



# The Untold Story

The Bangladeshi Community in Birmingham

**Kevin Gulliver and Dawn Prentice**

Foreword by Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP  
Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government

Introduction by Malik Ullah, Chair of Shahjalal Housing Co-operative

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## CONTENTS

List of Charts and Maps	
About the Authors	
Acknowledgements	
Foreword by Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government	1
Introduction by Malik Ullah, Chair of Shahjalal Housing Co-operative	2
SUMMARY	3
1. About the Report	6
2. Bangladeshis in the UK	8
3. Birmingham's Bangladeshi Community	15
4. Scoping Bangladeshi Needs	20
5. BME Housing and Mutual Self-Help	29
6. The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative	35
7. Shahjalal: Meeting Needs and Fulfilling Aspirations	42
8. Conclusions and Recommendations	47
Select Bibliography	48
About the Human City Institute	49

## List of Charts and Maps

Chart (1)	-	British Bangladeshis by Key Districts	9
Chart (2)	-	Key Housing Problems of Birmingham's Bangladeshis	22
Map (1)	-	West Midlands Bangladeshi Population	16
Map (2)	-	The Bangladeshi Population in Birmingham	17
Map (3)	-	Overcrowding in Birmingham	21
Map (4)	-	Fuel Poverty in Birmingham	23
Map (5)	-	Lost Years of Life in Birmingham	25
Map (6)	-	Index of Multiple Deprivation in Birmingham	26
Map (7)	-	Employment Deprivation in Birmingham	27
Map (8)	-	Environmental Deprivation in Birmingham	28
Map (9)	-	Shahjalal's Main Areas of Operation	36
Map (10)	-	Shahjalal's Main Areas of Operation by Street Layout	37

## About the Supporting Organisation

Shahjalal Housing Co-operative is a Bangladeshi housing co-operative created by the community and for the community. Shahjalal has a forty year history working in the inner areas of Birmingham, being created by three Aston co-operatives founded in the 1970s.

Shahjalal today houses around 400 people, in partnership with Birmingham City Council, the Matrix Housing Partnership, the Accord Group, Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services and Trident Social Investment Group.



## About the Authors

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We'd equally like to thank those stakeholders who contributed their views about the needs of the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham and about the role of BME and mutual housing in alleviated need and fulfilling aspirations.

The cover photograph is of women members of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative contributing to the building of new four-bedroomed homes in Aston, Birmingham in 2013/14.

September 2015



## Foreword



### Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government

*'The Untold Story'* represents conflation of the exploration of the needs of Birmingham's Bangladeshi community with potential solutions through mutual self-help. The statistics confirm that Birmingham's Bangladeshis face deep housing and health needs, which have been exacerbated by neighbourhood disadvantage and austerity. The problems of those living in Britain's inner cities, struggling to get by since austerity has introduced in 2010, remain concerns of the Labour Party. New housing, more and better jobs, and community support for families, young people and the old must be part of a renewal of inner city life under a future Labour government.

Yet the report also tells a story of hope in the midst of deprivation. It depicts action by the Shahjalal Housing Cooperative to tackle need and, perhaps more crucially, to fulfil aspiration arising from within the community itself, supported by Birmingham City Council and local housing associations. It is by providing an impetus to ambition, as well as confronting need, that the UK can develop a more successful economy while improving the cohesion and durability of communities.

The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative is a major success story for Birmingham's Bangladeshis, as the report relates, with a history stretching back four decades. Shahjalal is emblematic of what mutual housing organisations can achieve, adding to a long tradition of cooperation supported by the Labour movement since the 19th century.

We all need to build on this tradition and make mutual housing part-and-parcel of a future housing strategy that recognises the pressing need for more homes while enabling local control by communities to be retained.

As one of the longstanding housing co-operatives in Birmingham, Shahjalal exemplifies mutual housing in action. It was a housing co-operative founded by the Bangladeshi community and remains rooted in the Bangladeshi community, although reaching out to others with housing and health problems.

I hope others will read *'The Untold Story'* and take on board its valuable lessons of how communities can make a difference, meet need and inspire their residents to fulfil their aspirations.

## Introduction



Malik Ullah  
Chair, Shahjalal Housing Co-operative

Shahjalal Housing Co-operative has come a long way since its inception in the mid-1970s, as a series of smaller Co-operatives founded to meet the extreme needs of British Bangladeshis. In various forms, we have been active in the Aston and Saltley areas of Birmingham for more than 40 years. We are one of the oldest housing Co-operatives in the city and the only one founded by the Bangladeshi community and run by the Bangladeshi community in the UK. We are part of both a flourishing BME housing sector and a vital strand in mutual housing in the UK.

Shahjalal in its current form was created in 1996. Ten years later, when members elected a new Management Committee in 1996, Shahjalal has been able to go forward into a new phase of development – planning new homes, extending the range of needs we meet, including those of old and young members of our community, and expanding geographically while working with other communities.

Our continuing development as one of Birmingham's major housing Co-operatives, and our commitment to mutual self-help, is vital to ensure that Bangladeshi Britons are well-housed, receive good quality health care and are able to renew community vitality while meeting the aspirations of our young people. As this report shows, even though British Bangladeshis make a telling contribution to the vibrancy of the nation, and are a major part of Birmingham's rich ethnic tapestry, our community suffers persistent needs and inequalities.

That is why Shahjalal has much more work to do, retaining a strong emphasis on serving the Bangladeshi community in our current work areas while keeping a weather eye on opportunities to expand our provision geographically further afield – into the Black Country for example. We also have ambitions to broaden our work beyond housing and housing services to help revitalise the communities where we work. Facilities for old and young like, especially related to leisure and health, and for Shahjalal's women members, are high on our list of priorities. We have recently opened a community office and employed a dedicated worker to ensure that service delivery is even more responsive to our members and their communities.

HCI's report, and I am a Trustee of this charity, offers a summary of the journey of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative in its quest to improve the housing and health of Birmingham's Bangladeshi citizens. Yet the needs statistics in the report underline how much more there is to be done. Shahjalal is ready for the challenge ahead.

## SUMMARY

### About the Report

- The report is called '*The Untold Story: The Bangladeshi Community in Birmingham*' to reflect the need to tell the tale of how people of Bangladeshi origin have enriched the UK generally, and Birmingham particularly. The report is based on a range of research by the Human City Institute (HCI), including a review of literature, survey data and focus groups with members of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative in Birmingham, which was created by, and is run by Birmingham's Bangladeshi community.

### Bangladeshis in the UK

- Bangladeshis are one of the largest migrant communities to the United Kingdom. Significant numbers of ethnic Bengalis and ethnic Sylheti people arrived as early as the 17th century, mostly as lascar seamen working on British ships. Following the founding of Bangladesh in 1971, a large migration to the UK took place during the next two decades, leading to the establishment of a British Bangladeshi community.
- Today, it is estimated that about 451,000 British-Bangladeshis live in the UK, some of whose ancestors came to the UK before World War I, equating to about 0.7% of the UK's total population. The majority (96.7%) live in England, with smaller numbers settled in Wales (2.4%), Scotland (0.8%) and Northern Ireland (0.1%).
- British Bangladeshis play an important role in commerce, trade, civic life and the arts in the UK, and form a successful bridge between the UK and Bangladesh to the benefit of both.

### Birmingham's Bangladeshi Community

- Birmingham hosts the largest Bangladeshi community outside of London, at about 33,000 people, which is a 50% increase in the last fifteen years or so. Birmingham's Bangladeshi community is significantly 'younger' than other groups in Birmingham with around 40% aged 15 years or below. Some 80% of Bangladeshi households are two or more residents with dependent children.
- Birmingham Bangladeshis live in larger households than the average (at 4.4 people). Over half of Bangladeshis live in households of five or more people and 17% live in households of seven or more. Just over half of the Bangladeshi population in Birmingham is female compared to 49% of the UK's Bangladeshi population and 52% for all ethnic groups in Birmingham.

### Scoping Bangladeshi Needs

- Bangladeshis living in Birmingham are more likely to be living in housing stress than other ethnic groups. Overcrowding, poor housing conditions, fuel poverty and incidences of housing deprivation and obsolete housing attributes are all prevalent.

- Birmingham's Bangladeshis also experience significant health inequalities, with lost years of life, high morbidity rates and long-term limiting illness or disability being widespread.
- The neighbourhoods where the majority of Birmingham's Bangladeshis live are prone to elevated levels of multiple deprivation, high population densities, employment deprivation and environmental downgrades.

### **BME Housing and Mutual Self-Help**

- The benefits of BME-controlled housing, and the mutual self-help tradition in the UK, come together in the form of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative.

### **The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative**

- Shahjalal has its origins in the 1970s in Birmingham's inner cities. Today, it manages about 80 homes housing around 300 people. It is also a strong advocate for the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham, and seeks to provide and or seek other services to combat poor health, meet the needs of women and young and old people, while campaigning for more community and leisure facilities.



### **Shahjalal: Meeting Needs and Fulfilling Aspirations**

- Not only does Shahjalal meet the needs of the local Bangladeshi community but it aims to fulfil aspirations of individuals and neighbourhoods. Through controlling community assets and mutualism, the Bangladeshi community has a viable 'aspirational' vehicle in Shahjalal.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- It is clear that the migration of the Bangladeshi community to the UK over the last forty years, and sometimes stretching back much further, has been a major success for both the host economy and society and for Bangladeshis moving to the UK. British Bangladeshis, and Birmingham Bangladeshis in particular, make a significant contribution to the local economy and play an active role in civic leadership, while the community is increasingly integrated within British society. The role and contribution of Britain's Bangladeshi needs greater recognition – hence *'The Untold Story'*.
- However, British Bangladeshis, and those living in Birmingham, experience disproportionate housing need and health inequalities that require systematic investment in local housing and public health measures to ensure that the housing needs of Bangladeshi Britons are confronted and health inequalities melt away.
- BME-controlled, and especially mutual housing, offers much in these endeavours, and fit with the traditional values of community-support, self-help and self-reliance of many Bangladeshis. That having been said, without support of an active local state, and third sector agencies such as housing associations, these values will be in vain and remain in principle only. Improvements in housing and health, which save taxpayers money on NHS and social services in the long-run, require significant investment in the UK's inner cities today and tomorrow.

# 1.

## About the Report

### Introduction

The report was commissioned by the Chair of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative, Malik Ullah, and the Board of Management of Shahjalal. Malik Ullah is also a Trustee of the Human City Institute (HCI) charity, which has a twenty year history of researching the needs of BME communities, BME housing organisations and mutualism.

The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative is one of a handful of BME housing co-operatives in the UK, and is supported by Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services (BCHS), part of the Accord Group, and Trident Social Investment Group.

This report, then, represents a continuance of the research of HCI in key fields and collaboration with Shahjalal, and the wider BME and mutual housing sectors, in research and campaigning to promote community solutions to meet existing and emergent needs, while underscoring the community role in furthering local ways and means of satisfying the aspirations of diverse neighbourhoods under pressure from austerity and welfare reform.

The research has the specific aims of:

- Describing the Bangladeshi population in the UK in terms of migratory patterns and key household and community characteristics.
- Exploring the attributes of the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham, touching on the wider West Midlands.
- Scoping the housing, health, economic and community needs of Birmingham's Bangladeshi community.
- Contextualising the Bangladeshi community against the backdrop of the role of BME housing organisations and the mutual self-help tradition.
- Depicting the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative within the above context and within its historical development and geographical setting.
- Showing how the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative has a significant legacy of meeting needs and a present and future role in satisfying the aspirations of Bangladeshi people.
- Drawing conclusions from the research.
- Making recommendations about how organisations like Shahjalal might be developed.

The report is entitled '*The Untold Story: The Bangladeshi Community in Birmingham*' to reflect that the needs and aspirations of the Bangladeshi community are often not understood, nor acknowledged, or that the community's self-help role is recognised.

### **Research Methodology**

The research for '*The Untold Story*' encompassed a range of research approaches including:

#### **Review of Literature**

The research has included a short review of key literature about the migration, history, needs, achievements and aspirations of Birmingham's Bangladeshi community, alongside an overview of BME housing in the UK and the mutual strand in social housing.

#### **Shahjalal Documentation**

A review of Shahjalal documentation, including the Business Plan, Prospectus, news cuttings and photography has been undertaken and included throughout the report.

#### **Needs Data**

Needs and related data from the Census 2001 and 2011, research studies and Continuous Recording (CORE) lettings system have been deployed to provide a comprehensive review of the needs of the Bangladeshi community. A survey undertaken for Birmingham City Council via the Enterprising Communities regeneration programme in Saltley and Washwood Heath (Gulliver 2005) has been used to provide additional insights.

#### **Mapping Data**

Census 2011 data relating to Birmingham's Bangladeshis has been mapped alongside data from the Index of Deprivation domains.

#### **Aspirations**

Interviews with key people in Bangladeshi community, within the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative, and focus groups with co-op members (including specific focus groups with Bangladeshi women) provide insights into the aspirations of people of Bangladeshi origin living in Birmingham and their ideas for satisfying those aspirations.

### **Structure of the Report**

The report begins by describing the Bangladeshi community in the UK and Birmingham. It then moves on to scope the needs of the Bangladeshi community. The report next underlines the current state of play for BME housing and the mutual tradition.

Next, the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative is explored followed by the needs and aspirations being met by the co-operative.

Finally, conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

## 2.

# Bangladeshis in the UK

### Introduction

This section describes migratory patterns of Bangladeshi people into the UK and creates a profile of people of Bangladeshi origin living in the today across a range of household and community characteristics.

### Migration Patterns and Settlement

Bangladeshis are one of the largest migrant communities to the United Kingdom. Significant numbers of ethnic Bengalis and ethnic Sylheti people arrived as early as the 17th century, mostly as lascar seamen working on British ships. Following the founding of Bangladesh in 1971, a large migration to the UK took place during the next two decades, leading to the establishment of a British Bangladeshi community.

