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**Social gatekeepers and racial equality strategies in social
housing.**

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**A dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy to the University of Warwick.**

**The research was conducted under the supervision of the
Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of
Warwick.**

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Dedication

For my mother and father.

Declaration

The first phase of research, which records the housing outcomes of minority ethnic households at Byrds Housing Association up until 1989, was undertaken as part of this author's professional qualification for the Chartered Institute of Housing. This statistical material has previously been included in *Time Running Out* (Tomlins 1990).

The presentation of the thesis is based upon The University of Warwick Graduate School (1993) *Guide to examinations for Higher Degrees by Research*. The style for bibliographic citation is derived from Boal's (1995) requirements for the publication of proceedings of the Congress of the International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP).

Summary

This thesis theorises processes of change through an examination of formal and informal race equality strategies within a housing association. The literature review evaluates paradigms which seek to explain the differential housing experiences of minority ethnic and white communities. A revised model of structuration theory focusing clearly upon particular features of the housing process, such as the continuing potential of social gatekeepers to shape life chances, is proposed to advance the debate.

The review of studies of the housing association movement notes that an implementation gap continues to prevent effective race equality performance despite improvements in paper policies. Whilst Niner argues that associations have had greater freedom from regulatory control than local authorities, the potential to appropriate discretionary opportunities at junior levels of the hierarchy is underplayed within organisational change literature.

Primary research based upon participant observation supports the hypothesis that an 'organisational power vacuum' can create an 'opportunity space' for 'change activists' to achieve their own policy objectives without formal organisational support, as well as exercising practitioner discretion. The opportunity space represents the conscious or unconscious withdrawal of hierarchical control from an organisational area. Formal initiatives subsequently introduced at 'Byrds' Housing Association presented more overt opportunities and constraints to change activists. The absence of consistent policy ownership amongst senior gatekeepers, the completion of specialist workplans and the superficial incorporation of equal opportunities within generic work led to a degree of 'static reassertion', a reversion to historic practices and perhaps new barriers to formal and informal change following a period of innovation.

Nevertheless the organisational power vacuum paradigm affirms the potential for relatively junior employees to achieve corporate change. As a model for the exploitation of opportunity space it should be criticised, evaluated and amended to provide further tools for understanding and implementing radical equal opportunities change within diverse organisations.

Explanation of terms

Ethnicity is used throughout this thesis to refer to a 'group's internal structure, values and understanding of itself' (Modood 1990: 86), although ethnic identity should not be considered to be fixed or inherent. It may be situational and negotiated (Rogers and Vertovec 1995: 23), dynamic (James 1993: 232) and mediated by other features of identity such as class and gender (Brah 1992: 129). Ethnicity is preferred as a term to 'race' throughout this research because it is not widely thought to possess the same connotations of innate values often mistakenly (Giddens 1993: 255) associated with 'racial identity'.

'Race' is still referred to throughout this thesis where it is in common usage as a phenotypical label in academic or non academic debate, however it is rejected by this author as an explanatory concept. Therefore the term is enclosed by single inverted commas where its use might otherwise imply an endorsement of natural difference. The use of phrases such as racial equality are presented throughout the text without inverted commas where it appears to the author that their everyday usage does not contain this implication.

Whilst the use of language within the dissertation attempts to highlight the contrast between self defined ethnicity and externally defined racial phenotypes, it must also reflect

the processes observed by the researcher. These include the use by participants of racial and ethnic labels in a phenotypical way, albeit not necessarily with the intention of implying inherent values or behaviour.

Therefore the term minority ethnic is used to refer to members of ethnic groups who are differentiated by white society in Britain on the basis of skin colour. This usage consequently excludes white minority ethnic groups. Whilst this risks defining ethnicity phenotypically through white eyes, it ensures consistency of language between the secondary and primary research data throughout the thesis. The particular experiences of individual minority ethnic communities are also referred to, to highlight the heterogeneity hidden behind a single phenotypical label.

The anonymity of the individuals and the organisation within the case study of 'Byrds Housing Association' is preserved by the use of pseudonyms throughout the thesis.

Key to abbreviations

- ACAD - The right-wing academic and Byrds Housing Association Board of Management member who became shadow to the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor.
- BSA - British Sociological Association
- BVT - Bournville Village Trust.
- CCT - Compulsory Competitive Tendering.
- CIH - Chartered Institute of Housing
- CPD - Corporate Planning Director
- CRE - Commission for Racial Equality.
- DoE - Department of the Environment.
- EO - Equal opportunities.
- EOA - Equal Opportunities Advisor.
- EOP - Equal opportunities policy.
- FHA - Family Housing Association.
- GPT - Executive Group Policy Team.
- HMO - Housing Management Officer.
- HMPG - Housing Management Policy Group.
- HO - Housing Officer.
- IFHP - International Federation for Housing and Planning.
- NCM - The new Central Regional Committee member who expressed an interest in involvement in the work of the Equal Opportunities Advisor.
- NFHA - National Federation of Housing Associations.

Chapter One - Introduction: a theorisation of change and
housing association race equality performance

This thesis theorises processes of change in race equality policies, based upon a study of the implementation of formal and informal race equality strategies within a leading English housing association ('Byrds Housing Association'). It analyses the hypothesis that an 'organisational power vacuum' can be exploited by 'change activists' in order to achieve radical policy and organisational change. Therefore the scope available for individuals outside the formal policy making process to indulge in practice based discretion, and also creative policy making is analysed.

The informal change strategies adopted by a small group of social gatekeepers are studied using primary research in order to assess whether they were successful in introducing new organisational policies and procedures, and achieving particular outcomes. Their experiences are compared with the opportunities available to officers charged with the implementation of formal equal opportunities strategies at a later period within the same organisation. The short and long term effects of the changes which were informally and formally introduced are compared. In particular the permanence or mutability of radical initiatives is considered, in order to assess whether there was a 'static

reassertion', a reversion to historic practices following a period of innovation.

Ethnicity, housing and the housing association movement

Whilst the primary aim of the dissertation is to provide a theorisation of race equality change processes, a subsidiary aim is to add to the limited amount of research examining the equal opportunities performance of the housing association movement. The current orthodoxy is that the access of minority ethnic communities to housing in the public and private sectors in Britain has been critically shaped by the discriminatory attitudes of organisational gatekeepers (Morris and Winn 1990). However, whilst the housing disadvantage experienced by minority ethnic communities in Britain in the post-war period has been widely recorded (for example Rex and Moore 1967, Daniel 1968, Smith and Whalley 1975, CRE 1988a), there has been little attention paid to the policies and processes of housing associations. This is despite their role since the 1980s as the main providers of new social housing within Britain, which has led them to become key gatekeepers within the allocation of state funded resources.

The 1991 census data suggest that minority ethnic communities access to all housing sectors including housing association accommodation is characterised by diversity:

The proportion of ethnic minority groups being accommodated by housing associations is about twice that for white households. Black ethnic groups are much more likely than Chinese and other, and even more so South Asians, to be accommodated by these organisations. The only exceptions to this are Bangladeshi's and Other-others [including those classifying themselves as of mixed ethnic origin], for each of whom over 6 per cent of households live in housing association accommodation.

(Owen 1993: 8)

Nationally 3% of white households compared with 10.1% of African Caribbean households, 4.9% of Chinese households and those classified as 'others', and notably only 2.5% in the communities defined by the census as South Asian (henceforth referred to as Asian within this study) were renting from housing associations.

The interpretation of these national patterns is important in assessing the race equality performance of Byrds Housing Association. Individual housing associations might inform their own performance by considering whether the relatively small number of Asian households gaining access nationally to housing association accommodation indicates a housing preference. If it does, then an individual association's 'failure' to house Asian households in proportion to their representation within the local population might be

explained by issues of choice rather than constraint. Therefore an analytical understanding of the processes behind ethnically diverse patterns of housing outcomes is essential, prior to assessing the performance of the housing association movement generally and Byrds Housing Association in particular.

Housing as an area of study

The paucity of research into the race equality performance of the housing association movement is paralleled by the relative marginalisation of housing research within academic social science research. This is surprising since housing has an importance beyond material outcomes. For example Saunders (1990) and Darke (1994) amongst others have discussed the potential to create a home from a dwelling and perhaps a haven from the outside world. Even in the literal terms of the ability to gain shelter and security, housing inequality plays a critical role in determining and perpetuating wider patterns of inequality:

Because society is spatially constituted - that is because distance does constrain or enable access to services, resources and the opportunity structure of a nation - the form of residential differentiation has far-reaching implications for individuals' quality of life.

(Smith 1989: 170)

In essence housing acts as a key influence upon life chances through constraining or enabling access to society's resources, for example employment, health care, and social services. Whilst there are wider questions with respect to the residualisation of the housing association movement (Page 1993), at the time of the research Byrds Housing Association offered the opportunity of an enhanced housing position for those in housing need, and consequently an improvement in general life chances. As a consequence the Association's race equality policies are an important influence upon the distribution of socio-economic resources between and within ethnic groups.

Discretion within Byrds Housing Association

Byrds Housing Association was chosen as a case study because it appeared to me as a practitioner working within the organisation, that the role of individual officers and notably the role of gatekeepers at relatively junior levels of the organisation represented an important influence upon differential access to resources. The parameters of discretion for junior gatekeepers within Byrds Housing Association were bounded by procedural constraints such as routine reporting requirements. Nevertheless it seemed as if junior gatekeepers had a degree of individual discretion not only in particular areas of practice, but also within the

policy making structure. This arose from either an inability or an unwillingness amongst senior managers to exercise control over junior members of staff within particular areas of work. This was in spite of an organisational ethos which was widely perceived by the majority of staff to be authoritarian rather than open and which generally encompassed close accountability for individual actions. The discretion which housing officers require to be able to respond to unpredictable situations (Lipsky 1980) seemed to be exaggerated beyond the bounds of functional necessity by the organisational dominance of other disciplines such as finance. This was reflected by a relative lack of interest in the regular work of housing managers within the organisational hierarchy. In Lipsky's (1980: 16) terms there was an organisational tolerance for slippage of practice from prescribed policy.

Not only did discretionary opportunities exist at Byrds Housing Association, but a junior gatekeeper could also quite clearly identify the scope and opportunities to exercise discretion within daily practice and strategic policy making. In effect there seemed to be an organisational power vacuum which left an 'opportunity space' for those officers who wanted to follow their own agenda and bring about change, to act as change activists. The opportunities and constraints upon informal and formal race equality change provide the main focus of this study.

Chapter Two - Research processes

The research for the case study in this thesis was undertaken at Byrds Housing Association in the 'City area' between 1989 and 1993, and diverse methods of investigation were used to provide the triangulation of the findings. The informal race equality initiatives introduced by change activists from the City Office were assessed by reference to statistical data and participant observation. Participant observation also provided qualitative data on the formal, more regulated equal opportunities policies which succeeded change activism within the organisation. These organisational initiatives focused upon the creation of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor (EOA) and the development of an equal opportunities workplan. The quantitative and qualitative data which had been collected on informal and formal initiatives formed the basis of a theorisation of organisational processes which was predominantly undertaken once I had left the employment of Byrds Housing Association. Indeed my development of the paradigm of the organisational power vacuum was facilitated by the distance from the day-to-day operations of the Association which I enjoyed between 1992 and 1996.

The research processes were also shaped by my progression within the organisation from a City housing officer to secondment as the Association's Equal Opportunities Advisor at its Head Office. My secondment increased my access to the decision making forums of the organisation and provided me with a wider overview of organisational processes. Nevertheless as a seconded member of staff I perceived myself, and believed myself to be perceived by others, as a relatively junior member of the Head Office staff. Indeed restrictions on my opportunities to ask questions of senior staff remained, given my desire to maintain the covert nature of the research within the workplace. The processes of statistical research and participant observation are now examined in detail.

Statistical research

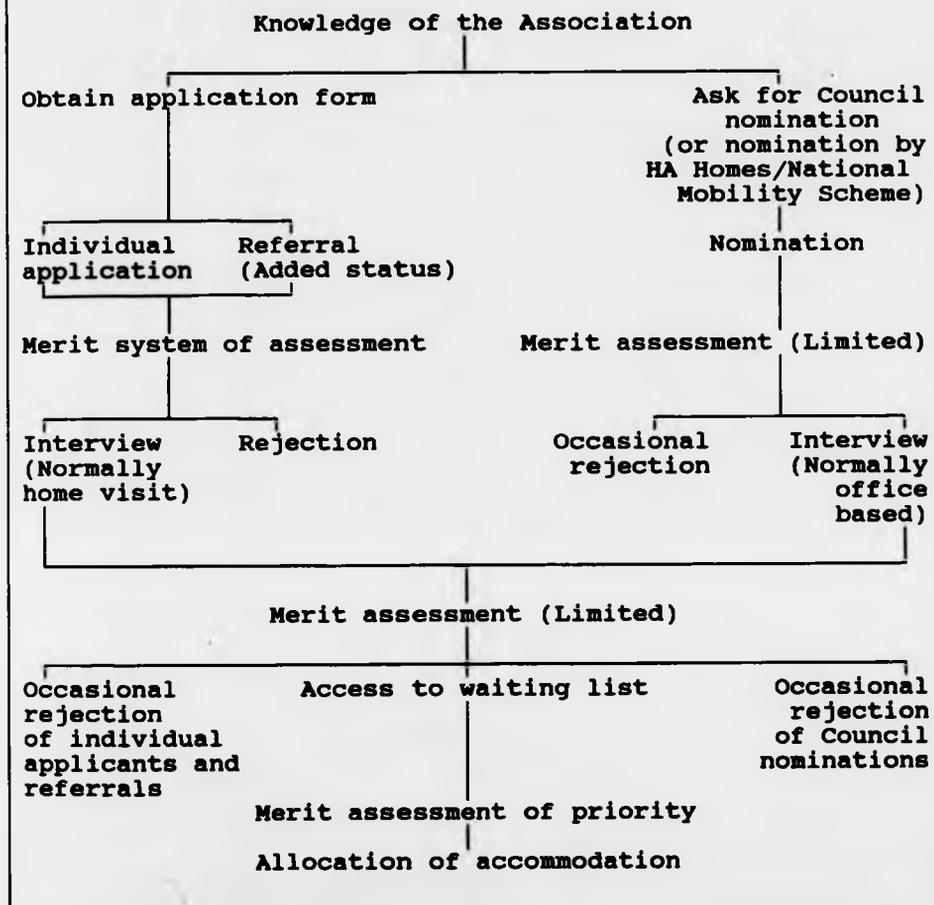
The first phase of research began in 1989 and involved the collection of data for submission in a dissertation towards the professional qualification of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) in 1990. It represented a simple statistical assessment of the record of Byrds Housing Association in meeting the housing and employment needs of the minority ethnic communities within the City. Most of the housing allocations data collected at this time recorded outcomes in August 1987 and August 1989, allowing an assessment of

whether the number of minority ethnic tenants had increased whilst change activists were introducing informal radical initiatives. The research involved the collection of uncomputerised and uncollated records and the difficulties involved in this process are described in Tomlins (1990).

Organisational procedures to be monitored

An individual's access to the Association's accommodation depended upon the negotiation of particular administrative hurdles as illustrated below in diagram one. The initial hurdle in access to accommodation was determined by the method of application. The most common channel in August 1989 was by direct application to the Association. This required knowledge of the Association's existence which was most likely to be obtained from information supplied by the City Council or another housing association, information from the telephone directory, use of a local paper's Citizen's Guide, word of mouth or posters placed at community centres. The applicant would have to request an application form from the Association by telephone, letter or personal call. As a positive action measure the Association began to allow community centres serving minority ethnic community groups to issue application forms, although these represented only approximately five per cent of the forms issued on a weekly basis.

Diagram One - Hurdles facing Byrds Housing Association housing applicants 1987-1991.



Once the application form was completed, it would be returned to the City Office. Whilst changes of procedure and staffing levels led to variations in the methods of assessing application forms, between 1987 and 1989 they were considered by at least two housing officers at a weekly

meeting as part of a merit system of allocations. The stated criteria to be used within the assessment process were: the existing housing conditions of the applicant; the applicant's ability to cope with existing housing conditions; the length of time the applicant had suffered bad housing conditions; and the prospect of the household finding alternative accommodation. An additional set of three factors were used to identify need for sheltered accommodation for older persons.

Households would be selected for interview if officers subjectively considered them to be in greater housing need than other applicants assessed at the same weekly meeting. The number of households selected for interview varied according to officers' perceptions of the Association's ability to house applicants in a 'reasonable' time. An officer's assessment of a lack of suitable accommodation owned by the Association could lead to the rejection of households. As Niner (1987) notes, these subjective processes have disadvantaged minority ethnic communities in access to housing association accommodation.

The interview usually consisted of a home visit requiring the completion of a standard form. Initial versions of the home visit form included questions with respect to the standard of the property. This was interpreted by housing officers as an assessment of the quality of the fabric of

the property, rather than an assessment of housekeeping standards. This distinction is important given the wealth of research which suggests that assessment of housekeeping standards frequently becomes racialised (for example Henderson and Karn 1987: 206), with the practices of white households regarded and rewarded as the norm.

Once households had been interviewed at Byrds Housing Association their details were reassessed at the next weekly meeting along with all new housing applicants. Whilst interviewed households were again formally subject to the merit allocations assessment, there was a presumption amongst staff that interviewed applicants would normally be accepted onto the waiting list. Therefore the interview was generally to verify the information supplied on the application form, which had effectively already been assessed as providing sufficient priority for acceptance onto the waiting list. However interviews did give some households additional priority because of the severity of their housing need, or due to the advocacy of individual officers.

Once households had accessed the waiting list they faced a wait of uncertain duration before being offered a property. This was largely dependent upon their degree of housing need and the number and type of properties becoming vacant. The properties offered to applicants reflected their household

size and their area preferences. The latter factor particularly influenced the quality of accommodation offered, since certain areas had concentrations of new build or rehabilitated properties. In common with Niner's (1987: 236) research, willingness to accept a property was a variable in determining a household's waiting time. Whilst housing officers often acted as advocates for the priority of particular households whom they had visited, the housing officer who managed the patch in which a vacancy occurred made the final decision in the selection of a new tenant. This provided an informal opportunity to reward an applicant with a particular type or quality of accommodation.

An alternative route into the Association's accommodation was through the local authority's 'rights' to nominate households to 50% of the Association's vacancies, although even on individual schemes this entitlement was rarely met. The nomination process typically involved the local authority sending a pool of nominations for the Association's consideration for any vacancy which it defined as 'suitable', taking into account household and property size. Although council nominations were interviewed in the same way as direct applicants, the convention amongst the Association's staff was that they should normally be accepted. However officers retained some discretion to reject particular nominations, and to determine the type of vacancy which would be offered. Access to the Association's

tenancies (but in smaller numbers), could also be gained by referral from a voluntary sector organisation which would introduce a household into the direct application process with a degree of priority. Similarly transfers from other social housing organisations were given priority through the HA Homes or National Mobility Schemes (NMS).

