the workforce, with many of the participants reporting working in several racing centres throughout their careers to date, regardless of age. The interviews with stable staff also highlighted a relative lack of career planning, such as being unsure how long they would stay in the industry, whether they were likely to move and how they saw their careers developing. The research identified that roughly 20 per cent of survey respondents were homeowners and some people interviewed in the qualitative case studies were owner occupiers. However, it may be that whilst homeownership is suited to and affordable for some racing staff, it is unlikely to be desirable or achievable for the majority.

## 4. Recommendations

Whilst Racing Homes cannot solve problems of a lack of housing or unaffordability, there were issues in the findings of this research that Racing Homes could consider addressing in the short, medium and long-term. Some of these recommendations could also be addressed by other industry stakeholders. There are further recommendations that the wider industry would need to collectively consider.

### 4.1 Racing Homes

- Provide training or workshops at the racing colleges about managing tenancies in the private rented sector. This could help to equip staff with the skills to maintain their tenancy and could address poor behaviour of tenants in the private rented sector. Landlords may be more willing to let to young tenants if they can demonstrate they have undertaken such training.
- Consider providing training for transferable employment and life skills, for example, basic qualifications and money management.
- Raise awareness of different housing options amongst racing industry staff and employers.
- Provide training or workshops for residents of tied housing about planning for housing in retirement. This could help staff to plan for their future housing needs and reduce reliance on Racing Homes' housing stock. If this was successful, there may be less need for non-specialist retirement housing. This is likely to involve working closely with employers in studs.
- Consider using existing housing stock more efficiently long term. Technically two bedroom general-needs accommodation used to house retired staff could be used to house families or two singles/couples sharing a property.
- Support commuting to enable staff to live further away from their places of employment in cheaper areas, possibly through loans for driving lessons or supporting and encouraging car sharing.
- Support households to ensure they are claiming all eligible benefits. Support households to apply for social rented housing.
- Develop links with local landlords and provide staff, particularly those new to the area, with information and signposting about the local rental market.
- Racing Homes could offer a housing management service to employers in the industry providing accommodation for staff.
- A rent guarantee system could be developed to help support staff to access the private rented sector.

- Support the use of social media, such as facebook, to help people find housing, for example, to match up people looking to share housing or find lodgings. This could also help employers who have in the past rented properties for single staff to share, but have found it difficult to find an appropriate group of people to share one property (as in Lambourn), to match appropriate people to spaces in the available housing.
- Consider providing short-term temporary housing for newcomers to a racing centre. This would be particularly useful for young singles. Such housing could be most beneficial in Newmarket.
- A good model for shared housing for singles in a hostel could be a unit with both private and communal space. The hostel in Lambourn with individual front doors, en-suite bedrooms and also some communal areas was well regarded. This could help to manage some of the difficulties identified with shared housing. The qualitative and quantitative analysis suggests that such a hostel would fill a need in Lambourn.
- In considering future development plans, the research showed that housing is least affordable for singles, particularly young singles, and lone parents (although there are relatively few in the industry). The greatest proportions of households finding housing unaffordable are in Epsom, followed by Lambourn, then Newmarket and the South West.
- The collective action taken by trainers in Lambourn to use funds raised from open days has enabled some housing provision. The scope for supporting this in other areas could be explored.

#### **4.2 Wider industry**

- Industry-wide consideration of working patterns away from the split shift format. Rolling shift patterns or an alternative could prevent loss of staff from the industry who are unable to balance the demands of work in the industry with family life and may allow staff to live further away from work thus easing housing difficulties. The split shift system is incompatible with child care provision and this could be particularly relevant for staff retention.
- Advocate for new housing in racing centres and provide support where necessary. This could be in the form of demonstrating the need for more housing. Signposting employers to information about providing accommodation for employees and obtaining planning permission for new housing could prevent problems arising e.g. conversion of properties without planning consent, problems arising with tax queries when paying rent for staff.
- Advocate for higher wages. The industry suffers from staff retention problems because of relatively low wages. Finding affordable housing is difficult on low incomes. Some employers offer low wages but also offer free or subsidised housing, but this is rarely for all members of staff, leaving some at a disadvantage in accessing affordable housing in the private market.

## 5. The research

To discuss this research please contact Dr Gemma Burgess on 01223 764547 or [gib36@cam.ac.uk](mailto:gib36@cam.ac.uk). To quote this report:

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