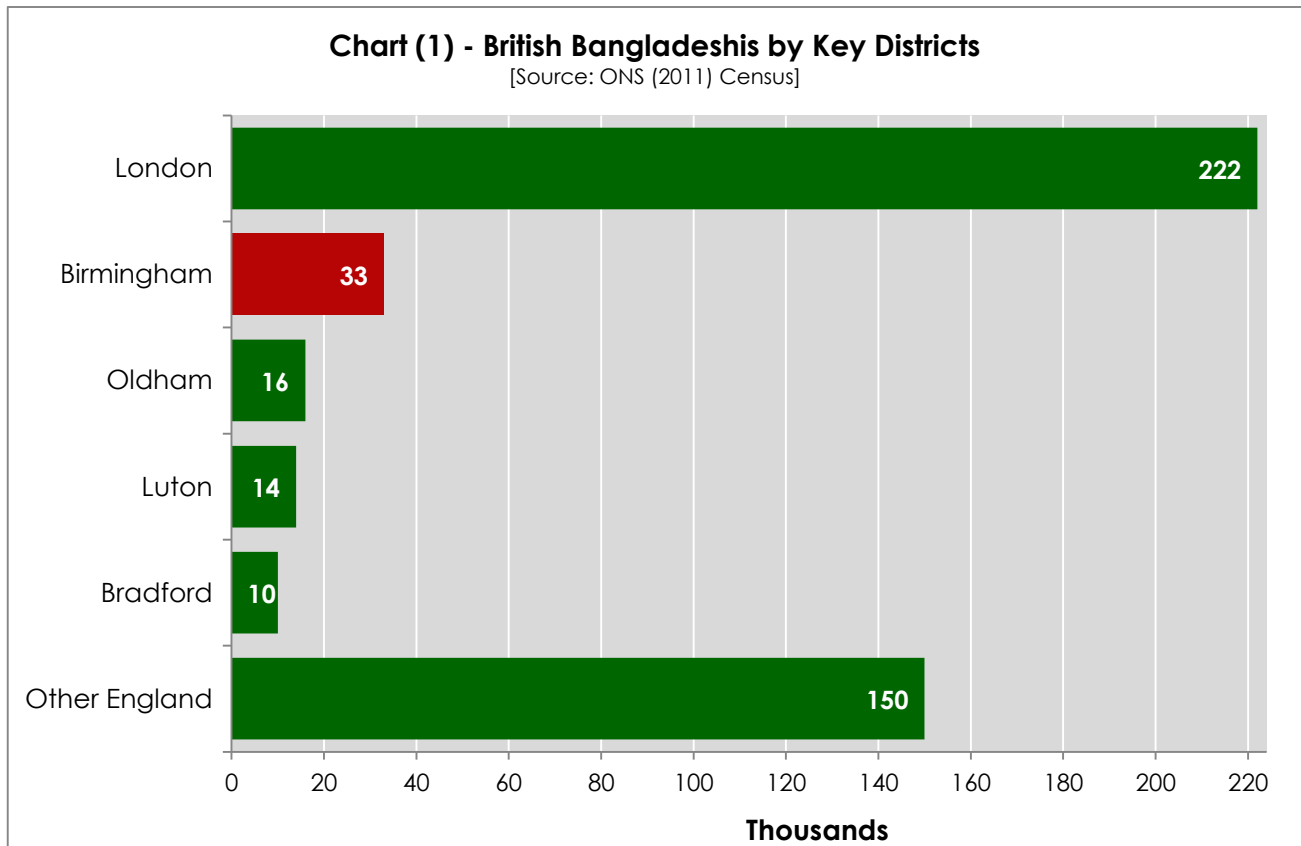
Many families originate from different *upazilas* or *thanas* across Sylhet, which includes the districts of Sylhet, Sunamganj, Habiganj and Maulvibazar. The largest places of origin are in the *upazilas* of, Jagannathpur, Chhatak Upazila Beanibazar and Bishwanth.[62][63] Other places within the Sylhet region which also have large numbers of expatriates include, Moulvibazar, Golapganj, Nabiganj and many others across the region. The minorities from outside Sylhet are mainly from Noakhali, Chittagong and Khulna, very few are from other divisions.

Bangladeshis were encouraged to move to Britain during the 1970s and 1980s because of changes in immigration laws, natural disasters such as the Bholá cyclone, the Bangladesh Liberation War against Pakistan, and the desire to escape poverty, and the perception of a better living led Sylheti men bringing their families. They are also known as British Bengalis, in reference to the main ethnic group from that south Asian region.

During the decades of 1970s and 1980s, British Bangladeshis experienced institutionalised racism and racial attacks by organised ultra-right fascist groups such as the National Front and the British Nationalist Party, but have since rooted themselves in inner cities of the UK over the last several decades. They are now one of the UK's most vibrant communities, characterised by community solidarity, a commitment to peace, self-help and mutual endeavour.

Today, it is estimated that about 451,000 British-Bangladeshis live in the UK, some of whose ancestors came to the UK before World War I, equating to about 0.7% of the UK's total population. The majority (96.7%) live in England, with smaller numbers settled in Wales (2.4%), Scotland (0.8%) and Northern Ireland (0.1%).

As the following chart illustrates, London is the main city of settlement, with more than 222,000 Bangladeshi people. Birmingham accounts for just under 33,000, and is the largest Bangladeshi community outside of London. Oldham (at 16,000), Luton (at 14,000) and Bradford (at 10,000) are the other major areas of settlement. There are smaller clusters in Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Rochdale, Cardiff, and Sunderland.



The largest concentration is in London, primarily in the east London boroughs, of which Tower Hamlets has the highest proportion, making up approximately 37% of the borough's total population. This large diaspora in London leads people in Bangladesh to refer to British Bangladeshis as 'Londonis'. Tower Hamlets can be seen as part of an inner ring of London boroughs running from Westminster, Islington and Camden round to Hackney, Newham and Southwark. In 2011, almost half of the British Bangladeshi population lived in this inner London ring.

### National Characteristics

The UK's Bangladeshi population is largely younger than other ethnic groups, although with a rapidly aging population with growing health and care needs. Bangladeshis have the highest rates of illness in the UK. Bangladeshis also have the highest rates of people with disabilities. The average number of people living in each Bangladeshi household is 5 – much larger than all other ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Census (2011) Ethnic Group and Local Authorities in the United Kingdom. Office for National Statistics.

Households which contain a single person are 9%, considerably lower than the UK average. Homes with a married couple represent 54% of the total. Pensioner households are 2%.

Bangladeshis are 40 times more likely to be living in cramped and poor housing conditions than anyone else in the country. There are twice as many people per room as White households, with 43% living in homes with insufficient bedroom space. One third of Bangladeshi homes contain more than one family – for example, 64% of all overcrowded households in Tower Hamlets are Bangladeshi. In England and Wales, not much over one third of Bangladeshis owned their homes, compared to 63% of the population, those living in social renting is about half of the total Bangladeshi population.

Bangladeshis are now mainly employed in the distribution, hotel and restaurant industries, although earlier migrations in the 1970s worked in factories – especially associated with car manufacture. Bangladeshis have one of the highest unemployment rates in the UK, at about 20% for men and 24% for women. Over 40% of Bangladeshi men under 25 are unemployed. The average earnings of Bangladeshi Britons is barely half the average national wage.

New generation Bangladeshis, however, aspire to professional careers, becoming doctors, IT management specialists, teachers and in business. In education, Bangladeshi pupils have registered below the average national academic achievement levels, but these results have steadily improved, particularly among Bangladeshi girls. Bangladeshi pupils are making significant progress, compared with other ethnic minority groups. Girls are more likely to do better in education than boys; 55% of girls are achieving 5 or more A\*-C at GCSE, compared to 41% boys. By 2013, the British Bangladeshi achievement rate (5 or more A\*-C at GCSE) had increased considerably to 61%, compared to 56% for White British students and 51% for British Pakistani students.

### **Bangladeshi Culture**

The majority of Bangladeshis living in UK speak Sylheti. The language is sometimes considered as a dialect of Bengali, and does not have a written form. Although many Sylheti speakers say they speak Bengali, this is because they do not expect outsiders to be well informed about dialects. Bengali/Sylheti is the second largest language spoken after English in London. Some 97% of Bangladeshi students speak English as a second language, after Sylheti. In recent years, there has been a slight increase in the numbers of Bangladeshi students arriving to the United Kingdom, majority of these are from Dhaka and other regions. Many of these are on student visas, living in the East London areas among the Bangladeshi communities.

The majority of British Bengalis regard Bangladesh as their 'ancestral home', although a survey showed strong feelings that they belonged to British society. The cultural traditions practised in Bangladesh, are also widely practised by the community. The languages of Sylheti and Bengali are viewed as important features of cultural identity, parents therefore encourage young people to attend standard Bengali classes to learn the language, although many find this learning progress difficult in the UK. English tends to be spoken among younger brothers and sisters and

peer groups, and Bengali/Sylheti with parents. Communities share and favour a family-orientated community culture.

British Bangladeshis eat traditional Bangladeshi food, in particular rice with curry. Many traditional Bengali dishes are served with rice, including chicken, lentil (dahl), and fish. Another popular food is shatkora, which is a citrus and tangy fruit from Sylhet, mainly used for flavourings in curries. Bangladeshi cooking has become popular in Britain because of the number of Bangladeshi-owned restaurants, which has increased significantly. In 1946 there were 20 restaurants, while today there are 10,000 owned by Bangladeshis, out of a total of 12,000 Indian restaurants in the UK. Surveys show that Bangladeshi curries are among the most popular of dishes; chicken tikka masala is now regarded as one of Britain's favourite national food dishes.

There are five Bengali channels available on satellite television in Britain. Three British-owned channels are NTV, Channel S, and Bangla TV. Popular national channels, ATN Bangla, and Channel i are also available. Bengali newspapers have been increasing within the community, such include Surma News Group.

The first international film based on a story about British Bangladeshis was Brick Lane (2007), based on the novel by author Monica Ali, her book is about a woman who moves to London from rural Bangladesh, with her husband, wedded in an arranged marriage. The film was critically acclaimed and the novel was an award-winning best seller. The film however caused some controversy within the community. Other films created in the community are mainly based on the struggles which British Bangladeshis face such as drugs and presenting a culture clash. These dramas include, Shopner Desh in 2006 – a story related to the culture clashes.

The Bangladeshi population is predominantly Islamic. Out of all the ethnic groups in the UK it has the largest proportion of people following a single religion. Nearly all Bangladeshis are Sunni Muslims. The 2011 census in England and Wales showed those who indicated their religion, 93% were Muslim, and 2 follow other religions (mostly Hindu and Christian). In London, Bangladeshi Muslims make up 28% of all London Muslims, more than any other single ethnic group in the capital.

Religious Muslim festivals celebrated by the Bangladeshi community each year are Eid al-Adha and Eid ul-Fitr. People are dressed in their new traditional clothing. Children are given money by elders, and Eid prayers are attended by men in the morning in large numbers, they will then visit their relatives later in the day.

Traditional food is cooked for relatives, such as samosa or shandesh. The celebration of Eid reunites relatives and improves relations. In the evening, young people will spend the remaining time socialising with friends. Some, however, will go "cruising" – travelling across cities in expensive hired cars, playing loud music and sometimes waving the Bangladesh flag. Sociologists suggest these British Bangladeshi boys and girls have reinterpreted the older, more traditional practice of their faith and culture. The Eid al-Adha is celebrated after Hajj to commemorate the prophet Ibrahim's compliance to sacrifice his son Isma'il.

## Bangladeshi Community Contributions

British-Bangladeshis played a pivotal role in mobilizing international public opinion in favour of Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971. Due to their relentless efforts, London emerged as an epicentre of support activity for Bangladesh at that time. The community in Britain contributes significantly to the British economy as well. They run some 10,000 restaurants (thus forming the mainstay of British curry industry) often termed 'Indian' restaurants that are largely staffed by people of Bangladeshi origin. These restaurants employ about 90,000 workers with an annual turnover of around £3.5bn.

The British-Bangladeshi Community is thriving in the United Kingdom; perhaps their third or even fourth generations are on their way to establishing themselves in mainstream British business, commerce, politics and communities. The Bangladeshi community has earned itself a good reputation in British society with a large number of Bangladeshi citizens having been awarded various honours, such as Member or Order of the British Empire (MBE or OBE) in recognition of their contributions to British society.

Around 100 British-Bangladeshi Councillors are playing a constructive role in local government. Some are mayors and or council leaders. The first ever MP of Bangladeshi origin – Rushanara Ali in Bethnal Green and Bow - elected to the UK Parliament in 2010. Rushanara was Shadow Minister for International Development for 2010-13, Shadow Education Minister for 2013-14 and a member of the Treasury Select Committee from 2014 onwards. Tulip Siddiq became an MP in 2015 elections, getting elected from Camden Town. Tulip is the niece of the sitting Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina and granddaughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the founder father of Bangladesh.

Baroness Uddin was the first Bangladeshi and Muslim woman to enter the House of Lords. Anwar Choudhury became the British High Commissioner for Bangladesh in 2004, the first non-white British person to be appointed in a senior diplomatic post. Lutfur Rahman is the first directly elected mayor of Tower Hamlets. Enam Ali became the first Muslim and the first representative of the British curry industry to be granted Freedom of the City of London in recognition of his contribution to the Indian hospitality industry. Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari is the chairman of the Muslim Council of Britain – the largest Muslim organisation in Britain. Murad Qureshi, a Labour politician, is a member of the Greater London Assembly.

Others have contributed in the British media and business worlds. Konnie Huq is the longest-serving female presenter in Blue Peter, a BBC television programme for children. Other notable national TV presenters have included Lisa Aziz of Sky News, Nina Hossain of ITV and BBC London, and Tasmin Lucia Khan of BBC News. In drama, Shefali Chowdhury and Afshan Azad both starred in the Harry Potter movies as Parvati and Padma Patil. Mumzy is an R&B and hip-hop music artist, the first Bangladeshi to be releasing a music single.