Processes of data collection

The availability of housing application forms was the first hurdle which faced applicants in gaining access to tenancies to be examined. The aim was to compare the number of forms being requested by minority ethnic households with the number submitted. Since the Association did not keep records at this point of access, a research exercise was undertaken purely for the purposes of the academic study. The survey was limited to direct callers for application forms because it was felt that concern would be aroused amongst telephone callers and postal applicants if their ethnic origin was requested. This restricted the research sample and may have made it unrepresentative if minority ethnic communities were using particular channels for requesting application forms in comparison with other communities. An additional limitation was that officer assessment of ethnic origin was made by the City Office receptionist, who related phenotypical characteristics to the standard ethnic

monitoring categories used by the Association. This produced a danger of misassessment and stereotyping, and racialised the notion of ethnicity. However it was felt desirable to avoid asking a question of ethnicity in a public area which I believed might have been threatening to applicants and deleterious to their willingness to submit a housing application. I also felt that pursuing possibly contentious avenues of questioning might provoke customer complaints and consequently remove the Association's acquiescence to further research. Due to time constraints and the potential difficulties in collecting data, ethnic differences in awareness of the Association and the council nomination channel were not assessed.

The submission of an application form for housing was the next hurdle to be assessed. Data were manually collated from a five year set of paper records. These were monthly aggregates of self-classification boxes completed on housing application forms, and allowed some comparison between spatial locations. The ethnicity of households selected for interview was reflected by the compilation of data from the Association's monthly records for acceptances onto the waiting list, since almost all interviewees passed this hurdle. However no ethnic monitoring data was available to suggest the number of applications or acceptances from the council nomination, referral, HA Homes or NMS waiting list channels.

Data were compiled with respect to the ethnic origin of households held on the Association's accommodation waiting list, which reflected all access channels. However the list was neither computerised nor kept as a collated paper record. Consequently the ethnic origin of each household had to be noted from each applicant's original housing application form. During this process, the income and savings of each household were also recorded to try and ascertain whether there were socio-economic contrasts between the ethnic groups gaining access to the waiting list. The date of acceptance onto the waiting list was examined to determine the relative waiting times of each minority ethnic group prior to receipt of an offer of housing. The number of areas requested and the number of offers of accommodation which had already been received were also noted, as it was understood that they might influence the date of a further offer.

The Association's monthly records allowed the compilation of lettings data by ethnic origin, whilst tenancy records were used to record the ethnic origin of each of the Association's tenants in August 1987 and August 1989. The ethnic categories used at the time were compatible with the four basic categories subsequently used in the 1991 census. Data were also collected on factors which were regarded as indicators of quality: size of property; property type (flat

or house); whether the property was a handover or relet, new build or rehabilitated; date of first letting; presence of full or part central heating; presence of front or back gardens; and the subjective assessment by the researcher of the quality of area and amenities.

The collection of empirical data on access to tenancies for the initial 1990 study presented a number of difficulties, particularly the need to examine large amounts of uncomputerised material. In some cases information on the ethnic origin of tenants did not exist on file, for example where the applicant had been housed before the Association had begun ethnic monitoring. In these cases to ensure that relatively comprehensive records were available for analysis, the housing officer who managed the tenant's area was consulted. The officer's subjective assessment of tenant ethnicity provided the classification which was recorded. Although this concerned a small number of tenancies, it is clearly a limitation to the data.

Properties held by voluntary agencies were excluded from the summary of data, as were hostels controlled by the Association and where identified, properties occupied by resident staff. Tenancies outside the administrative boundaries of the City local authority area were also excluded even where they were managed by the City Office,

although it should be noted that they were almost exclusively held by white tenants.

The radical race equality initiatives which were being undertaken at the time of the research for the CIH appeared to have ended around 1991. Therefore further statistical data were collected in 1993 to provide a comparison of minority ethnic housing outcomes with the earlier period. Although I had left the Association's employment by this time the collection of statistical data was considerably easier than in the original research. The Association's tenancy records were now computerised, and within the City area included a record of ethnicity which had been prepared for the CRE's visit as part of its housing association investigation in 1992. Computer records of ethnicity had then been kept up to date by adding data on incoming tenants' ethnic origin, through self-classification during the housing application process. As a consequence, the tenants' records which were used as a basis for analysis within the second phase of research were more accurate than those used during the first phase of research.

The computer records used recorded the 'primary' tenant name in August 1993. In most cases this would be the sole tenant, however in cases of joint tenancy the male tenant's name (if present) was recorded by convention. Address, ethnic origin of tenant and property type were also recorded. The property

type noted the size and format of the property. It did not however record its quality in terms of amenities such as central heating, or the quality of the environment such as the presence of gardens. The computerised records were manually split by the researcher between 'general family properties' and differing categories of designated properties for older tenants.

There remained limitations within the available data. The computerised record of tenants' ethnic origins had not been compiled by sending out a questionnaire to all tenants, but by a mixture of historic paper record and officer judgement. There were also errors in the recording of property types which were amended by the researcher for consistency with the initial data collection. For example all properties at one frail elderly scheme were designated as ground floor bedsits on the computerised record when personal knowledge suggested that this was not the case. However the researcher's knowledge base to determine these data inadequacies was partial.

Reevaluation of the original research data collated in 1989 also highlighted inaccuracies within the compilation of that raw data. Although the original figures were still available, I decided that I retained sufficient good quality data to allow me to discard the flawed data whilst still indicating patterns of access. A further influence on this

decision was the development of the dissertation away from a statistically based survey into a process analysis. Therefore the original data concerning the age of accommodation occupied by different ethnic groups was discarded, along with records of central heating and the subjective assessment by the researcher of the quality of area received by different communities. Other sections of statistical data whose collection for the CIH study are described above, have also been excluded due to space considerations and the changing emphasis of the research.

Participant observation

The participant observation of practices at Byrds Housing Association began formally in 1991. However as the research began to develop, I also reflected upon processes and events which I had observed since 1987 throughout my employment with Byrds Housing Association. For example I considered whether officer discretion within housing allocation processes, or the scope to introduce policy initiatives, had been indicative of an organisational power vacuum.

During this period, therefore, I was initially simply a participant in the use of discretion to achieve race equality aims. I subsequently became an observer of discretion whilst participating in, recording, and

theorising processes of organisational change. Nevertheless it would be misleading to suggest that I changed my role over this period from a practitioner who used workplace experience for subsequent research, to a researcher who used a formal organisational role as a cover for other activities. Whilst my organisational role clearly changed over the five years which are drawn upon for this thesis, my work for Byrds Housing Association remained a constant priority over my research. Indeed the detailed reflection upon my work as an Equal Opportunities Advisor occurred, similarly to my analysis of my work as a housing officer, after I had left this post. However, although this provides greater objective distance for the research, it also reduces the opportunity to revisit or test hypotheses within the thesis. These themes have already been debated in the existing literature concerning participant observation.

Participant observation has been used in studies as diverse as Beynon's (1975) *Working for Ford* and Yablonsky's (1967) *The Violent Gang*, whilst Lambert, Paris and Blackaby (1978) are amongst a number of housing researchers who have employed participant observation in their work. Becker has outlined how participant observation can be used either in addition to, or instead of, statistical research in order to gain a greater understanding of organisational operation:

The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organisation he

studies...enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed.

(Becker 1958: 652)

Since participant observation can reveal concealed motivations or the unintended results of conscious or unconscious actions, it appears to be particularly useful in analysing the causes of racial disadvantage. It may be able to identify the habitual yet discriminatory actions of institutional racism, or uncover the real commitment of those who disguise discrimination with the language of equality of opportunity. The chief advantage of participant observation is that the closeness and (potential) invisibility of the researcher to the focus of the research allows a greater understanding of the natural or 'true' working of the research study. For example the tendency of officers to engage in nondecision making or the extent of their opportunity space may be clarified.

Burgess argues that participant observers should:

share in the lives of those whom they study and take roles which are effective in the setting under study. They need to learn the language that is used in the setting, to remember actions and speech and to gather data from a range of individuals in a range of social situations.

(Burgess 1982a: 45)

Schwartz and Schwartz (1955) recommend two styles of participant observation, a passive model in which the

researcher is divorced from the lives and the actions of the observed and an active model in which participation with those being observed is maximised. Gold (1958) goes further and suggests that in some scenarios a participant observer should conceal her/his identity as a researcher, in order to maximise access to information.

The statistical data for this dissertation were collected with the knowledge of Byrds Housing Association. However, although the Association initially funded this PhD, they were not informed of the adoption of participant observation. Therefore it is unlikely that the majority of officers who were observed were aware that their actions would subsequently be evaluated as part of a piece of academic research. This raises a number of issues which Burgess outlines:

First, if the people involved in a social situation are not aware that they are being researched, it makes it virtually impossible for the participant observer to put questions to them. Secondly, the role that is taken puts the researcher in the position of being a spy (cf Hughes 1960). Thirdly the role may mean that it is impossible for researchers to distinguish their everyday roles from their research roles with the result that they 'go native' and fail to pursue their research activities. Finally, it can be argued that even if participant observers can overcome role problems that confront them in the field, there are still unanswered questions about the ethics of reporting and publishing data that were gathered covertly.

(Burgess 1982a: 46)

Since I was involved in the processes and debates being researched there was no barrier to asking questions, other than the limitations caused by a failure to conceptualise all of the issues at the time. However since I wished to prevent the Association's awareness of the original covert observation, I was largely precluded from adding to my observation of policy processes when I returned to the Association in 1993 to update my statistical records.

Nevertheless whilst conducting participant observation as Byrds' EOA, I considered myself to be an advocate openly advancing support for positive action, rather than a spy. In any case as Roth (1962) argues, it is impossible for the researcher to reveal to all people, all of the time, that participant research is being conducted whilst still being able to collect data. Burgess' third concern regarding academic detachment is most appropriately addressed by the research methodology for the dissertation. Total immersion in the day-to-day life of an organisation does threaten objectivity, however a clear research focus, triangulation and the regular evaluation of the data collected reduce this danger. Burgess' final criticism concerns the ethics of presenting covertly collected evidence. The reproduction of the comments and evidence covertly gathered can be justified within this research, since they were freely offered as part of the respondent's daily work. It was clear to all individuals with whom I entered discussion that I would be

interested in their views on racial disadvantage and the Association's policy process as part of my work as Equal Opportunities Advisor. Any of their comments could have been made available in internal reports, although individuals would not have been aware that they might subsequently become available for publication. However, it seems probable that some of the advantages of covert research will have been lost to me precisely because of my explicit interest in equal opportunities. In particular, staff antithetical to the process of equal opportunities change may have been wary of the information they revealed to the EOA.

The participant observation material for this thesis was recorded in accordance with accepted conventions:

Experienced field researchers indicate that different types of notes may be kept: mental notes, jotted notes and full field notes.

(Burgess 1982b: 191-2)

Statistical records were widely available to me as a housing officer and an Equal Opportunities Advisor. However, qualitative material, which reflected the processes of the organisation, was more widely available to me as an Equal Opportunities Advisor because of the organisational reports which I was required to write and the material which I was beginning to collect for this thesis. Becker (1958) suggests that individuals' statements recorded as part of participant observation should be assessed in the same way as personal

records would be assessed by historians. By this criterion statements made by individuals which are obviously inaccurate are still useful as a record of the motives and decision making processes of those individuals and organisations. Becker also recommends that the researcher should make a distinction between comments which are volunteered and those which are made in response to the questioning of researchers, with the participant research presented in sufficient detail for the reader to assess the accuracy of the conclusions which the writer is deriving from the research. This has been an important principle of this thesis, although a wealth of participant observation has been excluded due to space considerations and the evolution of the thesis into a theorisation of processes rather than a pure description of them. However a flavour of the policy initiatives of the EOA is provided through the inclusion of some Byrds Housing Association policy documents within the appendix.

There are clearly limitations to the primary research. There are weaknesses within the collation of statistics and ethical concerns around the participant observation. The decision to preserve the anonymity of the case study organisation and the individuals within it hinders the reader's ability to verify the research. One further limitation should be stressed. Whilst I have attempted to recognise and reveal those instances where my participation

in events may have affected my analysis, the real limitation to this research is perhaps the danger of the record becoming the self justification of a white practitioner turned researcher.

Chapter Three - Theories of 'race' and housing

The following three chapters examine the main theoretical explanations for the differential housing experiences of white and minority ethnic communities in Britain. They examine the role of choice and the role of constraint in housing outcomes and the way in which these processes coalesce in the housing association movement. Indeed the apparently separate and comprehensive theoretical approaches touch common ground. For example, structuration theory incorporates perspectives of structure and agency which are sometimes seen as opposing explanations. This commonality is refined in chapter four by briefly outlining a housing specific structuration theory. The resulting model provides a template which can then be applied to further research, including the examination of housing association performance in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Minority ethnic housing outcomes - a product of housing choice?

A number of writers suggest that the housing outcomes of minority ethnic communities predominantly reflect the housing choices and preferences of those communities, which are devalued by white researchers because they are not consistent with 'white' value systems. This school disputes

the proposition that minority ethnic housing experiences which differ from a 'white norm', such as greater overcrowding or lack of access to a particular tenure, are necessarily the product of discrimination. Writers from the choice school such as Davies (1985) suggest that minority ethnic communities have become the 'objects' of study, with their freedom of action and cultural preferences at best undervalued, and at worst ignored. These arguments are typically made with specific regard to the Asian community.

Dahya (1974) argues that the Pakistani community within Bradford had constructed an 'ethnic village' by segregating itself within specific areas of the city. He suggests that this occurred because of the identification of the Pakistani community with its 'homeland', precipitating a withdrawal from 'British' culture. The Pakistani community also arguably expressed a preference for owner-occupation, even at low physical quality, because of a desire to have a realisable asset at the point of intended return to the 'homeland'. The alternatives such as local authority housing were perceived to represent a non-realisable asset. Dahya argues using interviews from his case study that there is a cultural antipathy within the Asian community to rented housing:

'What is the status of a fifteen shilling tenant? Does anyone respect him? He is always at the mercy of the landlord and his 'party' and dare not express himself

openly lest he offend him...and can be kicked out at a week's notice.'

(Dahya 1974: 97)

Ratcliffe (1981: 189) adds in his study of Handsworth in Birmingham that Asian communities viewed local authority rented housing in particular in a negative way as a welfare tenure of last resort.

Modood (1990: 95) argues that Dahya's premise is now a 'commonplace truth' despite being initially received with 'unease'. Whether a commonplace truth demonstrates the validity of the argument is perhaps debatable.

Robinson's (1980c) study of Blackburn is able to incorporate Dahya's thesis, whilst acknowledging the growing access of some Asian communities to the local authority housing sector. He notes that the gradual development of local authority accommodation in areas of Asian residence, coupled with the arrival of East African Asians who did not harbour a desire to return to a 'homeland', explains the apparent changing tenure preference of the Asian community. He asserts the importance of choice in housing outcomes through a demonstration of the diversity of preferences between and within ethnic groups.

The choice model has methodological significance, asserting the importance of looking beyond the role of societal

structure in explaining housing outcomes. However there are a number of limitations to its thesis. The distinction between choice and constraint is not always clear cut, a decision to concentrate residence in particular areas because of fear of racial attack may superficially appear as an expression of housing choice when it is a reflection of constraint. Indeed Phillips and Karn (1991: 79) note that the spatial impact of racial attacks upon minority ethnic communities remains a neglected area of research, despite its potential effect upon housing choice. As the CRE note:

there are many, effectively 'no go' areas which have acquired a name for racial harassment and where members of ethnic minorities are afraid to accept offers of homes, should they even be offered them....Far too often we hear of an 'outer-city ring' or whole sections of a local authority area where housing officers say they are reluctant to make offers to black people because of potential harassment. These areas may often also contain good quality housing.

(CRE 1987a: 20)

In this context Johnson (1987: 172) highlights the contrast between the flight of some minority ethnic households from more suburban areas to the inner city because of fear of harassment, and the white flight from the inner city to the comfort of the suburbs.

It is not clear how far the choice paradigm can be applied to a range of minority ethnic communities. This reflects the overwhelming focus of housing choice researchers upon Asian communities. However researchers who have studied African

Caribbean access to housing such as Peach (1984), have noted the residential segregation between migrants from particular West Indian islands within Britain. The absence of a common minority ethnic experience of housing might be used to suggest the importance of choice in producing differential spatial and tenure outcomes.

Flett (1984c: 52-53) notes that the time of migration, and the area of settlement in Britain will have influenced tenure difference between minority ethnic communities. Smith (1989: 36) adds that whilst the residential segregation between different minority ethnic groups may simply reflect the processes of chain migration it 'could be taken to imply that residential differentiation is primarily a legitimate expression of cultural preferences'. However Ratcliffe's concern is the failure of choice theorists to specify the precise role of ethnicity in housing outcomes:

to isolate and prioritise 'ethnicity' as an explanatory factor seems to me to beg the question as to the relative significance of factors such as class, gender, age/position in life cycle, household size/structure and so on. As to 'explanation', we are able to provide little more in practice than a collective characterisation which then serves as a representation of the summation of individual actions.

(Ratcliffe 1995: 3)

Furthermore Ward (1987: 190) argues that Davies' (1985) and Dahya's (1974) emphasis upon the importance of minority ethnic choice in achieving housing outcomes is based upon

atypical research samples. They simply reflect spatially specific housing market operations:

Davies' evidence comes from Newcastle, where there was a low level of Commonwealth immigration and much less pressure on the local housing stock at the time, while much of Dahya's information is based on Bradford, which did not experience a postwar expansion like that of the Midlands and which also had a large old housing stock to accommodate the population, including the new arrivals.

(Ward 1987: 190)

Flett (1984c: 54) also emphasises the specificity of the housing choice model by arguing that Dahya's study focuses upon the housing preferences of 'peasants' from Pakistan, soon after settlement within Britain. Community attitudes are arguably reflective of previous lifestyles and cultures which may rapidly change within a new society. Therefore Dahya's findings should not be regarded as typical of Asian communities per se. Ward (1984a: 4-5), and indeed Dahya (1974: 114) himself, appear to agree that minority ethnic tenure preferences do coalesce over time with dominant societal attitudes. Phillips and Karn add that:

research in Leicester has indicated that second-generation South Asians no longer require spatial proximity as a prerequisite for social propinquity and cultural cohesion....increasing residential mobility, especially with greater automobile and telephone ownership, has overridden the perceived need to cluster for cultural reasons.

(Phillips and Karn 1991: 73)

However at this point minority ethnic communities may meet resource allocators who do not recognise the legitimacy of new expressions of choice. The outcomes of these interactions, including any instances of discrimination will serve to further shape the housing preferences of minority ethnic groups. For example they may lead to the perpetuation of involuntary segregation and a limitation of the range of expressed demands, hidden under the guise of choice.

The conventional academic view within Britain, and in the international race and housing literature (Blauw 1991b: 400), is to view choice as a particular influence operating within a particular community at a given time. There has been a belief that minority ethnic communities would begin to express a demand for a range of housing types in common with those expressed by the majority white community. However the residualisation of the public sector suggests that there need be little change in some minority ethnic 'cultural attitudes' for them to mirror those societal preferences. Indeed the distaste for rented property which was voiced within Dahya's study now arguably prevails within the white community (Gurney 1995).