Syed Ahmed is a businessman and also a television star, well known for being a candidate on The Apprentice.<sup>[127][134]</sup> There are many other entrepreneurs, including the late Abdul Latif, known for his dish "Curry Hell"; Iqbal Ahmed, placed at number 511 on the Sunday Times Rich List

2006, and celebrity chef Tommy Miah. Rizwan Hussain is also very well known for TV presenting Islamic and charity shows on Channel 5 and Islam Channel, mainly known within the community.

Artists include dancer and choreographer Akram Khan, pianist Zoe Rahman, vocalist Suzana Ansar and Sohini Alam, and the visual artist on film and photography Runa Islam. In Sport, the only Bangladeshi professional footballer in England is Anwar Uddin. Writers which have received praise and criticism for their books include Zia Haider Rahman who debut novel *In the Light of What We Know* was published in 2014, Ed Husain, who wrote the book *The Islamist* on account of his experience for five years with the Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Monica Ali is a major novelist. Kia Abdullah's book is *Life, Love and Assimilation*.

Large numbers of people from the Bangladeshi community have also been involved with local government, increasingly in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, and Camden. The majority of the councillors in Tower Hamlets are of Bangladeshi descent and part of the Labour Party. As of 2009, 32 of the total 51 councillors were Bangladeshi (63%), 18 were White (35%) and Somali (2%). The first Bangladeshi mayor in the country was Ghulam Murtuza in Tower Hamlets, and Camden has appointed many Bangladeshis as mayors since the first, Nasim Ali.

In Bangladeshi politics there are two groups, favouring different principles, one Islamic and the other secular. Between these groups there has always been rivalry; however, the Islamic faction is steadily growing. This division between religious and secular was an issue during the Bangladesh Liberation War; the political history of Bangladesh is now is being re-interpreted again, in the UK. The secular group show nationalism through monuments, or through the introduction of Bengali culture, and the Islamic group mainly through dawah.

One symbol of Bengali nationalism is the Shaheed Minar, which commemorates the Bengali Language Movement, present in Altab Ali Park which as of today – the park is also the main venue for rallies and demonstrations, and also in Westwood, Oldham. The monuments are a smaller replica of the one in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and symbolises a mother and the martyred sons.[148] Nationalism is mainly witnessed during celebrations of the mela, when groups such as the Swadhinata Trust try to promote Bengali history and heritage amongst young people, in schools, youth clubs and community centres.

### **UK-Bangladeshi Relations**

This is organised mainly through the Bangladeshi High Commission. The High Commission attaches priority to its interaction and engagement with the community. Each year, the High Commission promotes, assists and participates in hundreds of events organized by numerous community organisations.

The High Commission accorded reception on 4th October 2010, in honour of the first British-Bangladeshi elected as Member of Parliament Rushanara Ali and some 70 British-Bangladeshi Councillors elected around the UK. Former Honourable Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni and Mayor of Sylhet, Mr Bador Uddin Ahmed Kamran were present at the event.

They occupy an important place in the evolving Bangladesh-UK relations primarily because of the close link members of the community maintain with Bangladesh in terms of social and family engagements, as well as business and investment interests.

The trade relationship between Bangladesh and the UK has strengthened in last couple of years. Total export to the UK from Bangladesh, is nearly 10% of our total export earnings. Although UK-Bangladesh trade statistics are encouraging in terms of volume and growth, but is worrying that almost 80% of Bangladesh's exports to UK are ready-made garments, which enjoys duty free access under EBA (Everything But Arms) policy of the European Union.

The High Commission remains focussed to further improve the growing trend of economic co-operation between our two countries.

## 3.

# Birmingham's Bangladeshi Community

## Introduction

The following section maps the Bangladeshi community in the wider West Midlands and in Birmingham. It also provides an overview of the chief household characteristics of the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham.

It also enables some insights into the origins of Birmingham Bangladeshis and the cultural linkages to the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative.

## Origins and Location

Birmingham's Bangladeshi population numbered almost 33,000 in 2011 (50% up on 2001), representing 3% of the city's population. Around one third of Bangladeshis in Birmingham were born outside the UK. Bangladeshis comprise 7.2% of the 'non-white' population and 10.9% of the 'Asian' population.

The majority of Birmingham's Bangladeshis migrated from the rural area of Sylhet in Bangladesh in the 1970s onwards. At this time they were mostly men aiming to work in the expanding British economy following the post-war reconstruction. Most found work in factories of inner Birmingham. Later, wives and children, and potential marriage partners and their families were sent for, and the community grew gradually over the next three to four decades.<sup>2</sup>

Birmingham's Bangladeshi community is located primarily in the City's core areas, known colloquially as the 'inner city'. These areas are clustered around the city centre and extend north-west to Aston, Handsworth and Lozells, north-east to Nechells and Washwood Heath, and in a band to the south that covers Bordesley Green, Sparkbrook, Springfield, and Moseley. Some 20% of Aston's population are Bangladeshi for instance.

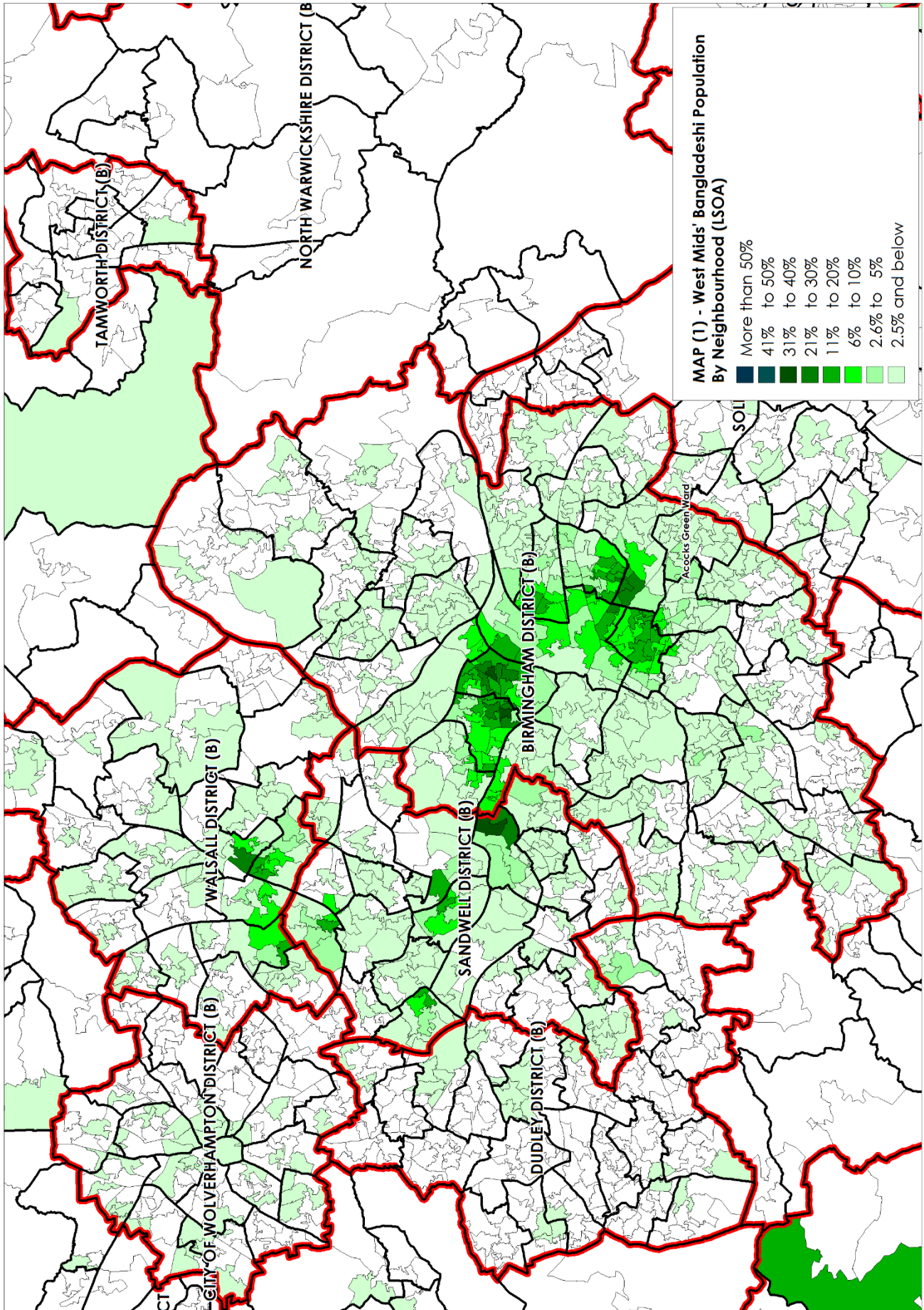
Maps (1) and (2) over the page show concentrations at regional, city and core area geographical levels. Map (2) shows the greater concentration of Bangladeshis in some neighbourhoods<sup>3</sup> at sub-ward level.

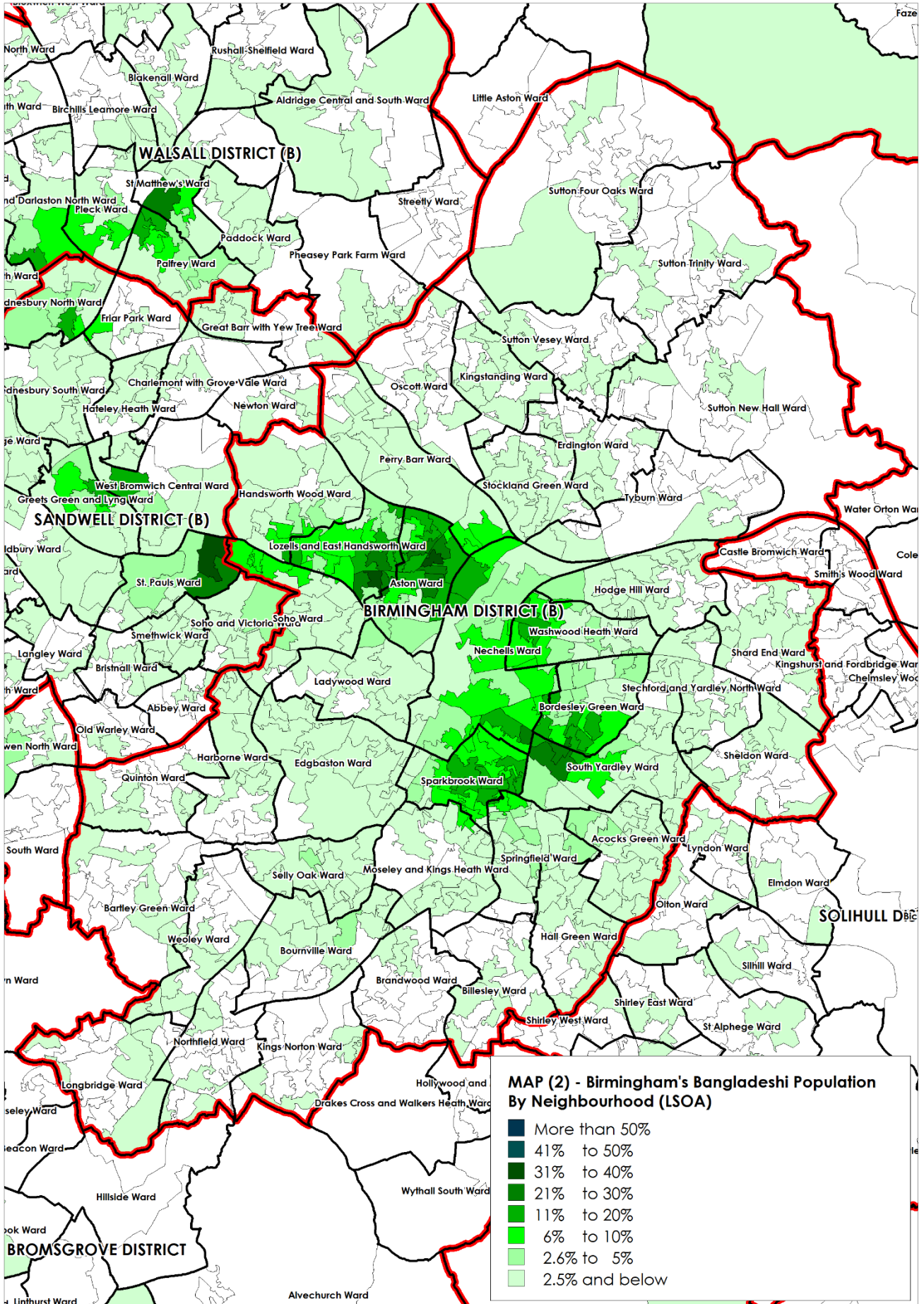
Two of Birmingham's 641 'official' neighbourhoods have Bangladeshi communities of more than 30%. Thirteen have Bangladeshi populations of more than 20% and 40 have populations of more than 10%.

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<sup>2</sup> BCC (2008) A Brief History of the Bangladesh Community. Birmingham City Council

<sup>3</sup> These neighbourhoods of around 400 people are designated Lower Super Output Areas (LOSAs) by the Government





## Community and Cultural Life

While many Bangladeshis in the early days of migration to Birmingham worked in heavy industries (although they were originally seamen), such as Delta Metal Works, BSA and Morris Motors, many became involved in the catering industry from the early 1980s onwards. So-called 'Indian restaurants' in Birmingham are actually Bangladeshi owned and managed, including many in the city's famous 'Balti Belt'. There are more than 600 Asian caterers in Birmingham, most Bangladeshi owned and run, which employ 5,000 workers and are a major tourist attraction.



The majority of Birmingham Bangladeshis are Muslims (at 93%). However, the Bangladeshi community also has a strong secular tradition, going back to the Bangladeshi Liberation War with Pakistan in 1971. The two dominant religious strands amongst Bangladeshi Muslims in Birmingham are:

- **Fultoli:** This Bareilvi-oriented movement, established by Abdul Latif Chowdhury, which is named after the village of his birth - Fultoli - in the Sylhet area from which many Birmingham Bangladeshis originated. This spiritual leader is said to be a descendant of Shah Kamal, one of the disciples of Shah Jalal, who spread Islam across the Sylhet region in the 14th Century. The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative (see its 2014 AGM above) was named after this spiritual leader. Many of Birmingham's Bangladeshi communities are part of the Fultoli movement, especially older Bangladeshis.

- **Tabligh Jamaat:** This movement oversees a large number of Mosques in the core areas of Birmingham, although they are not exclusively for Bangladeshis, and has been successful in attracting second and third generation Bangladeshis. Tabligh Jamaat is mainly a missionary movement, following Deobandi precepts and opposing the more syncretic Barelvi tradition, and tried to avoid local or national politics.

Since the early days of migration to Birmingham, a strong sense of community has been preserved via community and religious groups to replicate the communal village life left behind by the Sylheti seamen.

Inevitably, the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham has been subject to European influence with the concomitant use of 'hyphenated identities' to express multiple identities and ties (such as British Bangladeshi, British Muslim and so forth).

This can be shown in material terms with the changing relationship between Birmingham Bangladeshis and their kin in Bangladesh. It is estimated that less than one fifth of Bangladeshi families are sending money to families in the home country whereas thirty years ago this was closer to four fifths. The emergence of second and third generation is another explanatory factor.

While Bangladesh is still valued as the 'ancestral home' there is less inclination amongst Birmingham Bangladeshis to invest, send money, or stay for a long visit in Bangladesh.

### Household Characteristics

Birmingham's Bangladeshi community is significantly 'younger' than other groups in Birmingham with around 40% aged 15 years or below (for Birmingham as a whole the proportion is 24%, for Pakistanis it is 35% and for Indians 25%). Only 8% of Birmingham Bangladeshis are aged 60 years or over against a city norm of 19%. Unsurprisingly given the above, 80% of Bangladeshi households are two or more residents with dependent children compared to the Birmingham norm of 33% and 75% of Bangladeshis households across the country.

Lone parenthood isn't unknown in the Bangladeshi community (at 15%) but is much lower than for the city as a whole (at 30%) although is much higher than for Indian households (at 2%) but lower than for Pakistani households (at 17%).

Birmingham Bangladeshis tend to live in larger households than the average (at 4.4 people) compared to Whites (at 2.2 people), African-Caribbeans (at 2.4 people) and Indians (at 3.3 people) although slightly smaller than Pakistanis (at 4.6 people).

Over half (51%) of Bangladeshis live in households of five or more people and 17% live in households of seven or more.

Just over half of the Bangladeshi population in Birmingham is female compared to 49% of the UK's Bangladeshi population and 52% for all ethnic groups in Birmingham.

## 4.

# Scoping Bangladeshi Needs

## Introduction

This section scopes the housing and health needs of Birmingham's Bangladeshi population, supplemented by mapping of key data.

## Housing Needs

Since the earliest establishment of Bangladeshi communities in Birmingham, severe housing needs have persisted, especially in relation to overcrowding and the poor state of housing occupied relative to the general population. This section takes a look at the current housing needs of Birmingham's Bangladeshi community. First, however, some reference to tenure is made.

**Tenure:** Although higher than for Bangladeshis nationally (at 37%), Birmingham Bangladeshis are less likely to own their homes (at 42%) compared to other ethnic groups in the city (e.g. the Birmingham norm is 60%, and for Pakistanis it is 62% and for Indians 78%). Bangladeshis are the most likely Asian group to be renting from the city council (at 22%) and housing associations (at 16%).<sup>4</sup>

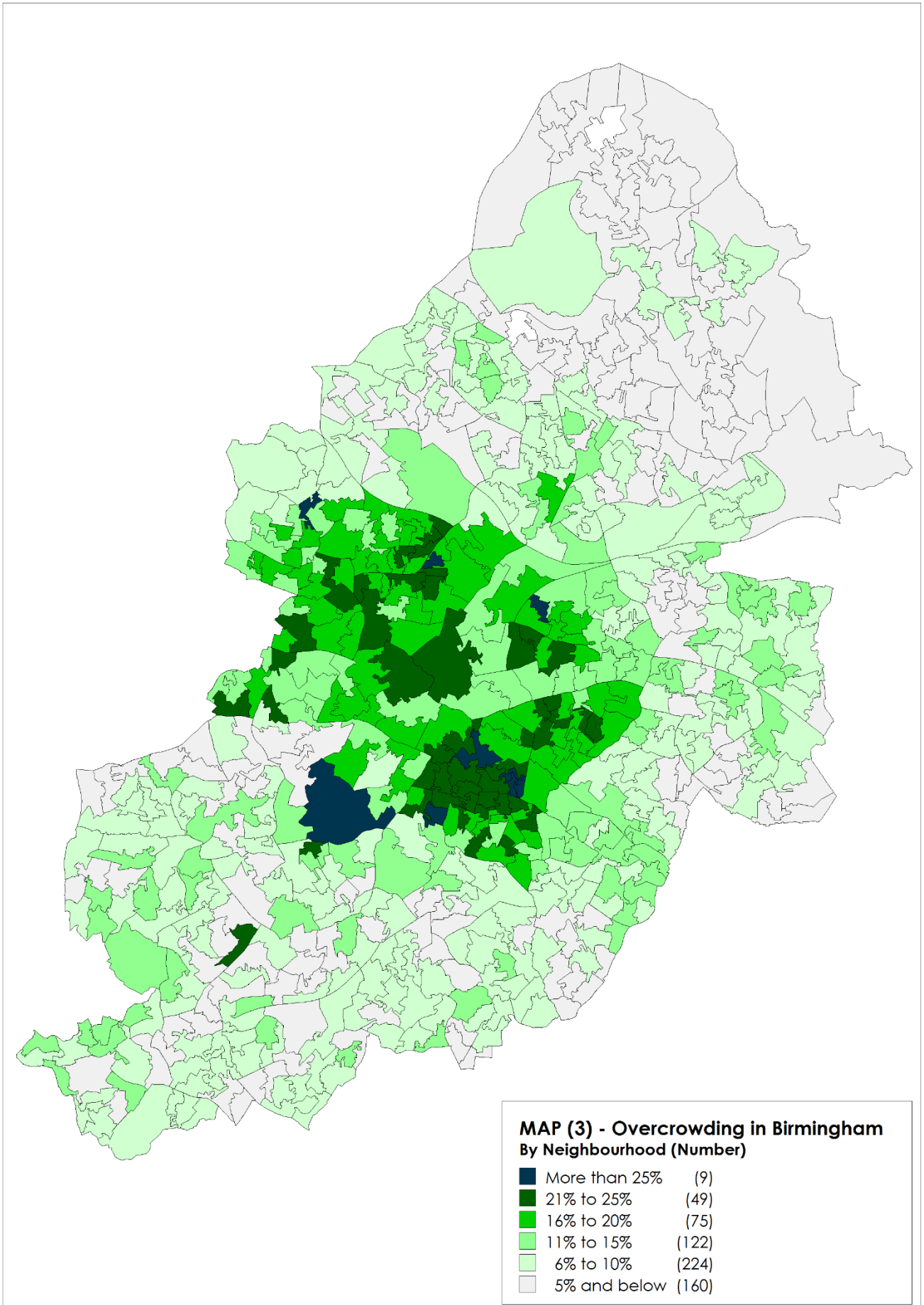
**Housing Type:** Birmingham's Bangladeshi population is more concentrated in older terraced housing (at 59%) than the city average (at 35%) and when contrasted with other Asian groups (Indians = 33% and Pakistanis = 54%). This housing is more likely to experience disrepair problems, since the majority was built pre-1919, and/or overcrowding since units tend to be small (two and three bedrooms).

**Overcrowding:** This is the most severe housing problem faced by Birmingham Bangladeshis. More than one quarter of Bangladeshi households (25%) have more than one person per room, and approaching one in ten (10%) have 1.5 or more persons per room. This can be contrasted with 18% and 5% respectively for those of Pakistani origin and 9% and 3% for those of Indian origin. The Birmingham norm is 4% and 1% in each case.

Overcrowding has also been measured in the household survey (Gulliver 2003). The average number of people per room in Bangladeshi households is 0.53 compared to 0.59 for Pakistani households, 0.79 for Indian households (Whites = 1.09 and African-Caribbeans = 0.95). The average number of bedrooms for Bangladeshis is 0.68 (Pakistanis = 0.64, Indians = 0.92, Whites = 1.18 and African-Caribbeans = 1.05). Map (3) on the next page shows how overcrowding at the neighbourhood level is concentrated in those areas most likely to be populated by the Bangladeshi community.

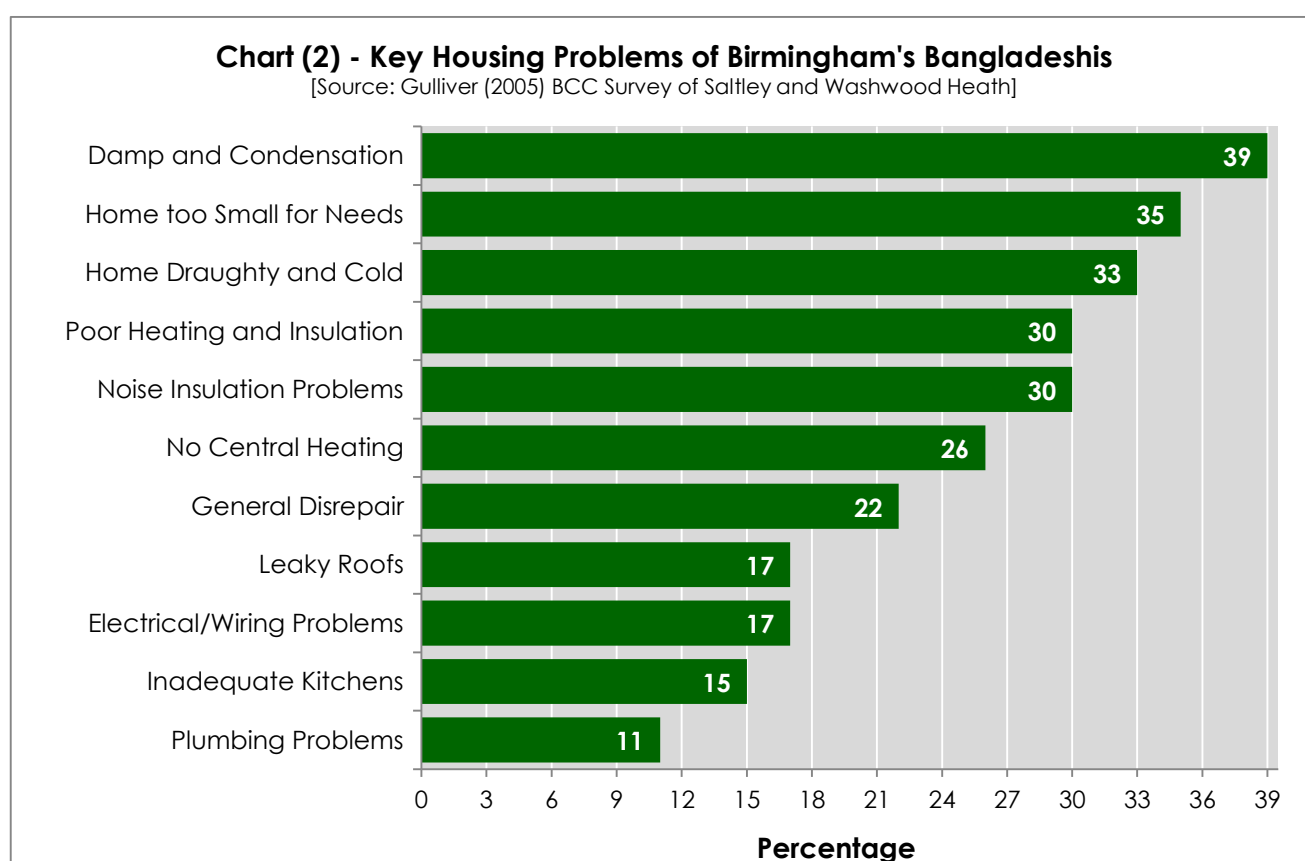
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<sup>4</sup> Census (2011) Ethnic Group and Local Authorities in the United Kingdom. Office for National Statistics.



More than one third (35 %) of Bangladeshis in the household survey<sup>5</sup> also said that their homes were too small for their needs [see chart (2) below] compared to 30% of Pakistani and Indian households and only 18% of White households. This subjective assessment takes into account the visiting needs of households, as well as subjective number of rooms/bedrooms per permanent resident.