It has also been the convention that the propensity of a minority ethnic community to cluster would progressively decrease following a community's initial migration and settlement. However Owen (1992: 9) concludes with respect to

the 1991 British census that there is a 'tendency for the growing ethnic minority population of Britain to be increasingly spatially concentrated.' This does not necessarily prove or disprove the choice paradigm. However it offers a continuing focus for the study of processes of choice and constraint in the apparent absence of an evolutionary assimilation of minority ethnic communities within the structures of majority white society.

Chapter Four - Theories of constraint in 'race' and housing

The theories which emphasise the constraints facing minority ethnic access to housing can be classified in a number of ways. Here they are grouped according to their intellectual roots, to locate housing research within a wider social science literature. Theories which draw upon Weberian sociology, theories seen as originating from a Marxian world view and theories which take a still more pluralistic view of influences upon societal outcomes are examined in separate sections. There are also clearly similarities across these boundaries. The most immediate point of comparison between theories of constraint and the choice paradigm discussed in the previous chapter, lies in the role of the individual. Therefore Weberian analyses which provide a focus upon officer decision making are examined first.

Weberian explanations

i) The housing class paradigm

Rex and Moore's (1967) housing class paradigm draws upon Weberian constructs of class, in particular the distribution of market opportunities and life chances, and the Parkian notion of discrete urban residential zones. Rex and Moore argue that people are differentiated in their ability to

compete for access to scarce housing resources. Households in similar positions to each other within the housing market because of their income, occupation, ethnic origin and the attitudes of resource allocators within public and private sector housing, represent housing classes.

Rex and Moore (1967: 36) initially suggested people could be divided into five different housing classes; owner-occupiers, council house tenants (subdivided into those in long life accommodation and slum accommodation), tenants of private landlords, owners of lodging houses, and lodging house tenants, before adding a sixth, those buying a house on a mortgage (Rex and Moore 1967: 274). The initial five housing classes were ranked as above in descending order of desirability, with outright ownership being perceived as the most desirable and the tenant of rooms in a lodging house as being the least desirable. The purchaser of a house on a mortgage was subsequently inserted as the second most desirable category. Further analysis (Rex 1968: 215, Rex and Tomlinson 1979: 132) drew attention to a total of eleven housing classes.

Rex and Moore argue that minority ethnic households had been confined to poorer housing within the transitional zone of the city. This reflected their poorer socio-economic position in comparison with the 'white' community, and decisions by resource allocators that minority ethnicity

constituted an undeserving status for access to particular types and qualities of housing. Therefore minority ethnic communities were forced by the actions of gatekeepers to seek access within the poorer sectors of private rented accommodation, or those low quality areas of the owner-occupied sector which were accessible using alternative and typically less financially advantageous loans. The economic constraints of these disadvantageous systems of finance necessitated taking in lodgers:

Buying a house of this kind was possible only if the owner proceeded to let rooms. Once he did this he found himself meeting a huge demand from other immigrants.
(Rex and Moore 1967: 30)

The result was widespread multiple occupation and as a consequence a deteriorating condition of the area within conventional norms. This contributed to a wider process of stratification, a theme which is subsequently taken up by Smith (1989).

The housing classes model inspired considerable debate and more criticisms than can be tackled in this limited review. Lambert and Filkin (1971) argue that Rex and Moore suggest a universal value system in defining the effective demand for housing. All households are assumed to be seeking access to good quality suburban housing 'as a scarce and desired resource' (Rex 1968: 214). Burney (1967), Lawrence (1974) and Rich (1987) are amongst a number of writers who suggest

that an individual's search for a particular category of housing is defined by their lifestyle and culture, thus undermining the concept of universal competition for a particular resource:

The Rex-Moore thesis...in its commitment to the conventional values of the British welfare state and the ideal of public housing, ignores the dimension of ethnic exclusivity which makes home ownership a vital component of Asian cultural identity.

(Rich 1987: 77)

In contrast to the housing classes model, Rich endorses Dahya's (1974) view that the superficially poor housing conditions and concentration of the Asian community reflect a temporary housing status, whilst households wait for families to arrive from India and Pakistan.

Karn (1967) argues that Rex and Moore place undue emphasis upon the lodging house form of owner-occupation (as a result of a failure to re-weight data following a disproportionately stratified sample selection procedure), whilst ignoring non-pathological forms of owner-occupation. She suggests that there was some evidence that owner-occupation was the preferred tenure of the minority ethnic community. Rex and Tomlinson agree that this is a common tenure preference. However they argue that minority ethnic communities become trapped in a particular form of owner-occupation, which is inferior and a class apart from the quality of accommodation enjoyed by the majority of property

owners. Nevertheless its perceived equity may still prevent its consumers from gaining access to the local authority sector:

In a word, what Karn has done is to identify housing-classes of owner-occupiers and private renters, who, while they are clearly better-off than the lodging house proprietors and their tenants, are none the less distinctly underprivileged classes.

(Rex and Tomlinson 1979: 130)

Haddon (1970) suggests a conceptual confusion in Rex and Moore's concentration upon current housing tenure, given their professed desire to study inequalities in access to housing. Whilst Rex and Tomlinson (1979) counter that outcomes may well be a reliable proxy for access, Saunders (1981: 143) argues that a more far reaching criticism is exposed. He notes that whilst Rex and Moore explicitly analyse the position of *housing groups*, their dynamic of inequality concerns the position of *social groups* in the housing market. Therefore the latter should logically be the focus of their studies.

This arguably contributes to a further limitation, that the housing classes model is gender blind. Watson and Austerberry (1986) note that the head of household is assumed to be male, whilst Cross adds:

If 'housing classes' have any predictive power for shaping life chances today, then their capacity to do so is mediated by gender.

(Cross 1993: 378)

Rex (1971: 295) answers some of the criticisms of the housing classes theory by arguing that it was not intended to offer a comprehensive model. It represented a simple, albeit essential, initial explanation which could be adapted to local circumstances.

The housing classes model remains important because it focuses attention on the links between the competition for housing resources and differential ethnic housing outcomes. It challenged Marxist models which viewed labour market position as the determinant of minority ethnic housing consumption and consequently led to a greater concentration upon the mechanics of resource allocation within the spatial environment and in particular within the housing market. Therefore Rex and Moore's approach can be seen as a forerunner of Pahl's interest in the function of the social gatekeeper.

ii) Urban managerialism, social gatekeepers and the street level bureaucrat

Pahl's (1975) theory of urban managerialism and social gatekeeping, and Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy, address the issues of officer discretion within resource allocation. As Davis notes:

A public officer has discretion wherever the effective limits on his power leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action and inaction.

(Davis 1969: 4)

This definition blurs the distinction which writers such as Bull (1980) and Donnison (1977) have made between the judgement involved in interpreting established rules and regulations, and the sanctioned authority which empowers an official to decide upon the merits of a particular case. Nevertheless as Ham and Hill (1993: 152) note, Davis provides a more comprehensive and realistic study of the actions of individuals than Bull and Donnison, by identifying the exploitation of loopholes and rule breaking as processes related to judgement and authorised discretion. This seems to offer a flexible form of analysis which might be useful in examining the formal and informal use of 'discretion' studied within this thesis. It also embraces passing references to 'discretion' in the secondary literature which are not further defined.

Whilst neither Pahl nor Lipsky exclusively seeks to explain the housing position of minority ethnic groups, they both analyse the scope of officers to differentiate between the access of particular groups to resources. Their discussion of the ability of officers, at a relatively junior level within the organisational hierarchy, to shape policy is also an important theme in the development of the organisational

power vacuum paradigm. Therefore the work of Pahl and Lipsky is now considered in detail.

Urban managerialism and social gatekeepers

The thesis of urban managerialism and social gatekeeping was developed by Pahl as part of a critique by neo-Weberian writers of the prevailing urban sociological orthodoxy. This was still based upon the ideas of the 'Chicago School' (for example Burgess' (1925) concentric zone model) and was primarily concerned with mapping the city and focusing:

upon residential choice and preference approaches...with no understanding of the context within which choice and preference are exercised, the nature of the housing market and its institutional structure, or the unequal distribution of choice and preference and the economic, social and political constraints experienced by different sections of the community.

(Hamnett 1996: 11)

Pahl, in contrast, emphasises the importance of the social processes which constrain or facilitate an individual's access to geographically dispersed resources. Therefore he refutes the paradigm of the Chicago School which had portrayed the distribution of the city's resources as an ecological or natural process. Pahl (1975: 147) suggests a dynamic process in which 'the spatial structure partly reflects and partly determines the social structure'. Thus

dominant conventions governing the distribution of spatial resources will affect individual life chances, with conflict at its greatest for resources where value and scarcity are high perhaps because of time or cost constraints.

Pahl hypothesises the key elements of the urban situation which researchers should study suggesting that:

The crucial urban types are those who control or manipulate scarce resources and facilities such as housing managers, estate agents, local government officers, property developers, representatives of building societies and insurance companies, youth employment officers, social workers, magistrates, councillors and so on. These occupations and professions should be studied comparatively to discover how far their ideologies are consistent, how far they conflict with each other and how far they help to confirm a stratification order in urban situations.

(Pahl 1975: 206)

Pahl represents the social process of resource distribution as the urban managerialist model. Urban managers or social gatekeepers such as housing officers are the independent variables within spatial and social constraints upon an individual's access to resources (Pahl 1975: 210) and therefore shape the inequality of minority ethnic households in access to housing. Pahl (1975: 172) suggests that social gatekeepers will be motivated in their work by the desire to secure career advancement and to preserve their perceived professional autonomy. Their actions will be influenced by the bureaucratic rules and procedures which have been established by local politicians or by organisational

officers. However they will also allocate resources according to their own 'implicit goals, values, assumptions and ideologies' (Pahl 1975: 265), which may include racism or stereotypes.

Pahl's ideal type of urban managerialism attracted a number of critics (for example Harloe, Issacharoff and Minns 1974, Norman 1975, and Gray 1976). The most significant criticisms (Saunders 1981) concerned the definition and interpretation of the role of urban managers and social gatekeepers. Methodological criticisms concerned Pahl's definition of the social gatekeeper. Pahl had not explained whether studies of urban managerialism should concentrate equally upon all social gatekeepers, or should primarily focus upon either senior managers or alternatively junior managers. Nor had Pahl explained whether the role of social gatekeepers in the public sector was more important than the role of social gatekeepers in the private sector. Substantive criticisms asserted that Pahl did not adequately acknowledge the extent to which the autonomy of social gatekeepers and in particular junior managers was constrained by policy and bureaucratic boundaries. Furthermore political economists such as Gray (1976: 82) suggested that urban managerialism misdirected the focus of research. Gray argues that in so far as there is a common urban managerialist ideology, it is the dominant bourgeois ideology of capitalist society. Therefore researchers should address the structural

constraints and inequalities of capitalist society, rather than individualising problems by dwelling upon the actions of urban managers. As Cole and Furbey (1994: 143) note 'allocation in a context of scarcity requires discrimination'.

Pahl revised his theory of urban managerialism in the context of these criticisms. Within the new model only local state managers are labelled as social gatekeepers. Whilst this provides a methodological clarification, it can be seen as obscuring the role of the private sector and local politicians in local resource distribution. However Pahl had redefined the role of social gatekeepers to reflect the constraints placed on the individual manager by policies originating within the organisational hierarchy and the state structure. Thus, managers perform:

crucial mediating roles both between the state and the private sector and between central state authority and the local population.

(Pahl 1977: 55)

In effect Pahl rejects his own pure urban managerialist model which argued that social gatekeepers exercised:

systematic control of the same urban resources and facilities in different localities; [implying] the ineffectiveness of the elected councillors [and ignoring] the constraints of capitalism.

(Pahl 1975: 268)

Pahl argues that the paradigm of a common ideology of urban managerialism cannot be sustained. He suggests that since state legislation allows substantial discretionary scope in policy implementation, systematic policy implementation through diverse agencies is improbable. However this conclusion is not wholly convincing since Pahl does not evaluate the potential of organisational or professional culture to develop normative workplace practices. It could be argued that the historic roots of housing management may lead to the continuation of Victorian distinctions between the deserving and the undeserving poor. For example Henderson and Karn note that in Birmingham:

Area officers developed an image of applicants which implicitly located them on a respectable - disreputable working class continuum. This imagery was then applied to the vacant property in order to assess whether the applicant was likely to affect the property, but more importantly to assess whether that applicant, once he or she became a tenant in that particular street, was likely to create 'management problems' for the area officer and/or his colleagues.

(Henderson and Karn 1987: 269)

As Henderson and Karn note these judgements may become racialised through societal prejudice and stereotyping leading to inequitable treatment for minority ethnic households.

Whilst Saunders notes that Pahl's revision usefully draws our attention to the role of the state in shaping life chances, he argues that:

The simple yet compelling idea which stimulated Pahl's initial approach - that inequalities generated in the operation of the capitalist economy could be modified in crucial ways through processes operative in the urban system - was inexorably eclipsed as he fatally pursued the logic of his own thinking into the intellectual minefield of political economy.

(Saunders 1981: 138-139)

This criticism is at least partly addressed by Pahl's subsequent exploration of corporatist models of social structure in which discretion remains within policy implementation:

Those who administer these systems of allocation we may term the managers, and generally they have considerable discretion either in determining the rules or in administering the rules determined elsewhere.

(Pahl 1979: 39)

The rationing of 'social housing' in Britain by bureaucratic processes does suggest that gatekeeping as a sovereign or as a mediating influence will disproportionately affect groups over-represented within the lowest socio-economic bands, such as minority ethnic communities. For example Rex and Moore's (1967) theory of housing classes might be read with hindsight as, in part, a demonstration of the influence of social gatekeepers. There are other studies which, whilst they have not necessarily endorsed Pahl's work, can be seen as part of an urban managerialist paradigm. For example those studies which highlight the influence of housing visitors in racialising the allocation process (Henderson

and Karn 1987, and Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989) and those studies which note the impact of housing workers' stereotypical views upon minority ethnic communities (Phillips 1986) might be classified in this way. Whilst it has been common to suggest that housing managers' prejudices are as a result of a lack of professionalism or everyday prejudices (CRE 1983), Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989) show that, at least in part, they may also be the result of workplace culture. This would indicate the continuing relevance of Pahl's search for an influential common ideology amongst urban managers.

Pahl arguably excluded the work of housing associations from his theoretical framework by restricting his revised theoretical framework to the local state sector. However the role of housing associations as allocators of scarce social housing resources indicates that the concept of social gatekeeping remains applicable to them. Although they are traditionally voluntary organisations, they predominantly operate within the public sector and the work of Niner (1987) and Dalton and Daghlian (1989) demonstrates the importance of discretion within housing association resource distribution.

The structural constraints at Byrds Housing Association and other housing organisations arguably offer a framework within which to exercise discretion. Pahl (1975: 266) argues

that in such situations professional judgement may be in conflict with the demands of employers or central government. This suggests that social gatekeepers are not automatically the agents of the state, and may possess the potential to be radical change activists. Nevertheless Pahl argues that attempts by social gatekeepers to use their resources to create positive changes on behalf of particular groups are ineffective. The errors of actors, an inability to predict outcomes and misinformed perceptions of existing scenarios (perhaps as a result of inaccurate data), may be barriers to the successful realisation of change activists' desired outcomes. However it is not clear if Pahl is pessimistic with respect to the collective potential of social gatekeepers to bring about radical initiatives and/or the scope for rogue gatekeepers to initiate change.

Street-level bureaucracy

Lipsky (1980: 3) defines street-level bureaucrats as public service workers who are involved in the direct provision of service to their clients. Lipsky is interested in their discretionary role in the allocation of scarce resources, examining in greater detail than Pahl the reasons why individual officers adapt policy in particular ways. He principally helps to explain 'how policies become reshaped as public officials seek to bring some order into their own

lives' (Ham and Hill 1993: 139). Lipsky argues that public sector organisations which include a large proportion of street-level bureaucrats within their workforce can be labelled as street-level bureaucracies. We can hypothesise that social housing managers and housing organisations fall within these definitions.

Within street-level bureaucracies the employer must grant discretion to the employee since:

street-level bureaucrats work in situations that often require responses to the human dimensions of situations. They have discretion because the accepted definitions of their tasks call for sensitive observation and judgment, which are not reducible to programmed formats.

(Lipsky 1980: 15)

Once discretion has been granted, it is self perpetuating and self aggrandising. Street-level bureaucrats will continue to expect the right to exercise their own judgement within the workplace and clients will expect them to be the source of decision making. The cumulative policy adaptations of street-level bureaucrats are for the customer de facto organisational policies. This is problematic where discretion is exercised in the interests of the bureaucrat rather than the organisation. Street-level bureaucracies require their bureaucrats to remain bound to organisational objectives in order to demonstrate appropriate

accountability for the public funds which they receive (Lipsky 1980: 159-160). There is a tension because:

Managers are interested in achieving results consistent with agency objectives. Street-level bureaucrats are interested in processing work consistent with their own preferences and only those agency policies so salient as to be backed up by significant sanctions.

(Lipsky 1980: 18-19)

Lipsky (1980: xii) suggests that whilst most employees enter street-level bureaucracies with ideals of public service, the bureaucratic pressures which they face mean that discretion is more likely to be exercised as part of a job coping strategy, rather than as a sensitive response to customer needs. This explains why officials make choices to enhance some rules, particularly those which protect them, whilst ignoring others. For example, the likelihood that some street-level bureaucrats will face physical danger within their daily work, means that they must be prepared to develop ad hoc responses to unpredictable situations. Housing officers will be affected even if they are not in physical danger:

street-level bureaucrats must make quick decisions because of the social reality that they are in the presence of clients who will interpret indecision as incompetence or lack of authority, with consequences for subsequent client interactions.

(Lipsky 1980: 30)

Malpass and Murie (1994: 292) add that practices which start as ad hoc decisions may become organisational necessities with some form of official endorsement.

The pressure to process large numbers of clients along with the inadequacy of organisational resources means that a sensitive response to individual need is unlikely:

street-level bureaucracies discourage employees who seek to work as advocates...the dynamics of street-level bureaucracies combine to persuade workers that they are destined to be ineffective in their chosen fields, that clients may not substantially benefit from their efforts, or that conditions for successful intervention are not likely to be available....It is difficult to aid clients in ways consistent with idealized conceptions of assistance within street-level bureaucracies as they are currently structured, particularly when the least experienced workers are thrown into the most difficult work environments.

(Lipsky 1980: 185)

Officers may be alienated from their work as a result of the expediencies which they are forced into. Consequently they may 'drop out' or 'burn out' at the start of their careers. The reality for those that remain is to spend their working lives:

in a corrupted world of service. They believe themselves to be doing the best they can under adverse circumstances and they develop techniques to salvage service and decision-making values within the limits imposed upon them by the structure of work. They develop conceptions of their work and of their clients that narrow the gap between their personal and work limitations and the service ideal.

(Lipsky 1980: xiii)

This is reflected in their packaging of customers who:

come to street-level bureaucracies as unique individuals with different life experiences, personalities, and current circumstances. In their encounters with bureaucracies they are transformed into clients, identifiably located in a very small number of categories, [to] fit standardized definitions of units consigned to specific bureaucratic slots.

(Lipsky 1980: 59)

Housing allocations typify these dehumanising practices where:

Contrary to the public's view, the day-to-day process of allocations in any local authority does not involve finding properties to 'suit' people but rather finding people to 'suit' properties.

(Henderson and Karn 1987: 216)

This impersonal processing emphasises the powerlessness of clients who are taught to be dependent upon street-level bureaucrats through having to conform to bureaucratic conventions to gain access to resources.

The irony for street-level bureaucrats is that whilst they may consider themselves to be a mere cog within 'the system', the customer views them as a crucial arbiter of life chances (Ham and Hill 1993: 140). The existence of street-level bureaucrats' discretion leads the majority of clients to view lower-level workers as the obstacle to the receipt of satisfactory service:

"nothing can be done" is only another way of saying that the bureaucracy or individual worker does not intend to change priorities. Yet it is often obvious to clients that more could be done if priorities were shifted..."nothing more can be done" often really means: "Priorities will not be changed in your case, although they could be."

(Lipsky 1980: 63-64)

Therefore customers do not experience the job coping strategies of street-level bureaucrats in a uniform way. The potential of stereotyping to offer officers 'short cuts to decision-making' (Ham and Hill 1993: 143) leads to discrimination. In fact Lipsky suggests that the need for street-level bureaucrats to differentiate clients and abandon universalistic standards of service provision are so great that:

it seems as useful to assume bias (however modest) and ask why it sometimes does not occur, than to assume equality of treatment and ask why it is regularly abridged.

(Lipsky 1980: 111)

The work environment is the catalyst for the development of bias as:

street-level bureaucrats change their attitudes from the time they are recruited to the time when they begin to experience work problems.

(Lipsky 1980: 141)

However the source of discriminatory attitudes, including the racialisation of particularistic standards, is found within society:

Unsanctioned, persistent differentiation is supported by the racism and prejudices that permeate the society and are grounded in the structure of inequality. Differentiation is intrinsic to street-level bureaucracy, but social inequality supports it and helps account for the cleavages in terms of which differentiation takes place. Thus the need to routinize, simplify, and differentiate in the context of inequality leads to the institutionalization of the stereotypical tendencies that permeate the society.

(Lipsky 1980: 115)

It might also be suggested that the practices of nineteenth century housing management in Britain also offer a support to the differentiation which Lipsky observes, particularly with respect to conceptions of the deserving and undeserving.

Managers concerned by policy slip may rationalise officer discretion by considering that challenging 'mispractice' could produce greater organisational disruption than benefit, since it is not clear that street-level bureaucrats' discretion can be effectively controlled or harnessed. As Hudson (1993: 396) argues, it may be 'that the best that can be managed is a little reining in here and a little wing clipping there'. The introduction of performance measures may provide an illusion of control at the expense of an overall deterioration of service as street-level bureaucrats target their time on monitored areas at the expense of all others, or reduce the time and care that they expend on each client, in order to be able to process more

clients. The key problem is that 'the most important dimensions of [street-level bureaucrats'] service provision defy calibration' (Lipsky 1980: 168), since they are responsive to individual and possibly unique circumstances. Therefore clearer organisational goals and formally reduced opportunities to exercise individual discretion, cannot affect the continuing necessity (Lipsky 1980: 199) for discretion in providing a personal service to a multiplicity of service users.

Superficially, however, it seems as if the professionalisation of public service work may offer a means of controlling the quality of client-customer interactions:

The argument for professionalization comes down simply to the realization that control of occupational groups must come from within the individual members of the group if it cannot be dictated from outside. If street-level bureaucrats cannot be restricted in everyday functioning, then self-monitoring must substitute for bureaucratic controls.

(Lipsky 1980: 201)

The role of professionals in organisations is discussed further in chapter 6. Nevertheless it might be noted at this point that Lipsky suggests that in practice the high ideals of professionalism are typically distorted by professionals' self-interest in maximising income and prestige. In addition Perrow (1970: 58) and Mintzberg's (1988: 640) descriptions of the behaviour of professionals suggest a common propensity between professionals and street-level

bureaucrats to stereotype clients as a time saving tactic, before applying standardised programmes to the pigeonholed clients.

Therefore the key issue is perhaps more fundamental than whether street-level bureaucrats should become professionalised to enable consumers to enjoy the benefits of their discretion, particularly if Lipsky is correct in conceptualising street-level bureaucracies as part of civil society:

As V. O. Key Jr. has observed: "...one of the great functions of the bureaucratic organizations is as a conservator of the values of a culture. In the purposes, procedures, ceremonies, outlook, and habits of the bureaucracy are formalized the traditional cultural values."...For street-level bureaucracy it means that these agencies are embedded in a larger system that creates and fortifies working conditions. In turn street-level bureaucracies help reproduce prevailing relations between individuals and government organizations.

(Lipsky 1980: 180)

Therefore Lipsky echoes Giddens' (1979) concept of the duality of structure, whereby the rules and resources of society both reflect and are reflected in the actions of individuals:

experiences are not monolithic, and the impressions of hopelessness are as much socially constructed as they are rooted in fact. The potential for growth and change in street-level bureaucracy is dependent on both identifying the critical problems and recognizing that patterns of practice may be reconstructed as well as reproduced.

(Lipsky 1980: 186)

Within this interpretation change activists implementing individualised positive action within a single organisation may aspire to societal change. Indeed the fulfilment of this structural objective may be necessary to establish the permanence of organisational change. Lipsky argues that social transformation is necessary to restructure the lives of street-level bureaucrats before services which are appropriate, equitable and respectful to customers can be established and maintained:

the character of worker-client and worker-supervisor relations, no matter what the articulated organizational policy, is likely to continue to reflect the dominant bureaucratic relations of the society, no matter what the administrative guidelines provide.
(Lipsky 1980: 188)

Currently Lipsky suggests that street-level bureaucrats are the agents of the state, absorbing the blame for inadequacies in public services whilst providing:

the control, restriction, and maintenance of relatively powerless groups.
(Lipsky 1980: 191)

Therefore new movements for social and economic justice are necessary to embrace the currently competing interests of client, union and administrator and to secure far-reaching change at a societal level. Lipsky (1980: 184) notes that at present the tendency of workers to rationalise rather than

criticise their workplace practices and behaviour, provides barriers to possible alliances with customers. Greater customer involvement can provide street-level bureaucrats with allies against dehumanising bureaucratic restraints and can help to preserve the ideals of public service. It may also prevent officers from making benign, yet discriminatory assumptions of customers' needs. Jeffers and Hoggett outline housing officers' tendency to engage in 'sleuthing' to make a sensitive allocation, by matching applicants to particular areas after 'decoding' the information on their application form:

The problem was that, although such judgements were made with the best of intentions, the outcome was a tendency to cement applicants to existing areas of domicile-if you lived in a poor area and were made homeless, you were likely to be allocated to that same area on the grounds of minimising disruption to your existing networks.

(Jeffers and Hoggett 1995: 338)

Despite active programmes of 'organisational hygiene' (Jeffers and Hoggett 1995: 325) to increase formalisation, and tackle bias and stereotyping, discretion was continuing to disadvantage minority ethnic households.

Insofar as Lipsky believes significant workplace reform is possible, the best opportunities for realising an equitable and responsive public service arise from approaches which harness the initiatives of street-level bureaucrats. For example recognising the customer responsiveness of

decentralised provision rather than imposing centralised control:

Fundamentally at issue is making the most of the reality that street-level bureaucrats primarily determine policy implementation, not their superiors. If the bureaucratic connection between lower-level workers and the reins of authority are indeed tenuous...perhaps it is better to flow with the organizational dynamics of policy delivery in these organizations rather than to resist them by insisting on bureaucratic solutions to problems defined as worker deviation from preferred performance.

(Lipsky 1980: 207)

It is not necessary to control the personal attitudes of workers in order to achieve non-discriminatory behaviour. Instead changes within the workplace to eliminate the need for discriminatory coping strategies, the promotion of a supportive and collective approach to work decisions alongside strong leadership, and a system of rewards and sanctions to facilitate the reform of entrenched practices, can result in a more customer responsive service.

Financial support through increased workplace resources and salaries is also a key factor in enabling workers to move away from reactive crisis management, towards a more considered assessment of customer needs. This will particularly be effective where rewards are targeted upon qualitative as well as quantitative performance. Nevertheless increases in financial resources should not be

regarded as a panacea, since quantitative and qualitative demand will expand to meet the new level of resources.

Lipsky's model of street-level bureaucracy has much in common with Pahl's theory of urban managerialism. They both highlight the discretionary role of gatekeepers, the constraints upon officers' ability to choose which rules to enforce and the way in which officers can be seen as performing a mediating role between different levels of society. However Lipsky provides a far more detailed exploration of public servants' behaviour than Pahl and in particular stresses the notion of a lost ideal of service through the pressure of work. Lipsky (1980: 25) argues that those who wish to understand policy implementation should focus upon the actions of policy deliverers rather than formal policy makers. Nevertheless the reality which he describes is a depressing view of public service distorted by workplace pressure and bias, and resistant to change.

iii) Social closure

Parkin's (1979) work in developing the concept of social closure with respect to racial differentiation provides one further neo-Weberian approach within the 'race' and housing literature. Parkin argues that society is stratified into a number of socio-economic groups. Each group may try to

increase its social standing by restricting the access of other groups to resources, for example by limiting their access to housing. However a group will not automatically succeed in its aims, because other groups can respond with action of their own.

Ward and Sims (1981) suggest that social closure and ethnic residential segregation in the housing market may result from status concerns and housing market considerations amongst white residents. There may be a perception that the residence of minority ethnic households in an area will cause a decline in the status of the area and by association its residents. Whilst white households might flee from mixed areas which they no longer desire they may seek to exclude minority ethnic households from areas which they consider to be desirable and consequently worthy of 'defending'.

These processes might include 'status discrimination' where the formal or informal assessments of households by house vendors or housing organisations perform a gatekeeping role in preventing access to housing for particular ethnic groups. There may also be an economic process of 'market discrimination' where institutions in the housing market such as estate agents perceive a common interest with white residents in preserving the existing ethnic composition of an area.

Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989: 37) argue that Parkin underplays the role of societal structure in causing disadvantage, whilst also failing to specify how individual actions inter-relate and multiply to provide the group impact of social closure. Ward and Sims partly address the societal context of social closure through their focus upon economic factors. They also partly identify the process of exclusionary closure through their discussion of market and status discrimination. However their model may not be a comprehensive explanation of discrimination since it focuses upon the coalescence of the interests of different agencies around a common ethnic identity against a feared 'other'. Therefore it does not necessarily identify the discriminatory actions of individuals or organisations acting in isolation from other ethnic group members. Ward and Sims also do not address the role played by housing associations within the housing market. Whilst they suggest that local authorities might be pushed into discrimination by the desire of councillors to attract a white racist vote, the distance of housing associations from electoral pressures appears to make them less likely to perceive that they will benefit from discrimination. Ward and Sims also might be criticised for emphasising the constraints faced by minority ethnic households in the housing market above the choices which minority ethnic communities seek to exercise. Ward and Sims (1981: 228) seek to address this criticism by arguing that white actors control the housing market,

however this can still be seen as devaluing the choices of minority ethnic households by reducing them to the victims of discrimination.

Ward and Sims (1981: 230) argue that the causes of ethnic residential segregation will be specific to each local housing market. Therefore in spite of Ward and Sims' attempts to identify concern for status preservation and economic interests as possible causes of discrimination, the social closure model might still be criticised as being descriptive rather than analytical. If the premise of the social closure model is accepted it might explain discrimination where it occurs, but it does not seem to explain why exclusionary social closure occurs on some occasions and not on others. Nor does it appear to explain why an ethnic group might feel that its status is threatened in one area of desirable housing but not another. In essence it does not identify the tipping point for discrimination. Therefore whilst the social closure model might be viewed as complementary to the work of Pahl and Lipsky through its focus upon social processes, it might be argued that models of social gatekeeping and street-level bureaucracy offer a more effective analysis of the causes of the actions of individual resource allocators.

Marxian explanations

i) Class based approaches to 'race' and housing

Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989: 21) note that there have been few class based analyses of racially discriminatory processes within the operation of the housing market. They suggest that this reflects a Marxist orthodoxy that the allocation of housing is of secondary importance to biases within the production of housing. Similarly it can be noted that whilst Castells (1977) adds an appreciation of the importance of issues of consumption to Marxian analyses, he still reduces differential racial housing outcomes to economic factors as a reflection of class position. 'Race' and culture are discounted as independent explanatory variables.

This reflects a continuing affirmation of class as the fundamental basis of stratification within neo-Marxist interpretations. For example Doherty has criticised the way in which pluralist considerations can obscure class analysis:

By concentrating on the patterns of racial distribution and the immediate processes that are thought to give rise to those patterns, geographers have ignored the dialectical relationships between the spatial position of racial groups and their wider social position and role in society.

(Doherty 1973: 22)

However neither Castells nor Doherty explain why minority ethnic households consistently experience poorer quality housing than white households in the same class position. Nor do they explain the issues raised by a large number of studies, (for example CRE 1983, Dalton and Daghlian 1989, Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989) which demonstrate the particular impact of individual gatekeepers and stereotyping upon minority ethnic households.

For a neo-Marxist model to explain the prejudicial attitudes of junior members of organisational hierarchies, it must explain why social gatekeepers differentiate between those customers who are deserving of their help and those who are undeserving of their help. It must also explain how those processes become racialised.

Althusser (1971) provides a possible explanation for the transformation of apparently free thinking housing officers into particularist agents of the state. He argues that ideology provides a set of overtly commonsense, but covertly highly politicised discriminatory attitudes, which become the means by which societal conventions are reproduced. Thus, individual housing officers infused with the dominant values of society reward customers who conform to the ideal of a conventionally ordered society. It might be hypothesised that there is an in built inertia within these

processes because it is easier for a gatekeeper to embrace rather than challenge the system.

A variety of explanations can be offered for the racialisation of these differential judgements in Britain. They may reflect a distrust of any divergence from the traditional white norm, society's need for scapegoats, or the need for a reserve labour force. Jacobs argues:

By locking the black working class in council ghettos, the state aims to perpetuate, through the generations, the immigrant status of the black community. The purpose is to ensure, without need of further immigration, that black Britain continually replenishes capital's reserve army of labour. Largely unopposed by the Labour movement it has been effortlessly achieved under the cloak of a caring welfare state and in the name of socialist housing.

(Jacobs 1985: 25)

Nevertheless there are inconsistencies within these apparently persuasive simplicities, even leaving aside the question of whether society can be conceptualised within a hegemonic capitalist vision in a world which might be seen as post-Fordist and/or postmodernist. If Layder (1994: 44) is correct that Marxism's validity can only be judged through the coherence of its theory given its theoretical abstractions and assumptions, then the following inconsistencies should be highlighted. First, private sector gatekeepers may have to forego profit to discriminate against minority ethnic households. This suggests that simple rational class interest is not at work unless the

discrimination is purely the result of risk minimisation to protect profits. Secondly, the idea of a pervasive model of bureaucratic socialisation does not explain why some officers discriminate against minority ethnic households whilst others do not. Nor does it explain the tendency of some workers to engage in positive discrimination. Thirdly, the neo-Marxist model does not explain the diverse outcomes within and between ethnic groups in access to housing across the country.

However the fundamental limitation of the Marxist and neo-Marxist models is the absence of a non-discriminatory alternative. Within a non-capitalist system some form of bureaucratic distribution will be retained apart from through structures of self-provision. This would include some notion of eligibility to access limited natural resources, which would in turn involve the assessment of whether households are eligible for the resource. Indeed Pahl (1977) notes continuing inequalities of resource distribution, including housing, in non-capitalist systems.

Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989) note that researchers who have tried to determine a relationship between class and the housing outcomes of minority ethnic communities have found that class has not provided a complete explanatory model. The work of Peach, Winchester and Woods (1975) and Lee (1977) is cited and we can now add to this the work of

Peach and Byron (1993). Henderson and Karn's (1987) attempt to examine the relationship of class and 'race' in the allocation of council housing within Birmingham provides a further example, although it might be argued that their references to status groups makes this a Weberian rather than a Marxian notion of class. They conclude that racial disadvantage in public housing allocations in Birmingham was not purely explained by class position, but was inter-linked with 'race'. A similar inter-relationship was observed within the private market:

white views about living near black people and sharing schools and other facilities with them are bound to have a dramatic effect on the market. So the desire of whites to live in white areas produces, through competition, a bidding up of the prices in those areas. As the black population is mostly of lower income relative to the white, higher prices disproportionately exclude them. In this way class discrimination comes to articulate with racial discrimination to produce a form of discrimination through the market that any anti-discrimination legislation is powerless to touch.

(Henderson and Karn 1987: 5)

This view appears to be consistent with the idea of social closure.

Whilst Ratcliffe argues that class should be seen as a factor in minority ethnic housing outcomes, he suggests a complicated rather than a clear relationship:

In the general population there has traditionally been a fairly strong positive correlation between class and propensity to buy. Among some minority groups (notably those of Indian and Pakistani origin), however, the

relationship has been weaker or even negative, with ownership levels being at their highest amongst the semi-skilled and unskilled working class.
(Ratcliffe 1995: 9)

Jeffers and Hoggett (1995: 342) also suggest that there may be an enduring relevance for Marxian analysis in 'race' and housing research through highlighting the structural framework within which housing officers are forced to determine eligibility to resources, although as noted above one which is not necessarily exclusive to capitalist societies. Jeffers and Hoggett's work highlights the way in which minority ethnic households are disadvantaged in access to local authority tenancies by their over-representation within the homelessness channel. They argue that the urgency of the housing need of homeless households offered them little opportunity to refuse undesirable offers of accommodation. However it might be suggested that this also reflects local authority attitudes to the status of homelessness cases and in particular the quality of accommodation which they should receive. Similarly Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989: 25) suggest that the addition of neo-Weberian approaches to neo-Marxist analyses, through the definition of the underclass and the class fraction, provides a more promising basis for the analysis of the housing outcomes of minority ethnic communities within Britain than traditional class based approaches.

ii) Commodification of housing

The 'commodification of housing' refers to the process whereby the provision and consumption of good quality housing are controlled by access to the private market rather than being determined by rights of citizenship and the welfare state. It also reflects a growth in the importance of exchange values in comparison with use values within the consumption of housing. The residualisation of local authority housing, in part through the promotion of owner-occupation as the natural form of tenure, has in turn become a further component in the growth of owner-occupation and the commodification of housing.

A number of writers have sought to apply the concept of commodification to issues of 'race' and housing. The key tenet of this argument is that commodification has exacerbated racial disadvantage within the housing market. Ward (1984b: 126) observes the structural and racialised inequalities in the owner-occupied housing market. He argues that differential rates of unemployment between ethnic groups, for example in youth unemployment, make changes in these housing trends unlikely.