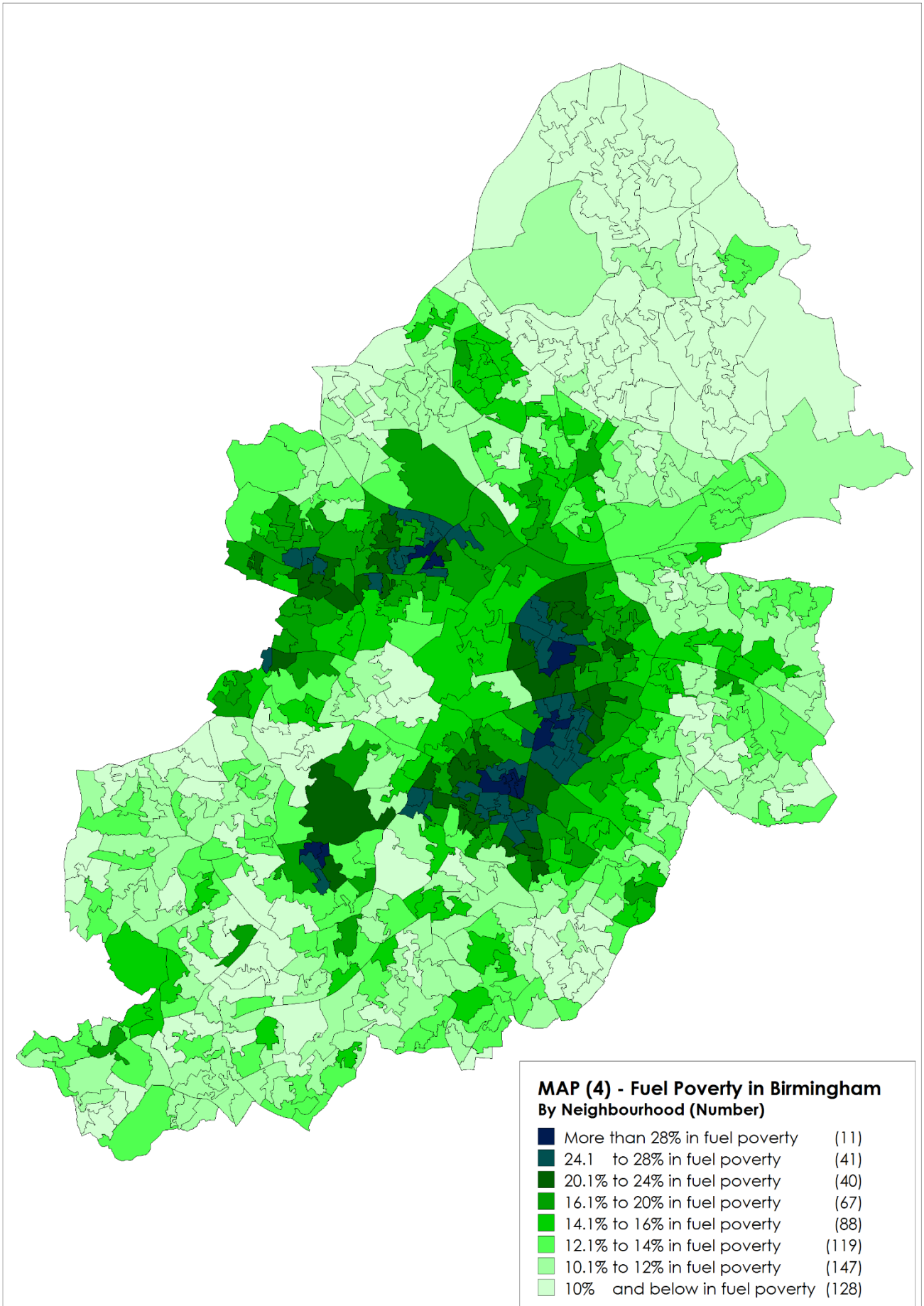
**Housing Conditions:** Bangladeshis taking part in the household survey were most likely of ethnic groups interviewed to place dampness and condensation problems (at 39%), draughts and cold (at 35%) and poor heating (at 30%) at the top of their descriptive list of key issues in their homes. Additionally, just over one quarter (26% and 29% from the Census) of Bangladeshi households told us that their homes had no central heating.



More than one fifth (22%) of Bangladeshi households in the survey pointed to general disrepair as a key problem. The poor nature of various housing fabric elements, such as leaky roofs, wiring and electrics, plumbing and kitchens were also listed (these dovetail with the key parts of the decent homes programme).

Bangladeshi households in Birmingham are also far more likely to be living in neighbourhoods where fuel poverty is prevalent, as the map over the page illustrates.

<sup>5</sup> Gulliver K. (2005) Birmingham City Council Survey of Saltley and Washwood Heath. BCC/Enterprising Communities Programme



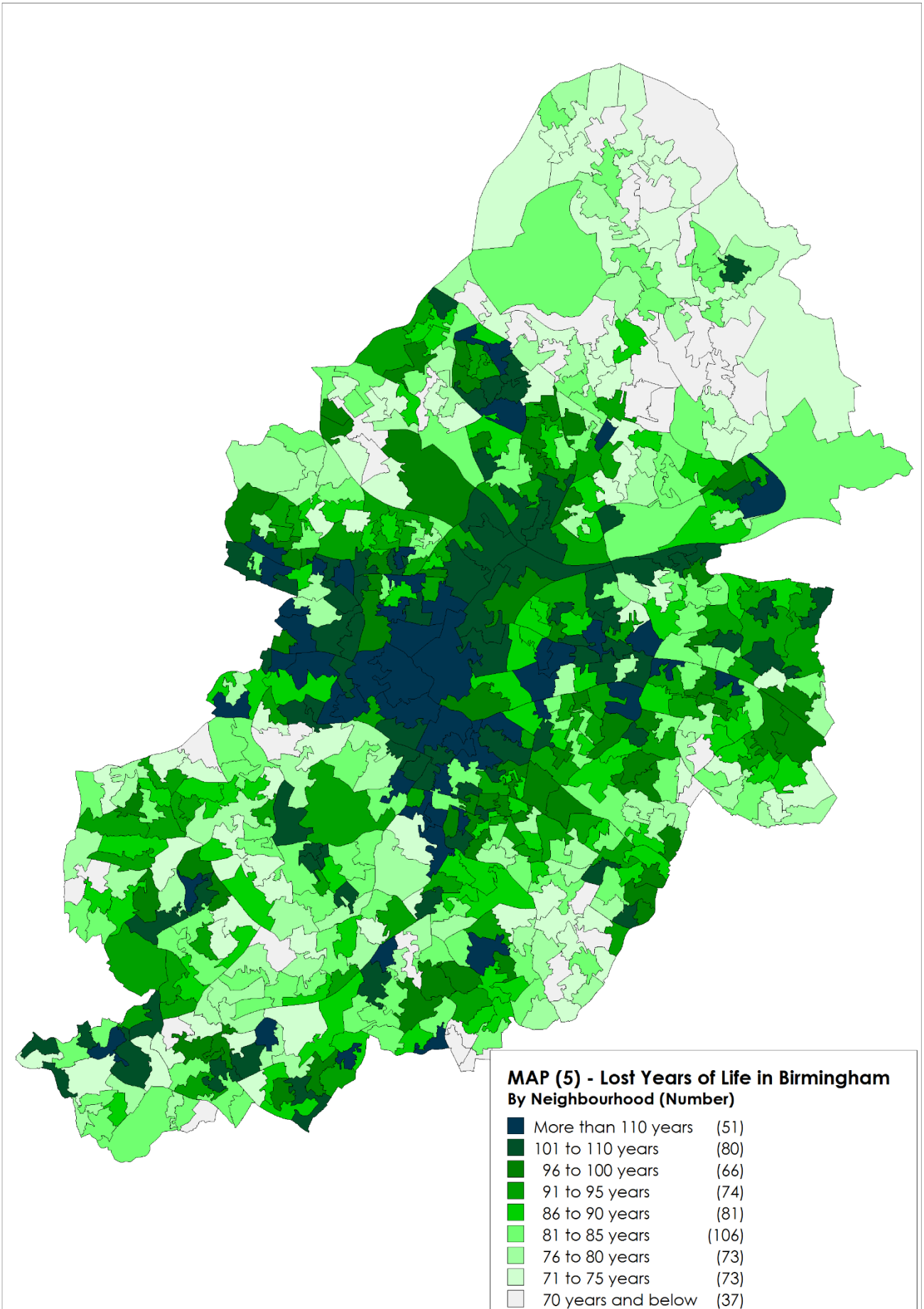
**Health Needs:** Lost years of life per 1,000 population is shown by neighbourhood in map (5) over the page. The darkest areas are those with the greatest number of years of life lost. As the map shows, the greatest extent of lost life occurs mainly in Birmingham's core area, especially in the wards of Aston, Ladywood, Sparkbrook, Soho, Nechells and Washwood Heath, which are the major areas of Bangladeshi settlement. The average life expectancy in these wards (ranging from 72.5 to 77.5 years) is up to nine years less than in Sutton Coldfield for instance; inner city living is bad for health. More than two fifths of Bangladeshi households (44%) say they have a household member with a limiting or long-term illness. This constitutes a greater proportion of the Bangladeshi population than the Birmingham average (at 38%) and for most other ethnic groups, despite the Bangladeshi community being relatively 'young'.

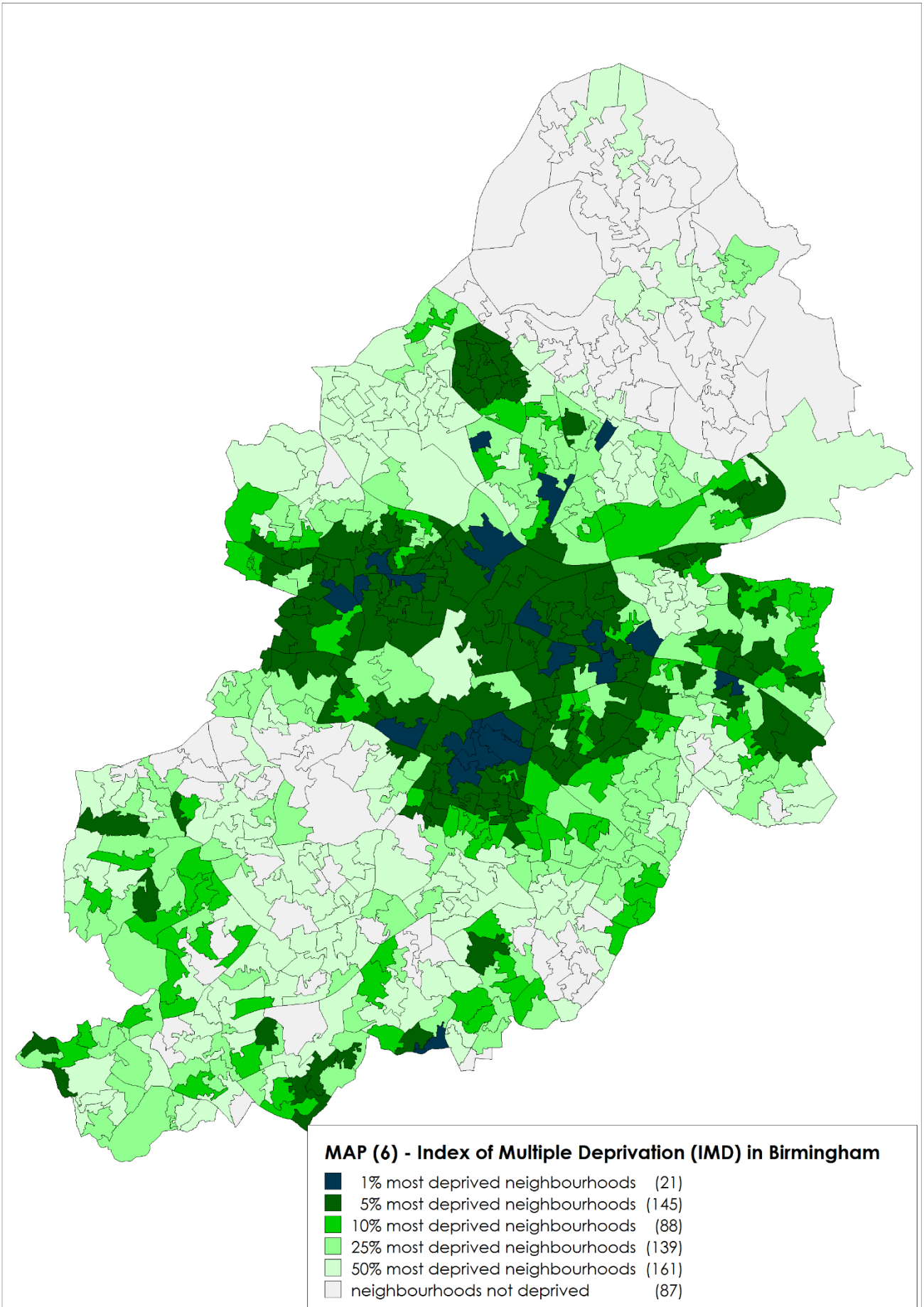
The Office for National Statistics (ONS) mental health indicator provides an approximation of the state of mental health in a community. Wards of high Bangladeshi concentration have pockets where mental illness is above average.