Johnson (1987) also argues that 'race' is a key factor in mediating wealth creation through owner-occupation. Differential family sizes, and differential house price

rises within areas of residential segregation will be important factors in perpetuating inequality in access to the benefits of commodification. However he suggests that concentrating upon material outcomes is also problematic since a superficial improvement in housing conditions for minority ethnic communities might disguise continuing restrictions in access to particular sectors of the market.

Smith also notes that whilst Asian and African Caribbean communities might have superficially participated in processes of commodification through owner-occupation:

the fact that the most dramatic extension of owner-occupation took place against a background of high unemployment, high interest rates and declining real incomes (the very circumstances least conducive to such a process) gives some cause for concern at the lower end of the income scale, where as a consequence of their position in the labour market, black owners are over-represented.

(Smith 1989: 60)

Smith concludes:

some owners (including a disproportionate number of black households) are effectively trapped in properties whose use values are limited by their poor condition, and whose exchange values are depreciating relative to those of other dwellings in the same city or region.

(Smith 1989: 63)

In addition Phillips and Karn (1992: 355) argue that the racialised attitudes of private gatekeepers continue to

restrict minority ethnic access to the owner-occupied market.

Whilst these considerations are important in terms of individual life chances the emphasis within much of the commodification literature upon one tenure, owner-occupation, restricts the concept's applicability as a universal explanation of housing outcomes for minority ethnic communities. The commodification model can also be perceived as giving undue importance to structural and economic factors and losing sight of the role of the individual as the consumer or distributor of resources. Thus there is an assumption that communities universally purchase housing for exchange rather than consumption purposes. However the level of financial gain (or loss) through property ownership may be immaterial to someone who is not interested in realising that asset. Consequently the commodification model ignores intangible housing assets such as security. There is also a palpable need to reshape the commodification debate as a result of the crash in the British property market in the late 1980s and early 1990s, because of the consequent reassertion of use rather than exchange values.

iii) Housing and institutional racism

Institutional racism was first used as a socio-political term in the United States by the Black Power movement as part of a critique of continuing inequalities in American society. Williams (1985: 324) identifies Carmichael and Hamilton as the first exponents of the concept which identifies:

a vicious circle created by a lack of decent housing, decent job, and adequate education...the pervasive cyclic implication of institutional racism.
(Carmichael and Hamilton 1969: 156)

The theory of institutional racism was further developed by a number of writers who note that it is not necessarily a conscious or intentional process:

Jones (1972) writes that 'institutional racism can be defined as those established laws, customs and practices which systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities in American society. If racist consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs or practices the intention is racist whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions' (p131). Blauner (1972) describes institutional racism as the interaction of various spheres of social life to maintain an overall pattern of oppression, again emphasising unintentional, ordinary procedures which he calls 'the chains of unwilling actions' (p188).

(Williams 1985: 324)

Jacobs (1985: 7) suggests that the exclusion of minority ethnic communities from social housing in Britain, followed by their inclusion in concentrated numbers upon sink estates

is a reflection of a 'highly racist society'. This is particularly the case because of the acceptance of these processes by white society. Ginsburg adds that:

institutional racism is in evidence where a public or private agency is presiding over long established racial inequalities, the reasonable assumption being that the agency must in some way be held responsible for such an outcome, no matter how limited its resources and how well meaning its staff.

(Ginsburg 1992a: 111)

Ginsburg conceptualises institutional racism as one of three definable forms of racial discrimination affecting access to housing. First, there is subjective racism which represents the direct and overt manifestation of racism perpetuated by individuals occupying a key gatekeeping function within the housing market. Secondly, there is institutional racism which is in Ginsburg's definition, the policy and administrative processes which disadvantage minority ethnic communities in access to housing resources. Thirdly, there are also processes of structural racism which may not necessarily be apparent within the local housing market, but which affect the availability of housing to minority ethnic communities. These features range from national housing policy to immigration policy and the operation of the labour market. Therefore Ginsburg differentiates between local institutional racism and national structural racism. His suggestion that seemingly impartial national laws are not institutionally racist, is in contrast with the original

American definitions of institutional racism (Jones 1972). However Ginsburg's distinction is one which Jeffers and Hoggett (1995: 330) argue is helpful in emphasising the continuing role of socio-economic processes in racial disadvantage. However, whilst Ginsburg argues that the three forms of racism which he identifies interact, Phillips' earlier comments seem a prescient criticism of his segmented approach:

As the early American writers were keen to point out, institutional racism is a process....In Britain, the term institutional racism is frequently used to refer to discrimination within a single institution.
(Phillips 1987: 136)

As Willis (1977) notes racist ideology has subtly underpinned the day-to-day decisions of key policy makers and resource allocators. They benefit from or are left unaffected by institutional racism, causing an inertia against change in society, which is reinforced by 'common sense racism'.

Smith and Mercer (1987: 1) note that 'race' and housing research from the late 1970s onwards has implicitly, though not explicitly, examined the institutional nature of racially differentiated housing disadvantage. Phillips (1987: 143) adds that a series of studies provide demonstrable evidence of:

A systematic pattern of racial discrimination...a pattern indicative of racism within the institutional rules, procedures and practices of housing departments across the country.

(Phillips 1987: 143)

Ginsburg (1992a: 117-118) suggests three common forms of institutional racism. First, housing provision which does not reflect the family structures of minority ethnic households seeking council housing. Jacobs adds:

The demographic demands of the black community were easily predictable. We can rest assured that had the large families in question been drawn, not from black workers and other oppressed groups, but from the upper class, good quality housing would have been rapidly built or acquired for them.

(Jacobs 1985: 23)

Secondly, particular local housing policies such as slum clearance and housing rehabilitation programmes which did not meet the needs of minority ethnic communities in the way in which they were applied. Thirdly, processes of municipal paternalism. These might for example include designating particular households and groups of households as deserving and undeserving, making assumptions about preferred areas of residence and 'protecting' households from the likelihood of racial harassment. Ginsburg (1992a: 117) adds that the racialisation of the historical biases of housing management has left such a complex web of cause and effect, that it is exceedingly difficult to isolate racial discrimination from other forms of socio-economic prejudice. Jacobs similarly argues that municipal housing:

effortlessly turned the full force of its already existing oppressive machinery against the black population. The early Fabians advocated harsh treatment for the bottom strata of the working class and these ideas, absorbed within labourism, formed a cornerstone of the welfare state. In these terms, both social control and racism, far from being extraneous, are integral to the ideology of social welfare.

(Jacobs 1985: 7)

Phillips (1987: 143) examines management practices in greater detail and suggests that institutional discrimination predominantly takes place within the routine work of housing departments. This might occur firstly through apparently objective rules which have a racially discriminatory effect, or secondly by grading applicants and matching them with 'suitable' properties, or thirdly via areas of discretion which provide scope for racial bias and stereotyping. Nevertheless Phillips is careful to emphasise that organisational stereotyping reflects institutional pressures on the individual officer, such as the organisational drive to keep voids low.

The identification of the key discriminatory effect played by officer assessment of customer deserts within analyses of institutional racism highlights similarities with the theories of urban managerialism and street-level bureaucracy. Indeed Pahl's search for a common ideology of urban managers can be seen as seeking explanations for discriminatory processes such as institutional racism. An

inclusion of structural factors within the framework of institutional racism in common with the original American definitions suggests links with other processes. For example, we might see commodification as an example of structural institutional racism because of the disproportionate advantages which have accrued to white communities (Smith 1989) because of the 'colour blind' promotion of owner-occupation by central government. The accompanying council house sales, and the reduction in finance for local authority housing might, in the same way, also be seen as having an institutionally racist effect within the public sector. Indeed Jeffers and Hoggett (1995) identify structural influences such as the residualisation of public sector housing as being more significant in causing minority ethnic housing disadvantage than administrative processes.

Jeffers and Hoggett (1995: 325) note that the common conception amongst housing organisations is that officer discretion 'carries' institutional racism into the organisation. Nevertheless despite attempts to minimise this discretion, there are fundamental issues involved in resolving institutionally racist practices which Jacobs highlights:

While the house allocation system was not specifically designed to discriminate against racial minorities, in practice it clearly does so at every turn....the basic nature of council housing will have to be

altered....the 1967 Street Committee...argued that it would be impossible to tackle discrimination without first altering 'substantially the whole pattern of municipal housing management'....No government...has been prepared to undermine the rigid, social control objectives of housing administration, thus allowing racism a free hand.

(Jacobs 1985: 23)

Indeed an acceptance of analyses of institutional racism, problematises the possibilities of individual housing organisations and employees effectively bringing about change. Whilst an organisation might reform its own practices, Phillips (1987: 136) points out that housing organisations and the housing market inter-relate with institutionally racist processes in a number of socio-economic environments such as the employment market. This produces cumulative disadvantage for minority ethnic communities.

Pluralistic explanations of the housing disadvantage of minority ethnic households

The politics of 'race' and residence, feminist analyses, postmodernism and structuration theory represent explanations of racial inequality in access to housing which are inspired by a wide range of intellectual sources. Nevertheless as Cohen (1989: 152-153) suggests with respect to structuration theory, these explanations are pluralistic through their appropriation of a number of explanatory

factors. They do not necessarily propound that we live in a pluralist political structure.

i) Housing and the politics of 'race' and residence

Residential segregation:

is the spatial separation of different population groups within a given geographical area. The groups are either minority or dominant groups in the region and live in different areas of that region.

(Saltman 1991: 1)

Smith (1989) focuses upon the central role of housing policy as a cause and a product of racial residential segregation through its interaction with social, economic and particularly political factors.

Smith refers to two paradigms in framing her research. First the Parkian notion of the 'contact hypothesis'. This suggests that racial residential segregation can be seen as a breeding ground of inter-racial antipathy because of the failure to regularly encounter and therefore build trust with the 'other'. As van Amersfoort (1992: 440) argues 'residence patterns are a measure of social distance between social groups'. He cites Lieberman (1963) as demonstrating that residential segregation is not only a product of socio-

economic factors, but also a cause of socio-economic inequality.

Secondly Smith adds 'race' to Harvey's (1985: 123-4) hypothesis that segregation is 'an integral mediating influence in the processes whereby class relationships and social differentiation are produced and sustained'. She suggests with specific reference to housing systems that they:

do not...simply provide an arena for the display of wealth achieved (or deprivation experienced) by virtue of a position in the division of labour. They are also a medium able systematically to confer or restrict access to the wide range of economic rights (to employment and to the accumulation of wealth through property ownership) which, in principle accrue to able bodied members of free-market democracies.

(Smith 1989: 173)

Smith notes that residential segregation between ethnic groups is not value laden per se. Indeed it might be regarded as benign if it is an expression of minority ethnic choice. However she argues that in Britain it is iniquitous. The distribution of housing resources has both inadvertently and deliberately led to the disproportionate concentration of minority ethnic communities within the poorest sectors of the housing market. Residential segregation is 'the fulcrum of racial inequality' (Smith 1989: 18) because of the spatial restrictions upon an individual's access to resources:

symbolically and in practice, the existence of segregation testifies to a systematic undermining of the rights of black people - rights which, in Britain, are related to participation in the economy, to the receipt of essential state - subsidized services and to the political and civil liberties associated with freedom of expression and equality before the law.
(Smith 1989: 172)

This marginalisation allows the 'problems' of inner-city multicultural areas to be portrayed as spatially defined and containable, the realm of micropolicy solutions (Smith 1993: 140). The interests of minority ethnic communities are excluded from integration into mainstream policy and the everyday concerns of the majority of the (white) population. Therefore racial residential segregation becomes the object of debate (Smith 1989: 179) rather than the cause of it, constructed in policy terms as a problem of the minority ethnic community for the white community.

Consequently minority ethnic residential space is pathologised, further legitimising the continuing exclusion of minority ethnic communities from the benefits of full citizenship. The social, spatial and economic distance between minority ethnic communities and white communities leads to the reification of 'race', perpetuating processes of exclusion. The racialisation of residential space means that:

residential location is taken as an index, of the attitudes, values, behavioural inclinations and social

norms of the kinds of people who are assumed to live in particular 'black' or 'white', inner city or suburban, neighbourhoods.

(Smith 1993: 133)

Smith (1989: 102) argues that the local state is unable to effectively intervene to implement positive action to ameliorate disadvantage, because it is bound by central government constraints. In any case the reification of 'race' may legitimise past policy failures and act as a constraint upon future action:

if policies which claim to address the needs of ostensibly equal individuals fail to tackle the tenacity of racism and the structures of discrimination, this can all be subsumed in the language of cultural autonomy.

(Smith 1993: 141)

However Modood argues that Smith is preoccupied with the racialisation of minority ethnic communities through white agencies. Those aspects of ethnicity which are not overtly being used to resist racism are ignored:

It is quite remarkable that Smith's concern...is with racial segregation, 'not just as a spatial form, but also as a politically constructed problem and as a socially constructed way of life' and yet ethnic minority communities, their internal structure and its evolution, are ruled out in advance as irrelevant to this social process.

(Modood 1990: 89)

Modood argues that minority ethnic communities are consciously seeking to create localities for themselves

whilst in Smith's paradigm they are the recipients, the victims and ultimately the objects of racism.

However Smith's thesis remains significant, despite Modood's important criticism, because of its reassertion of the crucial role played by housing processes in producing racial residential segregation, societal inequality and the construction of 'racial identity'. She emphasises that spatial marginalisation excludes minority ethnic communities from influence in the construction of housing policy, and highlights the long term impact of short term cuts in housing resources. Smith's examination of the deficiencies of 'colour blind' policies, echoes Lustgarten and Edwards' (1992) advocacy of an administrative approach to equal opportunities issues which would require the assessment of the race equality impact of all policy measures prior to their implementation.

ii) Feminist approaches to 'race' and housing

Feminist approaches to 'race' and housing represent a small, but growing area of debate and theorisation. They include the specific experiences of minority ethnic women in access to housing, and the role of gender as an explanatory factor within a general analysis of racially differentiated housing outcomes.

A review of the 'race' and housing literature indicates that with a small number of notable exceptions, most analyses have not considered gender as a discrete influence. There has been an apparent belief in the comparability of male and female experiences. However women of all ethnic groups are disproportionately disadvantaged in their access to, and consumption of housing in Britain (Brailey 1985, Watson and Austerberry 1986, Blair 1993, Gilroy and Woods 1994). This can be seen as reflecting the poorer economic position of women compared with men, the judgements of social gatekeepers and the design and provision of housing. However in addition to gender inequalities, minority ethnic women find their access to housing affected by racism and ethnocentrism (Mama 1989, Rao 1990).

Patriarchy and ethnocentrism can be seen as coalescing in the dominance of housing provision for the nuclear family. Smith (1992: 30) notes the way in which Britain's social housing system is based around the norm of the two parent heterosexual household. She argues that this disadvantages lone parent households which are predominantly headed by women. However there is a 'racial' dimension as well as a gender bias, since lone parent households are statistically more common within the African Caribbean community than in the white community (Lowenthal 1972, Owen 1993).

Peach and Byron (1993) provide an example of the second strand of feminist analysis which identifies the distinct experiences of minority ethnic women and then incorporates that analysis within explanations of the housing experience of that whole minority ethnic community. They examine the explanatory potential of factors of 'race', gender and class in determining the representation of 'Caribbean' households within the local authority housing sector, concluding that:

Caribbean households show a very high concentration in council housing and a lower than average degree of owner-occupation....socio-economic class explains a great deal of the pattern of male heads of household but relatively little of the tenure of female heads of household.

(Peach and Byron 1993: 407)

The concentration of female headed lone parent households within the local authority housing sector can be seen as one of the key explanatory factors of the over-representation of all African Caribbean households within council housing. Peach and Byron (1993: 421) add that African Caribbean female headed households are also disproportionately found within the poorest sectors of local authority housing. Nevertheless they stress that gender, household structure and class interact within a framework determined by 'race' and racism. Ratcliffe (1995: 8) concurs that the incidence of female headed households within a community is, at least to some extent, a predictor of housing outcome irrespective of ethnicity.

However the detailed results of Peach and Byron's research should not be assumed to represent a universal explanation for the housing outcomes of all minority ethnic communities. They, firstly, restrict their conclusions to Caribbean households and secondly, might be criticised for making sweeping conclusions upon the basis of relatively small data samples using the white community as the norm. Thirdly, they might also be seen as ignoring issues of wealth through focusing upon occupation as the indicator of social class. There may be variations in wealth transfers between men and women of different ethnic groups which might partly explain tenure outcomes. A final limitation is that Peach and Byron use gender as a predictor of housing outcomes rather than identifying its precise role within processes of disadvantage and discrimination.

Nevertheless they significantly restate the importance of the inter-relationship between 'race' and other socio-economic categories of analysis, highlighting in particular the explanatory potential of socio-economic gender differentials. Therefore Peach and Byron provide an important basis for further investigation into the interaction of race, gender and class within housing outcomes.

iii) Postmodernist approaches to 'race' and housing

The concepts of the postmodern, postmodernism and postmodernity have produced an extensive literature of contested meanings (for example see Savage and Warde 1993, and Bertens 1995). However Lyon (1994: 6-7) suggests that in spite of this complexity, it remains possible to discern common usage of the terms. Lyon (1994: 12) notes that Lyotard has popularised the notion of the postmodern as expressing an 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard xxiv). In effect this represents 'the exhaustion of modernity' (Lyon 1994: 6). Within this framework the terms postmodernism and postmodernist represent intellectual approaches to knowledge and for Bertens (1995: 215) cultural paradigms. Postmodernity indicates the altered social state of society (Lyon 1994: 7). Therefore the conception that we have moved to a condition of postmodernity reflects an exhaustion with the absolutes and certainties which have previously been integral to social life, but which were also value laden. Indeed with respect to 'race' Goldberg (1993a: 118-119) suggests that racial discrimination and racial marginalisation are the historic products of modernity. They reflect the historical synchronicity of the deification of Reason in the Western world and the exploitation of 'Other' worlds by the West. He argues that 'race' and racism become the means of bridging the gap between the theory and integrity of Western Enlightenment thought and the practice

and abuses of Western actions. Malik develops this thesis adding that:

The tendency to view social differences as natural became rationalised through the discourse of race. The concept of race emerged, therefore, as a means of reconciling the conflict between the ideology of equality and the reality of the persistence of inequality. Race accounted for social inequalities by attributing them to nature.

(Malik 1996: 6)

At present there is only the beginning of a postmodernist literature in the 'race' and housing field (for example Cross and Keith 1993), with little focus upon the British experience. However Lyon's (1994: 1) argument that postmodernity 'alerts us to some tremendously important social as well as cultural shifts taking place at the end of the twentieth century', suggests that an attempt should be made to apply postmodernist analyses to the 'race' and housing literatures. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comprehensively explore the complete range of social, cultural and political potentials for the application of postmodernist ideas to 'race' and housing issues. However we might differentiate between interpretations which simply criticise the effects of modernity and therefore do not necessarily present a postmodernist world view and those which present a new postmodernist perspective.