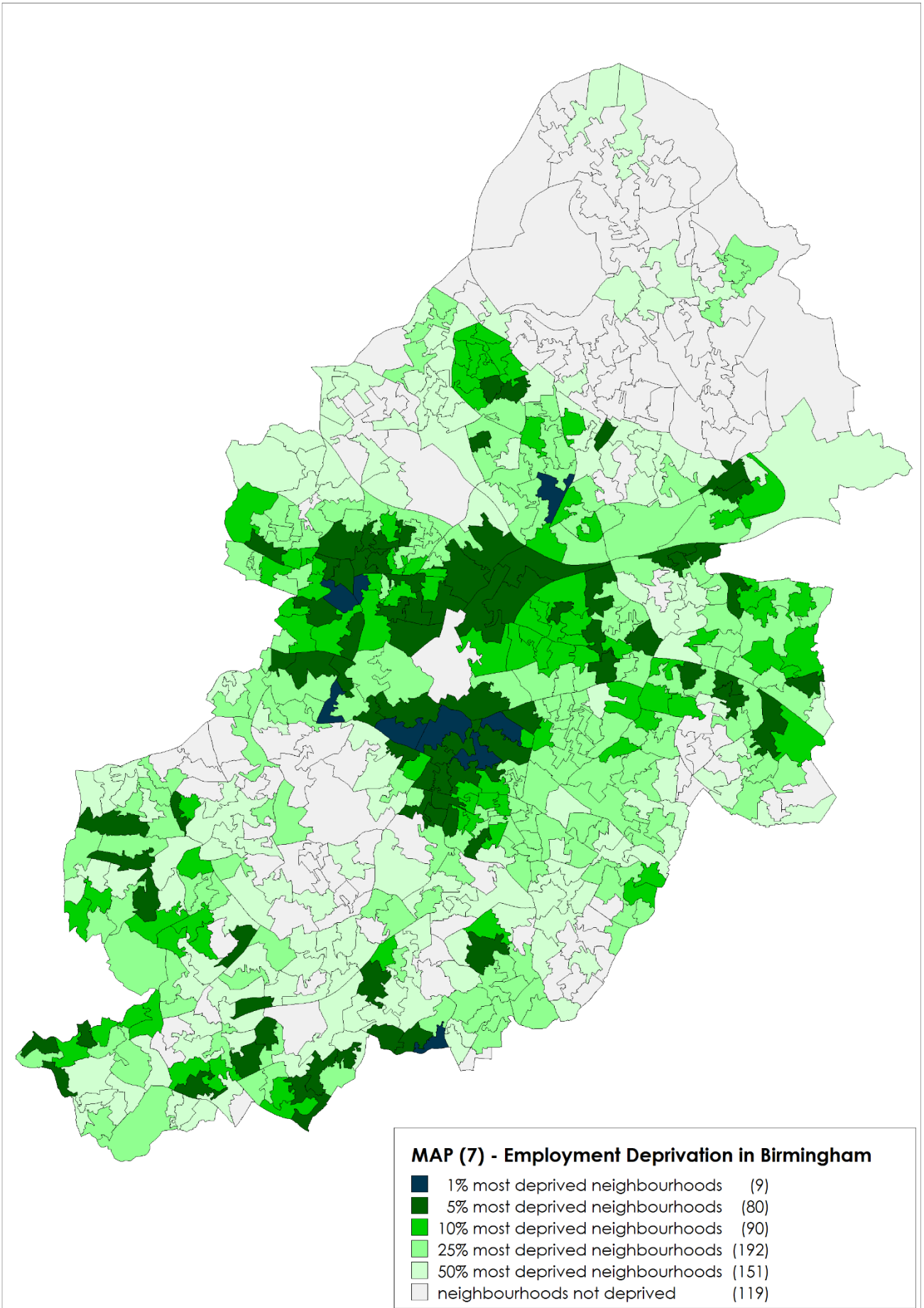


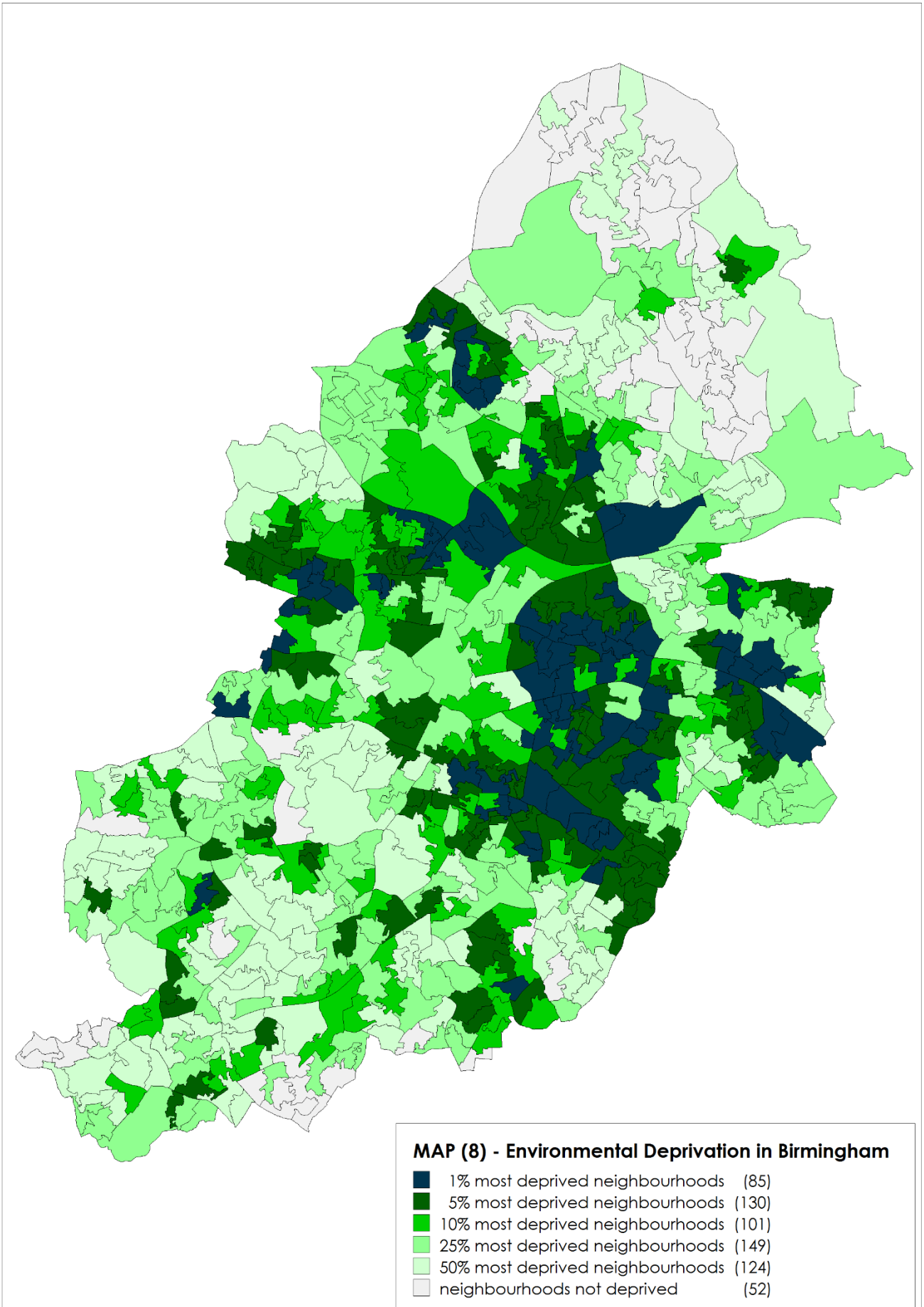
**Multiple Deprivation:** A range of ways of measuring multiple deprivation have been developed over the last two decades, with the latest being the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010. These indices are based on a range of domains, including housing, environment, health, disability, income, benefit dependency and so forth. Multiple deprivation impacts at the neighbourhood with the location of Birmingham's Bangladeshi community.

There are 32,482 neighbourhoods (LSOAs) across England of which 641 are in Birmingham. Close to one tenth (9%) of Birmingham's Bangladeshi community live in the 1% most deprived wards in England. Some 86% live in the 10% most deprived wards. These neighbourhoods are predominantly located in Aston, Nechells, Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath. Maps (6), (7 and (8) on pages 26 to 28 illustrate the location of multiple deprivation, employment and environmental deprivation in the main areas of Bangladeshi concentration.









## 5.

# BME Housing and Mutual Self-Help

### Introduction

Section 5 provides a backdrop to the work of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative by describing the legacy of the BME housing sector and the tradition of mutual self-help that underpins the co-operative principles of Shahjalal.

### The BME Housing Sector

BME housing organisations, of which Shahjalal is one and a member of the representative body, BMENational, are generally defined as letting to more than 80% BME applicants with a similar proportion of board members. They have deep roots going back thirty years in the most disadvantaged communities of Britain's major cities and towns. Shahjalal is one of six BME-controlled housing co-operatives today.

BME housing organisations grew out of the need for greater access to social housing by BME communities, in the wake of 1980s disturbances and the growing special needs of BME communities (especially the elderly and young homeless people).<sup>6</sup>

They were created at a time when 'race and housing' issues were at the forefront of national policy debates against a backdrop of urban decay and social unrest. When BME housing organisations were formed, they also made mainstream providers sharpen up and get beyond colour blindness practices to positive action for those in most need. Their achievements over the last thirty years have been considerable, including building community-based vehicles as advocates of BME communities, while operating as local role models. And even though there are fewer today than at their peak, the majority are viable community-based social enterprises providing culturally sensitive services with a bright future despite financial, VFM and policy pressures.

BME housing organisations were the forerunners of agencies envisaged by today's 'Big Society', Localism and mutual self-help. They came from the community and remain for the community despite the fluctuating operating and policy environment over the last few decades. Their roots were often faith-based and they saw their role as social action organisations – as advocates for BME communities, as well as housing managers and developers. The majority retain their faith and community links and still have active shareholders and Board Members drawn from these stakeholder constituencies.

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<sup>6</sup> Gulliver K. and Prentice D. (2015) Deep Roots, Diverse Communities, Dedicated Service: The Legacy, Value and Potential Futures of the BME Housing Sector in England. HCI/BMENational. Birmingham

Their representative body – the Federation of Black Housing Organisations (FBHO) – was a highly visible, respected and largely effective advocate for the BME housing sector. Through conferences, newsletters, research, lobbying and advocacy the FBHO enabled BME housing organisations to develop a high profile and secure ongoing funding from the public purse to support continuing expansion of housing and service provision. The demise of the FBHO was followed by the creation of BMENational as a successor representative body under the auspices of the National Housing Federation.

The BME housing sector was created with the aid of social housing regulator, the Housing Corporation, and supported by the National Federation of Housing Associations (today's NHF). The formation of the new sector was supported by a series of Housing Corporation policy documents as a public response to a long line of 'race and housing' reports from the 1970s onwards. These reports showed that many BME communities experienced direct and indirect discrimination in all tenures, including via social housing allocation policies.



The Housing Corporation in 1986, ten years on from the Royal Assent of the Race Relations Act 1976, launch its Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Policy to directly and indirectly support existing and embryonic BME housing associations to develop housing, board members, staff and to add value to the local community. Within five years more than 40 BME housing associations had been created, later rising to more than 100. A second five year plan was published by the Housing Corporation in 1992 followed a final enabling framework in 1998. This policy development was

punctuated by the Housing Act 1988, which enabled housing associations to raise greater levels of private funding and to set their own rents.

Alongside regulator support, many mainstream housing associations, especially those working in areas of high BME concentration – typically inner London, Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool and Bristol – formed housing development and management partnerships with the new BME housing associations. These partnerships continued on and off for the next twenty to thirty years. In some cases, BME housing organisations became part of large groupings. In the case of Shahjajal, it is part Accord Group through Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services, which in turn are part of the Matrix Housing Partnership. Trident Social Investment Group, also a Matrix member, provides some housing service support to Shahjajal.

Today, BME housing organisations are a small but vital part of the social housing sector comprising 2-3% of the housing association stock. Collectively, the 70 remaining organisations manage 65,000 homes, with an estimated annual turnover of £600m and controlling assets valued at around £1.8bn. Just over half are full members of BMENational.

BME housing organisations house mainly South-East Asians, African-Caribbeans, Chinese, Vietnamese and Irish. They increasingly assist non-BME people and new migrants (including from Eastern Europe). Refugees from various war zones past and present are also supported by BME housing organisations. BME housing organisations retain their role in meeting the special needs of BME communities but most have branched out over the last fifteen years into meeting general family needs and the needs of homeless people and refugees and asylum seekers.

BME housing organisations operate in around 100 local authorities with the average for each being seven local authorities. Concentrations of housing are in the following regions, which are the primary areas of high BME population concentration in England. Given the large BME populations in the West Midlands and the North-West, these regions have lower numbers of BME housing than might be expected: largely explained by BME housing organisations losing their identity and stock following a period in group structures. Eleven BME housing organisations continue to operate successfully in nine group structures – mainly in the Midlands and the North.

Many others have formal links to development and procurement partnerships, community and social enterprises. BME housing organisations support more than 50 community organisations. Six BME housing organisations (or 9% of the total) are housing co-operatives. In terms of concentration of BME housing organisations, London has by far the largest number of BME housing organisations (60% of the total) with other regions containing eight to four.

BME housing organisations are deeply embedded in the most disadvantaged communities, creating significant social value through a range of community initiatives. Most of their contractors are local ensuring that investment stays in the community. BME housing organisations remain anchored in the communities that founded them. They are bridges between communities and key vehicles for local people to have a say in how their housing is managed and developed.

BME housing organisations are major successes for BME communities enabling local assets to be controlled by these communities and considerable social capital to be built.

Their legacy and current work includes the creation of significant economic value in often fragile local economies. More than £200m in Gross Value Added (GVA) is generated from investment in development, repairs and maintenance, local procurement and expenditure in direct and indirect supply chains. This investment sustains 1,000 jobs in local economies on top of the 3,500 people employed directly by the BME housing sector. The presence of BME housing organisations in the most disadvantaged communities is a bulwark against poverty, discrimination and austerity at a very difficult time for people on low incomes and benefits. They invest £150m yearly in communities. Overall, for every £1 spent by the BME housing sector, between £2 and £5 in additional social value is generated.

### **Mutual Self-Help**

The mutual housing sector oversees the management of 195,000 homes, of which 54% are owned and the remaining 46% managed on behalf of others. However, this still only equates to around 1% of all UK housing compared to norms of around 5 to 15% across the European Union. Ownership is most common amongst housing co-operatives and community gateways and mutuals and management on behalf of others amongst TMOs, which have agreements on service delivery with mainly local authorities; only a small number of TMOs exist within mainstream housing association groups.<sup>7</sup>

Organisational size varies from less than 10 homes in management to more than 15,000. Shahjalal is towards the bottom end of this spectrum. The average size of organisations is 203 homes in management but 75% manage less than 100 homes and 85% less than 200. EMBs (at 471 homes) tend to larger than TMOs (at 450 homes) which in turn are larger on average than TMCs (at 192) with ownership co-operatives the smallest of all on average (at 57 homes).

Organisations managed by tenants in the social housing sector, of which Shahjalal is one, account for 28% of the total number (or 231) but are sub-divided into TMOs (at 34% of this sub-sector and 9% of total resident and community controlled organisations in the UK), TMCs (at 50% and 14% respectively), and EMBs (at 16% and 4% in each case).

Mutual housing organisations have an annual turnover in excess of £531m have shareholder capital of £494m and have in excess of 200,000 co-operating members.