The reappraisal of modernity's trust in progress (Bertens 1995: 234), and in particular a critique of instruments of

the post war social mission such as the welfare state, could provide an example of interpretations which are critical of existing conventions. This might simply build upon earlier literature:

public housing became a cornerstone of the post-war welfare state....The welfare state embraced the ideas of equality and integration. However decisions made towards the end of the 1940s were to deny black households their fair share of housing as a welfare resource, and it is at this point that racial categorization and residential segregation first become aligned.

(Smith 1989: 51)

However in contrast to simple criticisms of modernity, postmodernist ideas can develop new explanations of the past and new policy directions for the future, extending the 'race' and housing debate beyond empirical measures of deprivation and inequality in housing conditions:

the postmodern city, if it exists at all, incorporates a way of seeing as well as a way of being. In other words, we are talking as much about a new conceptualization of the city as well as a new form of urbanism.

(Keith and Cross 1993: 2)

Goldberg draws attention to the visual clues which suggest and reflect racial inequality in access to housing. He notes that the physical separation of 'white' and 'black' areas in the West's colonial cities were reproduced in its 'own' metropolitan areas:

In the 1950s and 1960s, slum administration replaced colonial administration. Exclusion and exclusivity were internalized within the structures of city planning throughout the expanding cosmopolises of the West. Fearing contamination from the racially defined suburbs of the inner city, the white middle class scuttled to the suburbs. The 'tower of Babel' was quickly superseded by 'the tower of the housing project high rise' as the appropriate image of racialized urban space...[1]local differences notwithstanding, the racial poor were simultaneously marginalized in terms of power and rendered peripheral in terms of urban location.

(Goldberg 1993b 46-47)

Whilst the cultural eclecticism of postmodernism (Goldberg 1993b: 47) might now be seen as breaking down these barriers, it may often be at the expense of minority ethnic households. The gentrification of inner city areas by white households anxious to be near to the cultural amenities of postmodernism may involve the residential displacement of minority ethnic communities and the dilution of group concentration. This may also mean the loss of a political voice and the continuation of marginality in different forms for minority ethnic communities as:

The racially marginalized are isolated within city centre space...and carefully divided from respectably residential urban areas.

(Goldberg 1993b: 53)

The analyses presented above suggest that postmodernist thought can be seen as a useful conceptual tool. They highlight the way in which the search for rational certainty within the processes of modernity can exclude those defined as the 'Other'.

Postmodernist interpretations of 'race' and housing can also facilitate a greater understanding of the diversity of housing needs. This would seem to represent a paradigm shift in British social housing in the context of the wealth of research which documents the judgemental attitudes of social housing providers (for example Henderson and Karn 1987, and Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989). Whilst pluralism is not dependent upon the existence of variants of postmodern social theory, postmodernism may provide a catalyst for the reappraisal of ethnocentric practices since 'it is pluralism that lies at the heart of much of what is tangible and valuable in postmodernist social theory' (McLennan 1995: 5).

Therefore the application of postmodernist thought to issues of 'race' and housing can suggest an alternative model of housing provision based upon the recognition of difference and a reassertion of the right of the individual to express and to seek to express housing preferences. These ideas have been used by Thompson and Hoggett (1996) who have sought to outline a postmodern social policy based upon a recognition of customer diversity. Similarly Tomlins (1996a) has tried to develop a pluralistic ethnic housing policy which might be outlined further at this stage.

Tomlins has suggested that this policy should not simply facilitate housing choice but should also support minority

ethnic decisions to express identity through residence. Thus, the pervasive desire 'to "get a better racial mix"' (Rex 1981: 40), and to see the minority ethnic community reproduce the social and spatial norm of the majority ethnic community will be challenged:

Our white liberal 'friends' of the time knew of course what was best for us; they knew that it was in our best interest to be dispersed; that our aggregation was synonymous with ghettoization; that as black people we will obviously be flattered to be placed among white people rather than having to live in communities in which the majority of people are black. They knew our needs better than we ourselves did. Our 'friends' and enemies were at one in ignoring alternative views.

(James 1993: 261)

As James notes, the implications of these actions went far beyond housing outcomes through an attack upon the resource of community which residential concentration offers. James' positive conception of voluntary residential concentration is reflected in current perceptions of ethnicity, which highlight the benefits for minority ethnic communities of choosing ethnic residential segregation, and formulating a self-defined housing policy. Modood (1990: 86) suggests that ethnicity describes a 'group's internal structure, values and understanding of itself'. This provides a potential which in the form of ethnic residential segregation offers group resources (Boal 1981: 235), which might otherwise be lost by spatial dispersal, and particularly by forced dispersal. However Soja and Hooper's (1993: 193-194) suggestion that postmodernism is revealing the resource of

diversity, might be clarified by the coda that it is demonstrating to majority ethnic communities, that which has long been known to minority ethnic communities.

Whilst Boal (1976: 75) argues that by the mid 70s the value of separate communities was being recognised, and initiatives to forcibly disperse minorities were falling out of favour, Marcuse (1994) continues to see a danger that ethnic residential separation provides a cover for continuing inequality. In addition Nanton (1989: 561) echoing Sivanandan (1985), suggests that policies targeted upon particular communities lead to a retreat into 'defensive ethnicity'.

Advocates of pluralistic provision might respond with Castles' conclusion that:

countries with pluralistic policies actually achieve a much higher degree of economic, social, and political integration than do countries which explicitly set out to assimilate immigrants.

(Castles 1995: 306)

In essence, if the legitimacy of a particular community's ethnic identity is denied by the wider political culture or if it feels in danger of racial harassment, it may fold in upon itself (le repli sur soi) and become inward looking.

The lack of representation of minority ethnic communities within the hierarchies of existing housing providers (NFHA 1992a), ensures that there remains a danger of provision for, rather than provision by minority ethnic communities. Therefore in addition to an acceptance of the right of minority ethnic communities to choose to concentrate in particular areas, separate provision is also needed to provide the user led perspective which the complexity of ethnicity demands. Whilst locating the control of housing resources within specific communities might in the short term provide the freedom to choose to segregate, it may still increase other opportunities for social contact. For example Johnson and Ward (1985) note in their study of the effectiveness of the Birmingham Inner City Partnership, that 'black' led organisations are frequently more inclusive than 'white' led organisations. Therefore minority ethnic communities have a critical role to play in achieving pluralism through demanding influence in housing policy and local politics, in addition to arguing for improved housing conditions.

Tomlins (1996a: 170) suggests that the choices of minority ethnic communities to spatially concentrate should not lead to marginalisation, if they are backed by policies and financial resources to ensure that the life chances within those spatially differentiated areas are comparable with those within 'mainstream society'. Ensuring continuing

improvements in access to mainstream provision alongside the development of separate organisations will prevent the development of an apartheid system of provision. This means recognising that provision by minority ethnic communities for minority ethnic communities will have a very different power dynamic to majority ethnic provision for majority ethnic communities.

Tomlins argues that a pluralistic housing policy is likely to be most successful when it is developed as part of a pluralistic social policy, addressing structural inequality and assessing all governmental measures for their impact upon minority ethnic communities. For example, in the context of housing, funding for property improvement and new building in areas of minority ethnic residence must be linked to the employment of local labour. Positive action should also be taken to ensure that employment opportunities within the wider urban area are available to minority ethnic communities. In addition, social welfare services must be proportionate to need across the urban milieu. Through a combination of measures, social contact need not be constrained by a minority ethnic preference for residential segregation.

Tomlins (1996a: 172) concludes that the essential condition of any equitable housing policy is recognition of, and provision for, minority ethnic housing need. This should

mean both pluralism and universalism, with separate provision augmenting sensitive provision from the mainstream. A pluralistic housing policy is not only desirable, but is clearly realisable and can be facilitated by the openness of postmodern perceptions of the city.

Therefore postmodernism recognises the legitimacy of diverse needs and the potential to escape from the certainties and racism of 'objective' local authority norms. As Jeffers and Hoggett (1995) suggest, rational technocratic solutions might be seen as part of the cause of, rather than the solution to, racial disadvantage in access to housing.

iv) Structuration theory

The dominant paradigm within 'race' and housing research is structuration theory which was initially developed by Giddens (see Giddens 1984 for the fullest exposition), and seeks to explain the inter-relationship between social structure and the individual. It is essentially a pluralistic theory which engages with the concerns of other theorists and incorporates their perspectives, if not their paradigms, within a new inclusive approach which is greater than the sum of its parts.

Giddens propounds that throughout society, whilst individual actions are shaped by society's 'structures' (defined within structuration theory as rules and resources rather than institutions), sufficient discretion is held by individuals to be able to reproduce or change structure. Therefore structuration theory recognises that individuals do not have absolute freedom in their roles, whilst emphasising an element of freedom in individual decision making which is absent in most Marxist and institutional racism interpretations. Indeed structures are seen as enabling at the same time as being constraining. For example within the workplace Giddens' conception of power offers a recognition of the scope for discretion:

What appears from the standpoint of administrative timetables and accounting books as a routinised series of activities and relations, actually involves a complex dialectic of control between supervisors and subordinates which may conform to the upper-level image of coordinated activities only to a limited extent....subordinates preserve some latitude in their doings in return for their compliance with the general course of systemic activities.

(Cohen 1989: 182)

Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989: 43) note that structural change is likely to occur through the 'unintended consequence of many actions', however the position of any particular agent within this pattern of societal reproduction is more complex, because:

knowledge of consequences may vary not only in a spatio-temporal sense, but also with reference to

hierarchies of privilege and power....the most salient point regarding intended consequences is that agents in homeostatic systems may know that they contribute consequences through their activities which serve to organise a system in which they participate without thereby intending to produce this result.

(Cohen 1989: 135)

Individuals' ability to negotiate the system, and by implication to change it, is dependent upon their 'knowledgeability and capability' (Sarre 1986: 74) in the context of existing structures. This reflects their life skills, predispositions and resources (personal or material). If ethnicity is seen as representing a particular outlook and potentials, then there may be discernible ethnic differences in not only the ability to negotiate the system, but also to bring about structuration ('the reproduction of social relations across time and space' Cohen 1989: 41) and to influence the future shape of structures.

Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989) have applied structuration theory to the differential housing outcomes of ethnic groups. From an assessment of previous research, they identify four broad factors (Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989: 40) influencing housing provision for minority ethnic communities which interact within a possible constraint of direct or indirect racial discrimination. First, there is cultural tradition where it continues to influence choice, for example through a culturally inherited tenure preference or a predisposition to return 'home'. Secondly, economic

resources will shape access to the marketplace. Insofar as minority ethnic communities continue to experience economic disadvantage, they will experience restricted access to housing which is dependent upon effective demand. Thirdly, Sarre, Phillips and Skellington suggest that minority ethnic communities have less knowledge of the different options available in the housing market and therefore have less opportunity to take advantage of the range of choices which are available. Fourthly, they suggest that the household structures of minority ethnic communities may differ from the norms of the white community. This may affect minority ethnic communities simply through the lack of provision of suitable accommodation. Alternatively the execution of administrative rules within the allocations process may place a punitive judgement on family structure which is 'not normal' (Morris and Winn 1990: 102).

Sarre, Phillips and Skellington (1989: 41) argue that these four factors interact in varying ways in different socio-spatial environments. Spatial socio-economic differences ensure that a universally applicable explanation of the housing outcomes of minority ethnic communities does not exist.

Within their own research of housing outcomes in Bedford, Sarre, Phillips and Skellington document a range of prejudicial policies and attitudes in the public and private

sectors, with covert succeeding overt discrimination. In access to local authority housing the historic attitude was summed up by the Housing Director of Bedford Borough Council in 1968 as being based upon:

"the capability of the applicant and his [sic] family to appreciate the amenities of the house in full"
(Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989: 197)

When Sarre, Phillips and Skellington began their research in 1978, assessments of the deserving and undeserving status of housing applicants were still influencing housing allocations. In addition these processes were racialised. Pahl's prejudicial social gatekeeper and Lipsky's stereotyping street-level bureaucrat were at work in Bedford:

They have refused Faraday Square. They really are too good for that area. They are two of the most courteous West Indians I have ever met! Their appearance and speech are excellent. I would think suitable for any new or good property in a good area.
(Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989: 361)

Good/very good cleanliness. Miss C's room seemed generally well looked after and was full of the usual technicolour bric-a-brac favoured by West Indians.
(Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989: 362)

Within their study of Bedford Sarre, Phillips and Skellington adopt Giddens' view that institutions perform a mediating function, diluting structural pressures on some occasions and enforcing them on others. They argue that minority ethnic communities have been discerning of the

likely allocation of resources from individual institutions, echoing Niner's (1987: 224) suggestion that minority ethnic households in housing need tend to apply to housing associations with a proven record of assisting minority ethnic communities. Sarre, Phillips and Skellington suggest that whilst there has been an element of choice operating against a background of constraint for minority ethnic communities in access to housing resources, that degree of choice has been relatively narrow and has been more restricted than the opportunities available to the majority white community.

Sarre, Phillips and Skellington's research confirmed to them that the structurationist model was a valid and useful research framework, leaving individual researchers:

to clarify how [explanatory factors] combine and how such apparent opposites as cultural choice and economic determination are in practice mutually reinforcing.
(Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989: 39)

Jeffers and Hoggett's 'game' metaphor draws on the interplay of forces in a similar way:

the power of the 'game' metaphor lies in the way in which it enables us to see beyond the deceptively bland persona of 'an organisational system' into a dynamic and interactive reality. It enables us to see 'the institution' as a continually shifting and contested structure in which no one, least of all those in housing need, is simply an object or pawn but all are active agents with differential resources pursuing varying strategies.
(Jeffers and Hoggett 1995: 340)

However it might be questioned whether the heterogeneity of structuration could become a hindrance to research. It might, like postmodernism, become chameleon like, celebrating rather than reflecting diversity, each piece of research assuming the dominant paradigm of its researcher within a structurationist framework. Therefore key trends within housing disadvantage might be disguised.

v) A housing specific structuration theory

There are grounds for the continued applicability of each of the theories of 'race' and housing outlined above. The choice school enshrines the independence of minority ethnic households as sovereign decision makers. Whilst it might be seen as promoting the idea of natural cultural requirements, it challenges the convention that minority ethnic communities are simply the victims of the discriminatory actions of white gatekeepers. The housing classes model emphasises the effects of competition for scarce resources, and the way in which minority ethnic households can be marginalised by these processes. It also provides a focus upon the actions of individual gatekeepers which is developed by Pahl and Lipsky. Thus housing officers are seen as important arbiters of life chances, rather than technocratic implementers of bureaucratic efficiency. The

social closure theorists draw upon a different strand of the housing classes model. They emphasise the way in which competition within the housing market can be used by one group to deliberately exclude another from access to resources.

Whilst Marxian class based analyses have failed to explain differential housing outcomes between ethnic groups in the same class position, there is an important role for them to play. If, as Jeffers and Hoggett (1995: 325) suggest, more organisations are moving to 'cleanse' officer discretion and racial housing inequality still endures, then structural constraints will move centre stage within the 'race' and housing literature. Nevertheless, those structural constraints might also be described as institutionally racist, an approach which emphasises the continuing importance of indirect discrimination through seemingly objective procedures. The commodification debate is analogous to class based and institutional racism analyses, because of its emphasis upon the racially specific consequences of a structural promotion of owner-occupation.

Smith (1989) draws our attention to the position of racial segregation in housing as an influence upon and a product of wider societal forces which frequently marginalise, and consequently disadvantage, minority ethnic communities. Nevertheless feminist approaches in turn remind us of the

dangers of the reification of 'race' as an exclusionary explanatory factor. Postmodernist analyses emphasise the housing implications of exclusionary value judgements but also offer a new way of seeing housing potentials. Tomlins (1996a) notes that this can be realised as a pluralistic housing policy. However, whilst Tomlins suggests this model to take housing policy forward, he does not provide a framework to bring together the explanatory factors for analysing current housing disadvantage.

Structuration theory can embrace the explanations provided by different theoretical perspectives, although not necessarily their exclusiveness. However, its very openness and consequent looseness can be seen as preventing its use as a blueprint for further research. Therefore we might construct a pluralistic, housing specific, model of structuration theory emphasising factors commonly found within 'race' and housing research. Minority ethnic preferences exercised against the tensions of resource allocation would form part of this template. Those tensions, barriers and indeed opportunities would include the role of individual resource allocators and their motivations for action, the ingrained and unconscious discrimination of institutional processes, and the structural constraints of employment opportunities and central and local housing policy. This is a similar framework to Sarre, Phillips and Skellington's (1989: 39) outline of explanatory factors,

however it delineates more clearly the potential areas of interaction. In addition, as the following chapters will demonstrate, a housing specific structuration approach must emphasise far more clearly than existing models the change potential of individual agents, and the diversity of individual and collective opportunities which must be researched. It should allow the incorporation of postmodernist diversity within a framework which will identify common factors requiring policy solutions at a national, local and organisational level.

The primary research within this thesis will examine the tension between individual choices and constraints, paying particular attention to the role of officer discretion within one city and one housing provider, Byrds Housing Association. The race equality performance of that organisation will first be placed in the context of the record of the housing association movement.

Chapter Five - 'Race' equality and the housing association movement

Social sector housing management is commonly assumed to be concerned with meeting housing need within society. However as the previous chapter has demonstrated, academic research has provided disturbing evidence which suggests that housing organisations and housing managers perpetuate inequality. Whilst research into the race equality performance of the housing association movement has been less extensive than within the local authority sector, there is sufficient evidence to provide cause for concern. There appears to have been little progress within the housing association movement towards addressing race equality issues prior to the urban disturbances/uprisings of 1981. Whilst some associations such as COPEC (Empson 1983) had developed basic systems of ethnic monitoring, there was generally little evidence of proactive equal opportunities policy development at this time.

During 1981 the National Federation of Housing Associations (NFHA) had begun a campaign to draw attention to inner city decay. This included a meeting to highlight the disrepair of urban property which coincided with urban disturbances nearby. Subsequently there was pressure upon the NFHA to shift the focus of the campaign from property to people:

Local organisations had their say at the inquiry and they had a lot to say. The events of the previous 24 hours began to change the direction of the proceedings. It was not just a question of improving inner city housing, but also of ensuring that the people living in those areas had access to better housing. In the Brixton area, the majority of those living in the worst housing were black.

(NFHA 1983: 5)

Consequently the NFHA made its first significant policy pronouncement on race equality at its 1981 Conference. However the NFHA's stance was still the product of reactive emergency resolutions, suggesting that race equality issues remained marginal to the mainstream:

Conference notes the particular problems of ethnic minorities in Inner City areas and calls on housing associations to ensure that their selection and management policies are non discriminatory and, in development and management activities, due regard is paid to the particular needs of ethnic minorities in their areas of operation. In order to achieve this, Conference requests the NFHA Housing Management Committee, in consultation with the Commission for Racial Equality and other appropriate bodies to produce advice on a fair housing policy for housing associations and in particular advice on a system of ethnic record keeping and subsequent monitoring.