Mutual self-help, as with Shahjalal, plays into a strong 'Co-operative imperative' in human nature that can be seen as its best in community-controlled housing. This, evolutionary psychologists tell us, goes hand-in-hand with our more widely-publicised competitive instincts and is an equally strong human drive.

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<sup>7</sup> Gulliver K. (2013) More than Markets: Mutual and Co-operative Housing in the UK. HCI. Birmingham

Yet, in recent times, however, many alternative ways of doing business and organising society, running public services and creating and developing companies, including co-operative alternatives, have been crowded out by market approaches, which, conventional wisdom says are more cost-effective and offer choice. This is now being seriously contested.

Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel<sup>8</sup> casts doubt on our acquiescence to market thinking, arguing that the dominance of a narrow form of economic thinking is a relatively recent trend. He contends that the last few decades have witnessed the remaking of social relations in the image of market relations with social goods changing their nature when supplied through the market. Sandel further shows that the limits to markets cannot be circumscribed by economic reasoning alone.



Sandel argues that policy-makers and the general public have been mesmerised by the ability of market systems to deliver greater cost-effectiveness and choice, against often conflicting evidence, concluding that we need to be more sceptical about market approaches and have greater confidence about our own judgements and in older ways, like co-operation, of 'doing business'. Co-operatives UK, on its website, puts forward three key reasons why co-operation works to support Sandel's thesis:

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<sup>8</sup> Sandel M. (2012) What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets. Penguin UK. London

- It allows communities and groups to take responsibility for their own needs and enables such groups with a common interest or aspiration (such as saving a village pub or shop, running a football club) to work together.
- Co-operatives have trusted values and principles including commitment to ethics, community and governance. So co-operatives are trusted to provide sensitive services to vulnerable people, such as funeral care.
- They creating extra value for business and members by enabling provision for the best possible services for members allowing the advantages of co-operation to shine through.

There is growing evidence that mutual housing organisations are more than competent housing managers with rent arrears, vacancies and re-let times lower than national social housing norms. They also compare favourably on repairs performance and housing 'indecentness' is dramatically lower.

Satisfaction among tenants of housing co-operatives runs ahead of that in the social housing sector overall. In housing mutuals, satisfaction among tenant co-operators is in the high 90s per cent.

Mutual housing offers some potential answers for confronting growing housing and community problems as austerity becomes embedded in policy discourse and public spending cuts bite deepest in the most deprivation, and often, BME-majority communities; especially those comprising large numbers of Bangladeshis.

It both meets needs and fulfils aspirations. Whether by providing a mutually supportive environment for elderly people that values their on-going contribution, or housing for young people who stand little chance of getting onto a receding housing ladder. Mutualism provides options for family housing or for those trapped in poor private renting accommodation. And it provides different ways to create housing for the vulnerable, homeless, disempowered and disenfranchised.

Mutual housing organisations provide added social value beyond other forms of social housing. There is some preliminary evidence that controlling assets by tenants and low income groups has positive effects on personal and community wellbeing, as well as self-esteem, health, employment access and progressions, and life chances.

Control of assets, as in mutual or co-operative housing, rather than being the recipients of services provided by a social landlord, is likely to create greater levels of social value and promote wellbeing and community cohesion.

The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative, is a great exemplar of these mutual values and achievements in housing. To illustrate why this is the case, the report turns to Shahjalal next.

## 6.

# The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative

### Introduction

This section reviews the origins, location, management and achievements of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative.

### Origins

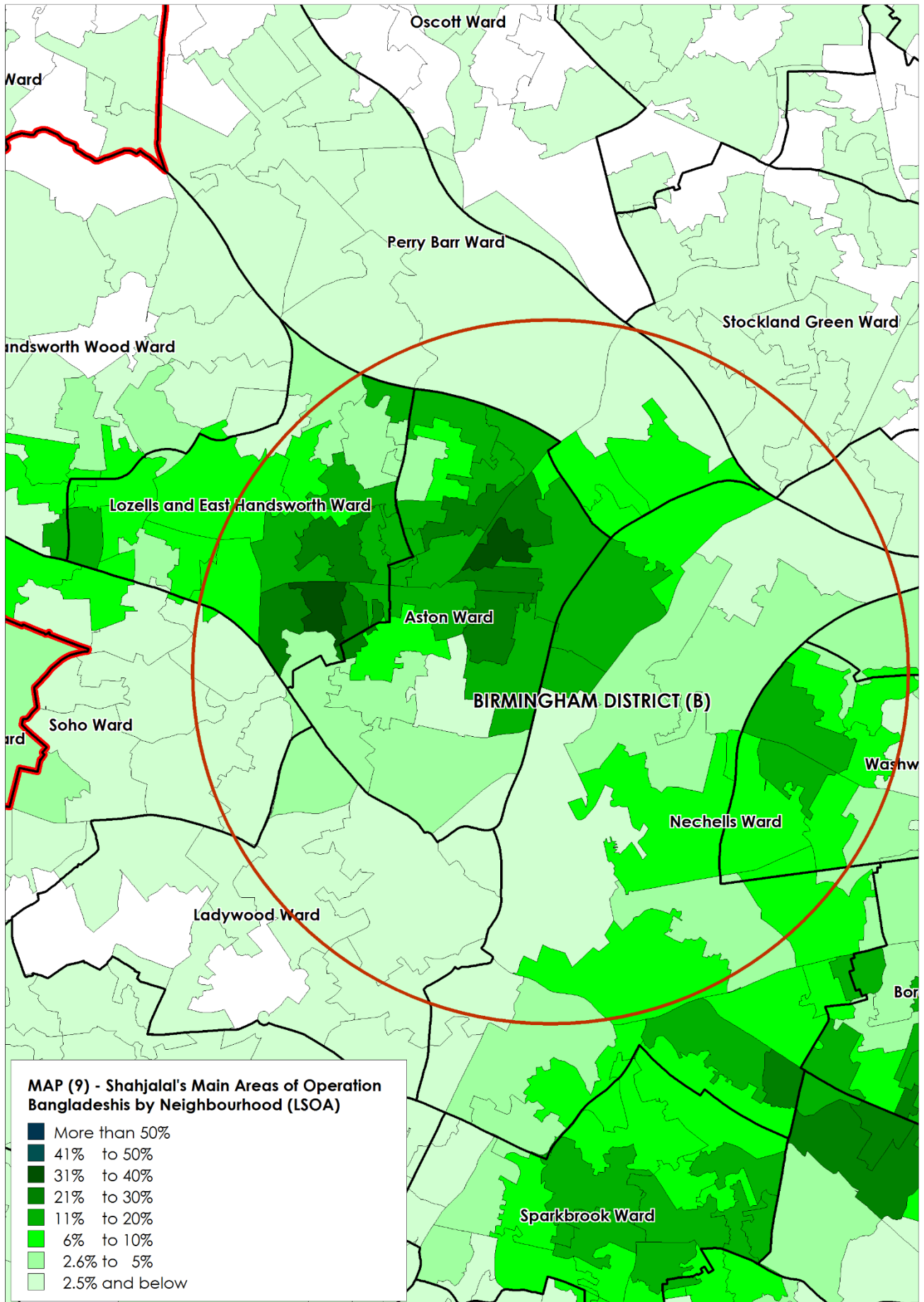
The Shahjalal Housing Co-operative Limited, based mainly in the Aston and Saltley areas of Birmingham was formed in 1996, but its constituent co-operatives have their origins in the mid-1970s. Three co-operatives - Frederick Road, Aston Widows and Villa Park - came together to form today's Shahjalal as a means of developing new housing and taking part more effectively in local partnerships. All three co-operatives were formed to meet the pressing housing needs of Bangladeshi families, especially newly arrived extended families who were faced with severe overcrowding in mainly older and poorer quality housing in Birmingham's core areas, such as Aston and Saltley where Shahjalal now operates.

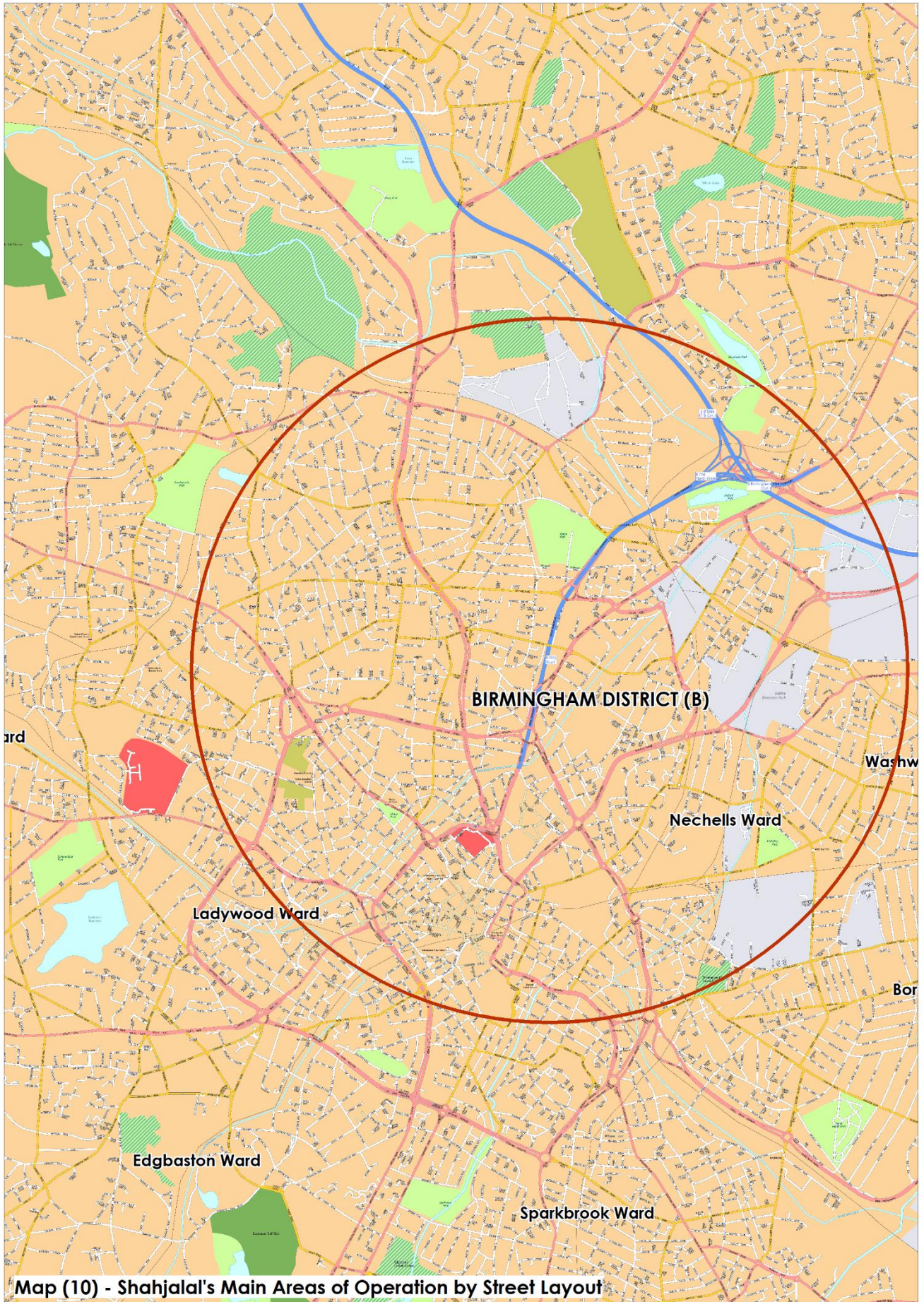
Shahjalal takes its name from the spiritual leader Shah Jalal who spread Islam through the Sylhet region of what is now Bangladesh in the 14th Century. Shahjalal, then, has its roots in both the legacy of its spiritual namesake and UK housing policies in the second half of 20th Century. Since the needs of the Bangladeshi community were not being met adequately at the chief time of arrival of most Bangladeshis, by either the City Council or housing associations, the co-operative route offered a way for the community to solve its own housing problems and create a more prosperous future while retaining a community-centred voice for Birmingham's Bangladeshis.

In common with many housing co-operatives formed in the 1970s, Shahjalal's three constituent elements grew slowly. Subsequently, the merger, brokered by the Housing Corporation, provided greater stability, economies of scale and opportunities for growth. At this time, 54 homes were in management (21 by Frederick Road, 18 by Aston Widows, and 15 by Villa Park). But with the help of Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services (BCHS) - a secondary co-operative and regeneration agency now operating across the Midlands and part of the Accord Group and the Matrix Housing Partnership - Shahjalal has evolved into a major asset for the Bangladeshi community; one of only two major housing organisations in the UK run by and for people of Bangladeshi origin.

### Location

Maps (9) and (10) on the following pages provide an overview of the key areas of operation of the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative, Birmingham's core surrounding the city centre, where most of Birmingham's older, terraced housing is located, and areas of major BME settlement.





Map (10) - Shahjalal's Main Areas of Operation by Street Layout

## Today's Shahjalal

Shahjalal is a par value housing co-operative with all members having an equal share but Shahjalal's strategic management, financial management and development strategy are directed by a Management Committee of fifteen elected annually by the membership and five are co-opted independent members. Almost half of the Management Committee are women. All but one - Vice-Chair John Morris - is from the Bangladeshi community.

The Management Committee holds general meetings twice each year to ensure that the full membership has opportunities to voice its views formally, as well as on a day-to-day basis with elected members, and to discuss policies and future plans.



Shahjalal's day-to-day affairs are overseen by BCHS under the Chair, Malik Ullah. BCHS provides a full housing service based upon a management agreement renewed annually, which is currently being reviewed. Development services are provided through the Matrix Housing Partnership via the Accord Group with BCHS acting as Development Agent on behalf of Shahjalal, and is now an associate member of Matrix.

Shahjalal has 80 homes in management of which 54 are owned and 23 are leased from Accord. Two thirds of the housing stock in management is rehabilitated, underlining the historic development of the three founding co-operatives and the era (1970s and 1980s) when funding

from the Housing Corporation for general family accommodation was invariably for inner city rehabs, especially in Birmingham.

But over the last few years, newbuild family housing and bungalows have been provided to improve the quality of our housing portfolio and meet shifting housing requirements.

## Shahjalal's Community Value

Shahjalal is a well-run housing organisation that benefits from a multi-skilled and mostly on-site Management Committee and professional support agencies like BCHS, Trident Social Investment Group, the Matrix Housing partnership and Birmingham City Council. Shahjalal has a long history of endeavour on behalf of the Bangladeshi community. From its 1970s roots, it has developed into a well-managed housing organisation that is run by resident members through a strong and skilled Management Committee, led by Malik Ullah as Chair.

Ample opportunities for participation and influencing by members are provided formally and on a day-to-day basis; Shahjalal has also introduced a well-received Residents Newsletter. Shahjalal is supported by a range of agencies, and acts as a strong advocate for the Bangladeshi community with housing, community and regeneration partners. Research, community events and media coverage all in the armoury.

## Shahjalal's Housing

Shahjalal has offered a quality housing solution to many Bangladeshis in Birmingham's Aston and Saltley areas, and soon in Sandwell and Walsall, far beyond what has been on offer from the private and social housing sectors. Rehabilitated housing has given way to purpose built although older housing has recently been upgraded to offer more appropriate accommodation for extended families.



Shahjalal has a current rent roll of approximately £400,000 per annum. Current rent arrears excluding any late Housing Benefit payments amount to 3% of the rent roll, which is around the national Key Performance Indicator (KPI) level. Ex-tenant rent arrears are below average.

Shahjalal has no void problem since homes become vacant infrequently and the co-operative lets homes very quickly in concert with Birmingham City Council's nominations procedures (50% of lettings go to BCC Common Housing Register applicants) and support from BCHS and Trident Social Investment Group. All repairs and maintenance performance measures are better than average -100% of emergency repairs undertaken within timescales (nationally 95%), 98% of urgent repairs (95% nationally), and 97% of standard repairs (90% nationally).

All Shahjalal's homes have gas certificates. Stock improvement scheme of the last five years, replacing boilers, kitchens, bathrooms, doors and windows where required, has exceeded targets set. New stock condition surveys are planned.



### Shahjalal's Finances

Over the 40 years of its existence, Shahjalal has established a strong track record as an effective and sustainable community-based housing organisation, and is the only Bangladeshi-led housing organisations registered with the social housing regulator.

Shahjalal places a strong emphasis on robust financial management and has published a Business Plan for the next ten years. The co-operative has an asset base valued at more than £4m and accumulated reserves of over £600,000. Shahjalal's turnover is approximately £400,000 and the co-operative makes an operating surplus annually of £70,000. All financial ratios are healthy and projected to remain so throughout the next ten years.

### **Looking to the Future**

Shahjalal has a bright future in meeting needs and fulfilling aspirations of the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham. It is to these that the report now turns.

# 7.

## Shahjalal: Meeting Needs and Fulfilling Aspirations

### Introduction

In this section is provided a brief overview of how the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative meets needs and is actively aiding the fulfilment of aspirations of the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham, and those in other communities in the locations where Shahjalal works.

### Community Involvement and Control of Assets

There is a growing body of evidence to show that mutual housing organisations provide added social value beyond other forms of social housing. There is further evidence that controlling assets by tenants, and other low income groups living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, has positive effects on personal and community well-being, as well as self-esteem, health, employment access and progressions, and life chances.



Control of assets, especially housing assets, as in mutual or co-operative housing, rather than being the recipients of services provided by a social landlords, is likely to create greater levels of social value and promote well-being and community cohesion. Case study<sup>9</sup> evidence infers that many non-housing benefits are offered to residents and the wider community by housing organisations managed by them - tackling anti-social behaviour, fostering community well-being, developing social capital and providing pathways out of poverty being just a few. This is sometimes called the 'asset effect'.<sup>10</sup>



Mutual housing organisations also outperform other social landlord types on dealing with anti-social behaviour, looking after local neighbourhoods, providing community facilities, and helping residents gain skills and obtain employment, from the viewpoint of residents. It is the local control and intimacy of many resident and community-led housing organisations that is most valued by members and contributes to community cohesion.

These are all values, or potential values, that Shahjalal holds dear. Shahjalal's membership is engaged in ongoing management of the co-operative's assets. From being kept informed by the publication of a quarterly newsletter to voting rights at meetings, the membership is

<sup>9</sup> Gulliver K. (2013) More than Markets: Mutual and Co-operative Housing in the UK. HCI. Birmingham

<sup>10</sup> McKnight A. (2011) Estimates of the Asset-Effect: The Search for a Causal Effect of Assets on Adult Health and Employment Outcomes. CASE Paper 149 Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion. London School of Economics

motivated by engagement with the benefits of the 'asset effect' shining through activities. Shahjalal's residents clearly find the high level of involvement constituted by membership of a co-operative fulfilling and valuable to their health and wellbeing, while providing significant options to improve their life chances.

## Meeting Needs

Shahjalal has set about meeting the needs of larger Bangladeshi households and is providing homes with four or more bedrooms – unusual in today's social and affordable housing sector. The first bricks for these homes were laid about a year ago, as the following photograph shows.

Shahjalal offers culturally sensitive design in housing for Bangladeshis, including separate living rooms for the sexes, appropriately designed kitchens and bathrooms, provision of ground floor bedrooms for older people, and extension of living space via loft, cellar and garden conversions to house larger and/or extended families.



Future plans also incorporate expansion down 'natural' geographical development corridors, integration of housing for older people, and continual improvement of existing housing.

In practice, this may mean moving into the adjacent areas of the Black Country as well as other inner city areas of Birmingham itself.

## Fulfilling Aspirations

Shahjalal also places a premium on meeting emergent needs beyond housing and helping residents to realise their aspirations. Shahjalal's success is partly due to accessibility of the Chair Malik Ullah and the members of the co-operative's Management Committee and to a service specified by residents themselves.

As residents told researchers for this project:

"The management team are all part of the community, they understand the issues and want to harmonise the community."

"It is a friendly service and you can get help when you need it by people who are seeing for themselves what the problems are."

'The service is personal and tailored to our needs - people are always willing to listen'.

Shahjalal fosters a strong sense of community spirit that enables residents to fulfil their potential. Yet while the co-operative is managed primarily on behalf of the Bangladeshi community, Shahjalal has a proud track record of working with other communities, both old and new in the Aston and Saltley areas, to promote integration and cohesion. The co-operative has a developing clearly role in fostering community well-being, individual confidence and personal ambition. Local people acknowledge this part of Shahjalal's work:

"Shahjalal raises awareness of our culture and helps recognition of our culture and traditions in the wider community."

"One of the best things is that because it is a community-based organisation people will always make time for you and are happy to help - Shahjalal contributes towards a better standard of living and community well-being."

"Residents always come first. Shahjalal is always available to help with issues and take a personal and professional satisfaction in helping us improve our quality of life."

"It is about rewarding work and effort, and delivering a better life for the community."

"Confidence building of individuals within the Bangladeshi community – many women in particular have very low self-esteem which Shahjalal helps improve."

Shahjalal is also an advocate on behalf of Birmingham's Bangladeshi community and regularly acts as a strong voice in the development of local housing and community strategies historically by Birmingham City Council, HMRA Urban Living, NDC Aston Pride, and Birmingham's Eastern Corridor economic regeneration.

The co-operative acts as a vehicle for developing social capital, especially in terms of education generally, language skills and women's community role in particular. Shahjalal has helped to raise the GCSE performance of local students to the Birmingham average. Residents clearly appreciate this work:

“You can access help from members immediately - especially good for those who speak limited or no English.”

“We want more qualified female doctors and teachers that are culturally sensitive, but are not necessarily Asian, as they have a different perspective. We want a multicultural approach.”

“We work together as a family – everyone is part of an extended family.”



Residents are united behind the need for more community facilities developed by and/or for Shahjalal to support women, older people and to combat growing drug issues among the young.

“We need a leisure centre that has lots of women only sessions so that women who are at home can communicate with others and gain the confidence to help them make friends.”

“We need a community centre as we desperately need adult activities.”

“We need to establish a youth group so young people are not led astray. There is little for young people to do.”

## 8.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

Here are a few conclusions and recommendations:

1. It is clear that the migration of the Bangladeshi community to the UK over the last forty years, and sometimes stretching back much further, has been a major success for both the host economy and society and for Bangladeshis moving to the UK. British Bangladeshis, and Birmingham Bangladeshis in particular, make a significant contribution to the local economy and play an active role in civic leadership, while the community is increasingly integrated within British society. The role and contribution of Britain's Bangladeshi needs greater recognition – hence *'The Untold Story'*.
2. However, British Bangladeshis, and those living in Birmingham, experience disproportionate housing need and health inequalities that require systematic investment in local housing and public health measures, to ensure that the housing needs of Bangladeshi Britons are confronted and health inequalities melt away.
3. BME-controlled, and especially mutual housing, offers much in these endeavours, and fit with the traditional values of community-support, self-help and self-reliance of many Bangladeshis. That having been said, without support of an active local state, and third sector agencies such as housing associations, these values will be in vain and remain in principle only. Improvements in housing and health, which save taxpayers money on NHS and social services in the long-run, require significant investment in the UK's inner cities today and tomorrow.

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## About the Human City Institute

### MISSION

The Human City Institute is a charitable research institute and 'think-tank' dedicated to investigating social exclusion, social justice and inequality, sustainable communities, issues around faith and ethnicity, health, housing and urban policies, quality of life and happiness, so promoting more human cities that meet the future needs and aspirations of their residents.

### VALUES

#### **People-Focused**

Human cities begin with putting people and their needs first.

#### **Community Well-being**

Wellbeing, happiness and quality of life are intrinsic to human communities.

#### **Social Justice, Equality & Diversity**

Enhanced social justice and greater equality foster fairer and more human societies.

#### **No Community Left Behind**

Community, ethnic and faith-based disadvantage is a core concern.

#### **Sustainability**

Sustainable environments are vital for the development of more human cities.

#### **Evidence-Focused**

Development of solutions and futures is based on research evidence.

#### **Innovative & Informative**

Solutions and their communication need to be innovative and informative.

#### **Partnership**

Working with others is fundamental to a human city approach.

#### **Involvement**

Involvement of communities and other stakeholders is central the research ethos.

### RESEARCH THEMES

HCI has developed a vision for its work built upon a thematic research programme that incorporates six key themes. These six themes not only relate to current and likely future policy concerns, but also have their roots in the historic work of HCI:

- **REALISING THE HUMAN CITY** ~ Overview of 'human cities' including measurement via indices and incorporating longitudinal and case studies of human neighbourhood projects and approaches and their dissemination.

- **NO COMMUNITY LEFT BEHIND** ~ Including the geography of faith, BME and lifestyle groups and their relative socio-economic exclusion and inequalities between communities, and ways of aiding their progress within 'human cities'.
- **SOCIAL EXCLUSION, INVESTMENT & INNOVATION** ~ Covering the role of social investment approaches and development of innovative, social enterprises within communities to alleviate poverty and disadvantage via innovation.
- **SOCIAL JUSTICE & INEQUALITY IN HEALTH, WEALTH & LIFE CHANCES** ~ Exploring inequality impact on health, wealth and life chances and how to further social justice.
- **PUBLIC VALUE, MUTUALISM & THE BIG SOCIETY** ~ Involving comparative studies of public value, mutual and co-operative, community and neighbourhood-based approaches to realise the 'human city'.
- **NEW VISIONS FOR HOUSING** ~ Involving development of new perspectives on how housing in the UK might be made fairer, greener and more affordable with a flourishing social housing sector.
- **COHORT STUDIES** ~ Exploring the needs and aspirations of age and lifestyle cohorts such as young and old people, various LGBT communities.

### TRUSTEES

- Dr Jill Jesson (interim Chair)
- Professor Guy Daly
- Judith Jenner
- Reverend Peter Middleton
- Abigail Robson
- Malik Ullah

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# The Untold Story

The Bangladeshi Community in Birmingham

**Kevin Gulliver and Dawn Prentice**

**Foreword by Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP  
Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government**

**Introduction by Malik Ullah, Chair of Shahjalal Housing Co-operative**

The history, legacy and contribution of the Bangladeshi community in the UK generally, and in Birmingham specifically, is largely an 'untold story'. Yet the Bangladeshi community, as the Census and other research shows, experiences some of the highest levels of housing and social need, and the greatest health inequalities. Despite these deep needs, the Bangladeshi community is characterised by mutual self-help, entrepreneurial activity, elevated aspiration, civic commitment and community solidarity. These needs and virtues are exemplified by Birmingham's Bangladeshis. So the 'Untold Story', a new report by Birmingham-based think-tank the Human City Institute, chronicles the role of mutual housing in enabling Birmingham's Bangladeshi community to confront needs and realise ambitions.

**Mutual housing plays a small but vital role in accommodating the most disadvantaged BME communities. As the report shows, this is why the Shahjalal Housing Co-operative was created in the mid-1990s from several smaller housing co-operatives founded in the 1970s. Today, Shahjalal, as the report reveals, is one of six BME community-controlled housing co-operatives in England and the only one established and run by the Bangladeshi community in partnership with BCHS, the Accord Group and Trident Social Investment Group. Shahjalal provides extensive opportunities for participation and influencing by its members: both formally and on a day-to-day basis. It equally acts as a strong advocate for the Birmingham Bangladeshi community. A mutual approach to housing and community development fits well with Bangladeshi values: the best housing organisations spring from communities and remain rooted in those communities, answerable to local people. The report shows how mutual solutions could be a major strand in meeting the needs of BME communities well into the 21st Century.**

PART OF HCI'S 'SOCIAL JUSTICE & INEQUALITIES' RESEARCH THEME

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