(NFHA resolution 1981 cited in Niner 1984: 239)

Niner (1984) argues that the NFHA's statement reinforced by a continuing commitment to change and the urban disturbances, focused housing associations' attention upon 'race'. Indeed it was a positive step given the absence of previous policy commitments. However it also typified an elementary, insular and voluntaristic approach by the movement which might be linked to the continuing shortfall

in race equality performance which could be noted over a decade later (CRE 1993a). The problems of minority ethnic communities were considered in a vacuum, with insufficient regard to historic discrimination and the generic socio-economic problems of inner city areas. For example the NFHA's statement did not demand that the government should target resources at deep rooted racial inequality. Whilst the advice of external agencies was sought, the emphasis was upon policy development within individual organisations. Indeed there was a concentration upon core housing management functions, arguably at the expense of other organisational areas. Nor did the NFHA make a commitment towards empowering minority ethnic communities. Its response to inequality was 'white' provision for 'black' consumer.

Initial reports of housing association race equality performance

Following the NFHA's 1981 Annual Conference resolution, a Fair Housing Policy Working Party was set up which produced the report *Race and Housing: A Guide for Housing Associations*. This publication aimed to:

consider the positive steps which could be taken by housing associations to reduce the effects of racial disadvantage and to improve race relations in the inner-city areas in which they work.

(NFHA 1982: ii)

It was necessary to achieve attitudinal change over the most fundamental of concepts:

Originally, a number of members had very strong objections to the principle of keeping records on people according to their racial or ethnic origin. At the end of several sessions of debate, it became clear to all of us that the only way to ensure that discrimination did not exist - particularly in the selection of tenants and allocation of homes - was for housing associations to keep such records.

(NFHA 1982: ii)

The NFHA's guidance is in some places clear and challenges existing practices (Niner 1984: 240). However it also offers legitimacy to discriminatory practices:

If an association does give special consideration to the relatives of existing tenants, who are predominantly white, this could be interpreted as indirect discrimination against black people even though the association may have good management reasons for this practice.

(NFHA 1982: 12)

Some of the advice now appears weak and outdated. For example, the NFHA is pessimistic regarding the possibility of evicting tenants guilty of racial harassment. Indeed the rights of racially harassed households are devalued through an oversensitive approach to offenders' families, even where eviction is not being suggested:

Instead of eviction, the offending tenant could be offered a transfer to alternative accommodation elsewhere. However, this can be unsatisfactory as it

can punish a whole household where only one member is guilty of harassment.

(NFHA 1982: 19)

The report also creates its own erroneous stereotypes, commenting that 'most black people (about 90 per cent) are unskilled manual workers' (NFHA 1982: 14). Despite this factual error the employment section of the report was arguably more likely to bring about change than the housing management section, because of its more prescriptive style.

The NFHA finishes upon an evangelical note quoting from the 1968 Report of the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders in the United States:

"The only genuine, long range solution for what has happened lies in an attack - mounted at every level - upon the conditions that breed despair and violence. All of us know what those conditions are: ignorance, discrimination, slums, poverty, disease, not enough jobs. We should attack these conditions - not because we are frightened by conflict, but because we are fired by conscience. We should attack them because there is simply no other way to achieve a decent and orderly society..."

(National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders 1968 cited in NFHA 1982: 25)

This evangelism sits uneasily with the rather meeker aims of the publication:

If this guide leads at least some [my italics] housing associations to review their practices and procedures with a view to reducing racial disadvantage and eliminating the possibility of discrimination, members of the Working Party will feel that their time has been well spent.

(NFHA 1982: ii)

The Working Party responsible for the first report monitored its implementation and sought to meet criticism from the movement that it had not produced sufficient practical guidance on implementing a programme of race equality. Therefore a second report, *Race and Housing...Still a Cause for Concern* (NFHA 1983) was published which:

deals with the progress made in the first year by housing associations in implementing [*Race and Housing: A Guide for Housing Associations*'] recommendations. It also attempts to look at housing associations and what they provide 'through the eyes of black people' - to see ourselves as others would see us. Finally, it considers the problem of reconciling the views that housing associations and black people have of each other.

(NFHA 1983: 5)

This comment is notable for its conceptualisation of minority ethnic communities as 'the other', outside the housing association world.

The report is characterised by an inconsistency between the NFHA's partisan affirmation of associations' new responsive approach to race equality issues alongside research data which suggest their unresponsiveness. The report's foreword claims that there has been a 'remarkable change in the climate of opinion over the last two years'. However on the same page it notes:

The black organisations we met or contacted, whether specialising in housing or concerned with other aspects

of community life, were almost invariably unconvinced of housing associations' commitment to giving a fair deal to the minority communities....associations, with some notable exceptions, were quite unaware of this jaundiced view of their own work....there was a strong feeling that black people had no real interest in either participation, employment or even in some cases, access to housing.

(NFHA 1983: 3)

Minority ethnic distrust of the housing association movement is rationalised and discredited by the NFHA as misconceived, possibly reinforcing community concerns:

The message which had got through to the Working Party, from the black groups which had replied to the survey questionnaire, and from the separate meetings with housing associations and black organisations, was that there existed a gap - of culture, language and credibility - between associations and the black community. Few, on either side, had managed to bridge that gap and its existence was damaging to both sides. Black people were not getting the housing or the jobs which associations were willing to offer. Housing associations were wrongly labelled as bureaucratic 'white only organisations, unconcerned with the needs of black people'.

(NFHA 1983: 14)

There was a clear consensus from the small number of minority ethnic organisations which contacted the NFHA, that the interests of existing mainstream associations were divorced from the needs of minority ethnic communities. A key issue appeared to be a lack of control over housing association resources:

'I am quite sure that most black organisations and people are not aware of the following: the existence of housing associations; how they are financed; how they are managed; what role and/or facilities they can offer to the black community as a whole; how they can

participate in housing associations. Can they ever get onto the management committees which seem to operate as a kind of closed shop'. [sic]

(NFHA 1983: 11)

Meetings with minority ethnic communities in Leeds and Leicester confirmed that the predominant view of housing associations was that:

associations were either irrelevant or actually detrimental to their needs....the housing associations generally...thought they were doing a good job for those in the black community...the black groups thought that housing associations were insensitive to their needs and they had little influence on, and no control over, what housing associations were doing in their area.

A good example of this was found in Leicester where housing associations have been particularly active in rehabilitating houses in areas with a large black population. The black groups saw housing associations as agents of 'white gentrification'....Landlords got rid of their black tenants in order to sell to housing associations with vacant possession. The associations, in turn, converted the houses into flats and let to white tenants. Housing associations were improving the area, but at the expense of the black community.

(NFHA 1983: 13)

There is a clear dissonance between the distrust and anger of minority ethnic groups and the complacent self-appraisal of mainstream housing associations, leading the NFHA (1983: 8) to comment in a rare moment of reflection, 'one can't help wondering how sure some associations were of their ground...and whether they might not be taking too rosy a view of the situation.'

A questionnaire distributed by the NFHA to 130 associations, drew a 63% response rate, 55% responding in time to be included within the report. Of these, only 55% had reported *Race and Housing: A Guide for Housing Associations* to their management committee; only 38% had a written policy on 'race'; only 25% had any minority ethnic committee members; only 21% had produced documents in ethnic minority languages; only 34% monitored lettings by ethnic/racial origin of tenant; only 52% knew which of their tenants were from minority ethnic communities and only 44% provided training on 'race' matters for staff. The NFHA seem unconscionably complacent about the results:

Before publication, there had been some anxiety about [*Race and Housing: A Guide for Housing Associations*] - had the NFHA's recommendations gone too far, or too fast? Some, of course, had said the Federation was doing too little too late. But the response showed that the aim of the report was about right: associations did not feel threatened by it and seemed to be considering its recommendations positively.

(NFHA 1983: 6)

In fact the data suggest a lack of initial response to the recommendations, even though it might be presumed that the 55% responding represented the associations with the greatest interest in, and commitment to, equal opportunity matters. The most encouraging data concerned the 73% of associations who possessed an equal opportunity policy for employment matters. However this may represent a 'paper policy' given that only 15% of associations kept ethnic

records of their staff, and only 22% monitored job applications by ethnic origin.

Therefore it is surprising that the NFHA ends its report by presenting a positive view of the movement:

This guide, together with the NFHA conferences and seminars which developed its ideas, has awakened the conscience of the movement to the issue of race and has spurred many associations to look at the matter afresh.
(NFHA 1983: 15)

In reality this suggests that the conscience of the housing association movement could be assuaged by minimal changes in performance, making it worth considering the impact of other stimuli to change.

The CRE's only formal investigation of a housing association *Collingwood Housing Association*, was also published in 1983. Its research coincided with Housing Corporation enquiries into alleged racial discrimination at the Association, which prompted the Corporation to nominate six new Board members to Collingwood. The Association's Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Housing Manager were also replaced in order to meet concerns about Collingwood's race equality performance.

The CRE states that due to continuing inequalities in access to housing, it was committed to conducting formal

investigations to remedy disadvantage. It wished to include housing associations within this process since although it was:

aware of the specialist housing associations whose work in the inner cities was of particular benefit in meeting the housing needs of ethnic minorities....we had reason to believe that blacks might be under-represented as tenants of some mainstream housing associations providing general purpose housing and it had been suggested that this might sometimes be the result of discrimination.

(CRE 1983: 3)

The sources and details of these 'suggestions' would have been informative but are not revealed. Collingwood appears to have been selected for investigation as a large general needs housing association operating within areas of substantial minority ethnic residence. It is not clear whether it was selected at random, whether the Housing Corporation's enquiries had stimulated interest, or whether the investigation would have been conducted irrespective of apparently racist remarks made by Collingwood officers prior to the investigation in a supposedly 'jocular vein' (CRE 1983: 3).

The evidence produced within the report suggests the existence of subjective racism which had become institutionalised within the organisation. For example the CRE found that:

until 1981 the former Housing Manager appeared to have considered it appropriate to impose quotas for immigrant tenancies in particular housing schemes.

(CRE 1983: 1)

It was clear that minority ethnic households were considered to be an explicit threat to existing norms:

Although the Association itself was said to have no policy regarding race of applicants, the Housing Manager said that she would normally try to assimilate immigrants rather than "create groups". She thought that immigrants would be more acceptable to the tenants if there was only one on a particular scheme although she could not recall any complaints from white tenants about immigrant tenants...she explained that her previous comment about...'being swamped by aliens' [sic] referred to...a [hypothetical] situation.

(CRE 1983: 19)

She felt that it was sensible to inform persons beforehand when members of two different groups were likely to be living alongside each other...when rehousing Chilean refugees, she recalled, the Association had not wanted to create groups of political dissidents. Accordingly, it had been decided that where these were accepted only one would be placed in any scheme. On the other hand, in 1980 the Association had approached Ockenden Venture with offers of accommodation for Vietnamese refugees and four such families, who were related, had been rehoused next door to each other on a scheme of 80 houses in Flint. These families settled in well and were polite and friendly and she felt that the Association "could risk" putting another two Vietnamese families on the scheme. If, however, this had not been the case and there had been resistance from other tenants, then she would have decided against the idea because the children would have suffered at school and would not have been happy.

(CRE 1983: 20)

The flexibility of operation which has been valued by the housing association movement provided opportunities for subjective racism to flourish by concealing informal bias.

These weaknesses were not confined to the Association. The low level of minority ethnic households nominated by the local authority for Collingwood's accommodation also appears to demonstrate social gatekeeping, since council officers generally had complete discretion in deciding who to nominate.

Subjective racism and discretionary assumptions were also institutionalised by practices within the Association. Collingwood's allocations criteria involved an assessment of applicants' 'present housing conditions and...their opportunity to obtain adequate accommodation elsewhere' (CRE 1983: 18). However the importance of present housing conditions was diluted by other considerations. For example there was an aim to:

create a balanced community...in the case of relets, the needs of the scheme may frequently outweigh the need to take the most urgent cases from the waiting list.

(CRE 1983: 18)

This has once again become an area of debate through the promotion of 'sensitive lettings' to combat the perceived deterioration of housing association properties into problem estates (Page 1993), and highlights the importance of housing management judgements in 'balancing the community'.

At Collingwood five housing visitors were involved in the assessment of housing applicants. In addition to assessing housing need they were expected to comment upon housekeeping standards and the ability to keep a garden in order. 'Quality of personality' (CRE 1983: 25) was regarded as more important than housing qualifications or experience in the appointment of housing visitors and training was through work experience. There was no race equality training carried out by the Association. Indeed it seems clear from comments made with respect to alleged discrimination within the allocation of co-ownership schemes (CRE 1983: 19), that tackling discrimination was not a priority within Collingwood Housing Association.

Collingwood is important for demonstrating the way in which procedures could be discriminatory, but is also significant as an example of the way in which the problems that were found could be tackled. Under its new management team nominated by the Housing Corporation, the CRE (1983: 2) was subsequently able to regard Collingwood as 'a model of good practice'. The CRE recommended to Collingwood that it should adopt an equal opportunities policy, provide guidance and training on the Race Relations Act, review its allocations policy, introduce monitoring procedures, contact local minority ethnic communities, clarify local authority nomination rights and allocate to the Chief Executive responsibility for complying with the Race Relations Act.

These proposals reflected the Commission's concerns regarding Collingwood's provision of its core services, in particular the lack of written criteria for allocations prior to 1978 and the unsatisfactory nature of the formal policy which was subsequently produced. This had merely summarised and given legitimacy to existing subjective procedures.

Nevertheless managing the change process was problematic.

The new Chief Executive:

found hostile attitudes to the investigation among staff - it was seen to be the last straw - and heard blatantly [sic] racist comments such as the perceived 'risks' of housing any black people at all.

[The Chief Executive] considered from his Collingwood experience that it was vital for the prejudiced attitudes of staff to be brought to the surface and that a blind eye should not be turned to such blatant [sic] attitudes and comments, by senior staff and members.

(Haringey Community Relations Council 1986: 2)

The role of housing association discretion

The continuing importance of freedom and discretion within housing association work is clear in Niner's influential research, although her case studies published in 1984 are also important for demonstrating the motivations for equal opportunities change. Niner (1984: 242-243) notes that at Merseyside Improved Houses minority ethnic households

generally spent slightly longer on the general allocations waiting list than the white community. They were more likely to receive lettings of flats rather than houses and were under-represented within council nominations. At Liverpool Housing Trust (Niner 1984: 243-244) internal monitoring found that minority ethnic households were receiving poorer quality accommodation than white households, older properties, and flats rather than houses after an external researcher had suggested racial discrimination. Whilst Niner suggests these outcomes reflected the location of Liverpool Housing Trust's stock, the pattern of results duplicate those observed by this researcher within Byrds Housing Association, as well as trends regularly found in studies of local authorities (for example CRE 1984c).

Niner (1984: 244-245) also discusses the performance of COPEC Housing Association based in Birmingham. Although the Association boasted of 'caring housing management' (Empson 1983: 18), it still required external pressure before it began to implement race equality policies such as ethnic monitoring. This initiative formed part of a commitment to prevent discrimination given by COPEC to the CRE, after the Association admitted a breach of the 1976 Race Relations Act following an internal memo:

concerning the letting of a particular property had been found which recorded the wish of existing elderly tenants that any incoming tenant should be white.
(Empson 1983: 18)

Consequently COPEC used the 'knowledge' of its housing management staff to record the ethnic origin of its tenants.

The ease with which data were collected:

counters those who claim that to record ethnic origins simply allows anyone disposed to discriminate to do so. A tenant's ethnic origin in reality is well known to housing management staff, to fail to gather this information simply frustrates regular analysis.

(Empson 1983: 18)

The records revealed that minority ethnic tenants were more likely to be living in flats than houses. Further monitoring was undertaken to try and discover whether this was as a result of historic occupation of houses by white tenants or alternatively discriminatory allocations. Niner unquestioningly presents Empson's (1983: 19) assertion that no discrimination was taking place. However the way in which the data are presented could conceal discrimination. For example whilst lettings to white households are compared with lettings to minority ethnic households, there is no comparison between the number of applicants and the number of lettings within each ethnic group, nor is there any comparison of housing need.

Niner (1984: 245-246) argues that keeping ethnic records should not be a condition of further financial support from the Housing Corporation, despite the fact that two of her case study associations only addressed race equality issues

as a result of external pressure. It seems unlikely that those associations would have taken action without this stimulus, which has important implications for current advocates of race equality change.

Indeed there appeared to have been little race equality progress in the movement by 1986. A member of the Black Caucus of Housing Workers noted the following areas of concern:

i) the very slow pace of change in housing associations' policies and practices on race....

ii) the very slow progress in new black housing associations being registered by the Housing Corporation...

iii) the need to develop black workers for high status jobs in housing associations, as well as giving training to black workers lower down in the organisation.

iv) the welcome trend towards more black people becoming members of management committees, but to note the danger of paying lip service to race equality.

(Haringey Community Relations Council 1986: 1)

This view appeared to be endorsed by the Housing Corporation:

The experience so far with checking associations against FHP [Fair Housing Policy] has been:

- that FHP is not being followed systematically
- that no one senior person is responsible for all aspects of FHP within each association

- that record keeping is all that is done with little preparation or follow up, such as a regular monitoring meeting.

- that smaller associations need a lot of advice, but can still achieve a FHP.

(Haringey Community Relations Council 1986: 4)

Niner's (1987) case studies of Bournville Village Trust (BVT) and Family Housing Association (FHA) lead her to make a more critical assessment of housing association performance than she had outlined in her earlier work (Niner 1984). She argues that whilst housing associations have generally played an important role in meeting the housing needs of minority ethnic communities, her case studies indicate that they ultimately 'like local authorities, fail to provide equal opportunities for all ethnic groups'. There was no single cause of this failure at BVT and FHA, 'policy, procedures and preferences all appeared to contribute to outcomes' (Niner 1987: 221). However officer discretion was critically important in shaping minority ethnic access to accommodation.

BVT and FHA operated merit systems of property allocation, which have been common within the housing association movement and provide officers with a large degree of discretion. Whilst managers tried to be consistent in their decisions, the allocations process relied upon comparisons of individual applicants which could only be highly subjective. Indeed Niner found difficulty as an observer of

the selection and allocation processes at BVT and FHA in clearly identifying the procedures being followed. Whilst need was one factor considered, Niner (1987: 236) found suitability was another, which included an assessment of 'willingness to accept the offer'. This can lead to the most desperate households being offered the worst housing and can be indirectly discriminatory if minority ethnic households are in the greatest need.

Niner (1987: 240) found that at FHA, even allowing for the dangers of statistical insignificance, the 'discretionary process...seemed to favour white applicants relative to black through the continued operation of many conscious and unconscious assumptions and pressures'. At both associations:

The need with a deadline attached was favoured above the chronic need. In my samples it tended to be white applicants who experienced finite need while black applicants were more likely to be living in overcrowded and poor housing, subject to friction and pressure to leave but without a provable ultimatum that they must leave by some fixed date.

(Niner 1987: 238)

Where associations did rehouse Asian applicants, a worker at the Asian Resource Centre in Birmingham believed that it was:

because they would accept the property refused by other groups and would, because of language difficulties and

general reluctance to 'be a nuisance', not press for improvements or repairs.

(Niner 1987: 237)

Niner found that in practice two separate lists were held for Associations' vacancies. Those deemed to be so desperate that they would accept any offer were excluded from consideration for the better properties. This demonstrates the way that individual managers act as street-level bureaucrats within a framework of administrative pressure, to ensure that the most difficult to let properties are filled quickly. It also indicates a lack of consideration of the differential social conditions between ethnic groups which might lead to racial inequalities in the operation of the practice. This suggests the importance of institutional racism as a key factor within minority ethnic disadvantage.

There were also formalised organisational constraints upon minority ethnic access to BVT's and FHA's accommodation, such as eligibility criteria. Indeed these were also widely applied throughout the movement:

Provan (1982) found the following eligibility criteria used most frequently by Birmingham associations: existing housing conditions, alternative solutions, ability to cope, financial ability, building a balanced community, time in housing need and ability to compete.

(Niner 1987: 229)

As with Collingwood Housing Association, there is a danger that the desire to 'build a balanced community' provides an

organisational justification for direct and indirect discrimination by simply responding to the location, age structure and preferences of existing residents.

At BVT and FHA superficially objective attempts to manage excess demand for accommodation had discriminatory effects. For example FHA failed to offer properties to people with a high points score on the local authority housing waiting list. This particularly discriminated against African Caribbean applicants who were disproportionately likely to be in this category. Neither BVT nor FHA would accept applications from owner-occupiers, thereby excluding large sections of the Asian community on the basis of values and standards found in the white community. As Niner notes the equity value and choice that owner-occupation is presumed to bring are the important influences upon life chances, owner-occupation in itself says nothing about resources or need. As the commodification literature demonstrates, its benefits are differentially distributed amongst ethnic groups.

Niner suggests that minority ethnic communities exercised choice within housing constraints, by using their knowledge of the housing market to apply to those associations which had a track record of housing minority ethnic communities. This had implications for the quality of property received, since these tended to be inner city associations with a stock of predominantly rehabilitated rather than new build

properties. Whilst Niner suggests that the Housing Corporation's concentration of development money into stress areas was expected to remedy this problem, there has not been a consistent political commitment to direct housing association funding to inner city stress areas. In addition the introduction of the mixed funding regime of financing new properties can be seen as having militated against the rehabilitation of inner city sites, in favour of the development of green field sites. These processes can be seen as barriers to the realisation of Niner's hopeful prognosis. Nevertheless the principle that minority ethnic households will seek help from associations which already house members of minority ethnic communities, is one that motivated Byrds Housing Association's City Office to adopt a policy of positive action in favour of minority ethnic households.

Niner's central conclusion is that housing associations have greater operational discretion than local authorities:

the freedom from legislative duties and perhaps from scrutiny by elected representatives gives enormous scope for consciously helping ethnic minorities and increasing their housing opportunities. The same freedom also means, of course, enormous scope for doing the very minimum that Housing Corporation monitoring and race relations legislation will permit.

(Niner 1987: 240-1)

A participant at a one day seminar for housing associations in 1985 reflected upon some of the same themes:

the effects of racism or racial disadvantage were a fact in some people's lives and...Housing Associations, because they usually have a greater flexibility in their structures, can respond to the needs stemming from this disadvantage more quickly than local authorities appear to be doing.

(Haringey Community Relations Council 1985: 2)

The predominant concern of this thesis is to assess whether the organisational freedom of housing associations which is identified within these comments, percolates down to junior levels of the hierarchy.

Paper policies and the implementation gap

Niner's research represented the conventional view of housing association race equality performance, arguably until the publication of the CRE's (1993a) investigation of the housing association movement. Nevertheless other researchers added to the literature. Dalton and Daghlian's (1989) study of the operation of housing associations in Glasgow suggested that the number of applications from, and lettings to, minority ethnic communities were far below the numbers that would have been expected given the size of the local communities. The quality of accommodation gained by minority ethnic households was also a cause for concern, whilst the differential outcomes which they experienced in

access to accommodation could not be justified by household composition.

Dalton and Daghlian indicate that a number of the practices of the housing associations which they studied were potentially indirectly discriminatory. For example, they echo Niner (1987) by noting the way in which eligibility criteria disproportionately disadvantage minority ethnic households. Thus allocation points awarded for length of residence tended to discriminate against minority ethnic communities, whilst owner-occupiers were once again excluded from access to accommodation, irrespective of the condition of their property.

A lack of knowledge of the available housing services also appeared to disadvantage minority ethnic households. West of Scotland Housing Association had dismissed the idea of advertising their services to minority ethnic communities, on the basis that 'everybody knows us' (Dalton and Daghlian 1989: 63). Lettings data suggested that this reflected an unwillingness to analyse their own performance, since one third of 132 lettings over nine months in 1987 were made to households with some form of connection with existing residents, who were predominantly white. Three of the four associations studied temporarily closed their waiting lists, providing advantages to applicants who would know when the list would be open. Once again it seemed as if white

households would benefit because of greater connections with existing tenants. These barriers demonstrate a lack of attention to equal opportunities in the development of standard policies, and appear to have been common throughout the housing association movement. Indeed 'word of mouth' advertising was attempted as a positive action strategy at Byrds Housing Association for the case study in this thesis.

Dalton and Daghlian (1989: 74) add to the literature which highlights the influence of housing visitors within the housing allocations process. Although West of Scotland Housing Association argued that they lacked property in the areas that minority ethnic applicants requested, these 'requests' may have reflected the preconceptions of social gatekeepers regarding area preference. Other stereotypes provided a rationale for inaction:

The shortage of large family housing may be used by some as a justification for not housing ethnic minority households proportionately to their presence in the local population. Rather than examining such aspects of the organisation as may deter ethnic minority applications, some may suppose, as did the Director of West of Scotland, that 'they (ethnic minorities) need large houses' and 'we simply don't have any.'

(Dalton and Daghlian 1989: 49)

Three of the associations in the sample were trying to bring their resources to the attention of minority ethnic communities through publicity and community contacts. For example Charing Cross Housing Association was seeking to

establish regular links with representatives of a variety of local minority ethnic organisations, to encourage understanding of and participation in the Association's activities. It was felt however that this work deserved more time than the small staff had, and that consideration should be given to the funding of a development worker with a special remit for working with the community (Dalton and Daghlian 1989: 63). This emphasises the potential importance of specialist workers.

Charing Cross Housing Association had arranged for a recent building site board to include four languages, rather than the standard sole reliance upon English. This initiative had been partly funded by the Housing Corporation. However such funding is only regarded as being applicable in special cases, whilst it could be implemented in all areas where 'minority language' speaking households comprise 2% of the local population.

Despite new approaches, a lack of identification between minority ethnic communities and housing providers appears to have continued. A study for Scottish Homes' *Ethnic Minority Housing* consultation paper in 1993 noted:

Housing association properties were seen as desirable but unobtainable. There was a general feeling that social landlords do not fully understand the cultures and experiences of ethnic minority households. In particular there was a feeling that landlords do not attempt to cater for ethnic groups in terms of the type

and locations of properties offered or by attempting to overcome language difficulties.

(Scottish Homes 1993: 19)

Scottish Homes along with the Housing Corporation, and Tai Cymru had been provided with a duty under the 1988 Housing Act:

to make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that [its] various functions are carried out with due regard to the need:

* to eliminate unlawful discrimination: and

* to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

(CRE 1991a: 5)

Despite this empowerment of their regulatory regime, Harrison's (1992a) study of associations in England and Wales indicated that they felt that the 1988 Housing Act had harmed their ability to meet their obligations to minority ethnic communities. Associations faced more restrictive financial regimes for specific schemes, such as inner-city rehabilitation or dwellings for extended families, but more fundamentally faced problems:

in terms of the mixed funding system itself, with its apparatus of "viability" concepts and "value for money" ideas, and emphasis on unit costs. Potential rent levels and affordability considerations are said to discourage work in types of housing or areas advantageous for black and minority ethnic communities.

(Harrison 1992a: 8)

'Value for money' was to be measured in quantitative terms rather than through customer satisfaction, echoing Lipsky's criticisms of the distorting effects of quantitative performance measures. Harrison (1992a: 55) notes that there is a danger that minority ethnic housing needs will only be met if they can guarantee a financial return. Nevertheless he maintains an optimistic outlook. Whilst only six associations had equal opportunities posts, a greater number had a team within the structure looking at equal opportunities issues:

the climate may have changed since the early 1980s. The preoccupations are often now ones of detail (and considerable complexity!). This is not to suggest that there is no opposition or cynicism, but questionnaires rarely brought this to the surface.

(Harrison 1992a: 22)

He argues that:

Amongst major players on the English urban housing associations scene there is today frequently a fairly high degree of sophistication on "race issues". No doubt this is in part a product of external pressures from the CRE, Housing Corporation, FBHO, NFHA, local authorities, etc. On the other hand some associations go well beyond the minimum necessary to secure a decent image.

(Harrison 1992a: 55)

The NFHA's (1992a) report *Equal Opportunities in housing associations: Are you doing enough?* offered an opportunity to assess the relationship between comments made by the

Director of the NFHA and housing associations' actual performance:

I believe that race for the NFHA is the primary issue and it is the issue which it has to put back on its own agenda, not simply to write reports, publish them and go away....What we are weak on and what we need to be attacked and criticised on when we're weak is actually delivering beyond that point.

(Coulter 1988: 6)

Coulter's self-evaluation proved to be uncomfortably accurate, as the NFHA research suggested that housing associations still had considerable work to do to turn their paper policies into practical action. This is of particular concern since the survey respondents might once again be regarded as reflecting the views of those most interested in equal opportunities issues. 17% of 188 housing associations returning questionnaires still did not have written equal opportunities policies. Approximately one fifth of Associations had only adopted an equal opportunities policy as recently as 1990, perhaps prompted by the Housing Corporation's (HC 02/90) circular of that year on the promotion of racial equality.

Minority ethnic communities were the group most often identified within equal opportunities policies, named by 88% of associations. However housing associations had not yet escaped from a narrow view of the organisational necessity of race equality issues:

* the most common area included in associations' [equal opportunities] policies was allocations (94%), employment and staff training (92%) and contractors (71%).

* the least common area was housing development (38%) and staff harassment (36%).

(NFHA 1992a: 4)

In addition there appeared to be a large mismatch between paper policy and practical action. Whilst 74% of responding associations said they had procedures to implement their race equality policy within allocations and lettings (although it was not clear whether they were doing so), only 27% of associations were implementing equality targets. More than one fifth of associations did not monitor recruitment and employment by any equal opportunities measure.

The CRE's (1993a: 7-8) *Housing associations and racial equality* report also identifies an implementation gap, despite greater progress amongst housing associations than local authorities in achieving race equality best practice. Whilst a number of limitations to the CRE's investigation (Tomlins 1994a) make it difficult to endorse its report as a wholly accurate representation of the housing association movement, it is still of importance in the dissemination of best practice and the identification of examples of mispractice.

Most associations studied had adopted a race equality policy. However, only a quarter had plans for policy implementation and only two associations had timetabled their plans (CRE 1993a: 11-15). In addition only two of the associations had specialist race equality or equal opportunities officers to support equality measures. It is unlikely that housing associations addressed other areas of their work, such as finance, so informally.

Examples of bad practice which favoured white households within the allocations process included residence qualifications (CRE 1993a: 26), and policies of preferential access for daughters and sons of existing tenants. Nominations arrangements (CRE 1993a: 29-32) with local authorities were a further cause for concern. Only 35% of associations had written nomination agreements with their local authority housing department. Even fewer produced monitoring reports based upon the ethnic origin of nominations, despite well publicised examples of discrimination in this area (CRE 1989a).

The CRE found that ethnic monitoring of access to housing association resources was generally haphazard. The majority of associations recorded the ethnic origins of households on their waiting list and those receiving new lettings. Only a quarter recorded access by quality of accommodation received, in spite of research demonstrating that minority

ethnic households tend to be offered poorer accommodation than white households by social housing gatekeepers (CRE 1984c, 1988a, Sarre, Phillips and Skellington 1989).

The use of ethnic records underlined the discrepancy between the public face of housing association race equality policies and their practical implementation. Whilst the majority of associations kept ethnic records under the pretence of using them for ethnic monitoring:

the Commission found little evidence that associations had used the information in any meaningful way.

In most cases, management committees were receiving reports regularly, but without any analysis or recommendations. The lack of any attempt to use the information to measure performance against targets or even expectations meant that most of these reports were meaningless or valueless.

(CRE 1993a: 18)

Furthermore since most associations were unaware of the ethnic origin of their current tenants, the ethnicity of new tenants could not be studied in the context of existing tenancy lists.

Racial harassment policies indicated that:

most associations had committed considerable time and effort to addressing this problem. However, on a practical level, there was a degree of hesitancy in taking action against perpetrators, despite policy commitments and the presence of staff trained to take the action necessary.

(CRE 1993a: 44)

Record keeping and monitoring were also weak in this area, and few associations were informing their management committees of instances of racial harassment and remedies being pursued. Furthermore under half of the associations surveyed had actively publicised their racial harassment policies. This should be of particular concern given the acknowledged problems of the under-reporting of harassment (CRE 1987a) and continuing concern at the high incidence of racial attacks within the UK (Secretary of State for the Home Department 1994: 4) and throughout Europe (Ford 1992).

The CRE (1993a: 50) argue that very few housing associations meet the Housing Corporation's requirement of assessing the needs of minority ethnic households within the planning of new housing development. This substantiates Harrison's (1992a) view that the commercial pressures to achieve growth, have impacted upon equal opportunities performance. Indeed the commercial behests of the Department of the Environment, the compliance of housing associations with them and the absence of a strong enabling lead from local authorities might be examined within an analytical framework of institutional racism.

Some limited conclusions can be made regarding the responsiveness of the housing association movement to the publication of the report. The CRE notes that:

Not surprisingly, by no means all of the investigated associations welcomed the Commission's...findings. However very few were ignoring the recommendations made to them.

(CRE 1993a: 83)

Most associations claimed that they were implementing new policies and procedures to improve their race equality practice. However it is not clear whether their action was a response to the perceived institutional power of the CRE, or a demonstration of continuing moral commitment to race equality issues. In the case of the former, ongoing prioritisation of race equality issues by organisations such as Byrds Housing Association, will depend upon rigorous monitoring from the CRE and/or Housing Corporation.

The response of the wider housing association movement which was not a focus of the investigation is of interest, particularly as reflected in the indifference of the British housing press. During the week of the report's publication, *Inside Housing* (1993a) relegated the CRE's findings to page five of its weekly news magazine, whilst its front page featured stories such as the appointment of a new Chief Executive at a London housing association. *Housing Associations Weekly* (1993) also failed to lead with the report. Instead they gave prominence to the NFHA's challenge to the government's centralised approach to housing policy.

Neither of the key monthly magazines, *Housing* or *Voluntary Housing* have included an article on the CRE's conclusions.

The shortfall in associations' performance against Housing Corporation standards, which is highlighted by the CRE, questions the rigour with which the Corporation undertakes its regulatory role over the movement. Whilst it has threatened to remove funding from poor equal opportunities performers, in the key area of housing development the CRE clearly believes that the Corporation's requirements are being flouted without penalties being invoked. The Corporation's interventionist stance in the regulation of black associations such as Harambee (Bulgin 1993: 33), might be compared with their lack of enforcement of equal opportunities expectations upon mainstream (white) associations. Its inertia in invoking sanctions for poor equal opportunities practice has sat uncomfortably with its regulatory role. However it is more reflective of its intention to take a less proactive role in the enforcement of association standards (HA Weekly 1994g: 9). Therefore it is disappointing that the element of the CRE (1993a: 73-78) investigation dealing with the Corporation is rather brief and superficial.

Minority ethnic elders

A small number of studies have begun to highlight the specific experiences of minority ethnic elders. Julienne comments:

the neglect of black and minority ethnic elders' housing needs continues virtually unabated....they do not know about these services and where they do, these services are not sensitive to their particular needs. The accommodation is located in an area away from the communities they feel comfortable in, away from shops catering for their needs and places of worship; staff and residents don't understand and are often hostile to their language or customs, diets are not catered for, and publicity about the schemes is targeted in areas in which they do not live and in a language they cannot read.

(Julienne in Jeffery and Seagar 1993: vii-viii)

Julienne highlights barriers which affect all minority ethnic age groups in access to social housing. Nevertheless he argues that elders are disproportionately affected because of misconceptions amongst them about the services available (or lack of them), combined with assumptions by mainstream housing associations about the absence of housing need amongst minority ethnic elders.

Jones notes that whilst a number of diverse explanations have been suggested for a superficial lack of demand for housing association accommodation amongst minority ethnic elders, research by ASHIA/Age Concern (1991) indicates that:

Elders identified lack of information (84%) and language (72%) as the greatest barriers to receiving assistance.

(Jones 1994: 41)

In addition staff from Jones' research sample of four housing associations identified the following potential barriers to access to social housing for minority ethnic elders:

Image/knowledge of the participating associations/
housing associations in general/sheltered housing;

Location of existing schemes;

Fear of isolation;

Design/appropriateness of accommodation;

Affordability;

Language problems.

(Jones 1994: 60)

This provides a useful summary of a number of issues, although it is less reflexive than it initially appears. Whilst the need for more minority ethnic staff is also noted, the role of white social gatekeepers in discouraging applicants from particular communities is not considered.

Yet again there also appeared to be a gap between paper commitment to address identified issues and practical action, since only one of the four case study associations had an implementation plan for its equal opportunities policy (Jones 1994: 52). One organisational policy did not

specifically address itself to the provision of service at all. Jones argues that a comprehensive approach to race equality is required:

The time has come to move beyond the numbers game and address issues of service provision. Accordingly in auditing the performance of housing associations the Housing Corporation should look beyond mere numbers housed to actions taken and the quality of the service delivered (difficult though that may be to quantify).
(Jones 1994: 31)

In essence race equality policies risk racialising prospective minority ethnic applicants, as commodities to be processed rather than individual consumers within a customer care ethos. Jones' (1994: 38) emphasis upon the importance of quality of service, rather than the quantity of consumers, reflects his view that service provision is often colour blind despite a racialised delight at improving performance within the 'numbers game'.

Employment and participation

Hajimichael (1988) offers a rare perspective upon the employment record of housing associations, studying the performance of six London associations. He argues that despite a good reputation concerning race equality issues, they were poor race equality performers largely as a result of a 'colour blind' approach. White staff and particularly

white men were the main beneficiaries of promotions and salary increases. Contrastingly minority ethnic women appeared to be particularly poorly rewarded by their employers. In general, minority ethnic employees were under-represented in manual grades and middle to senior management (Hajimichael 1988: 21).

The NFHA (1992a: vi-vii) record the number of minority ethnic housing association employees as 16% of the total workforce, an increase from the 4.5% previously measured (NFHA 1983). However it declares a skewed sample and suggests that the Housing Corporation's estimate of 9.2% is more reliable. The NFHA (1992a: vi-vii) note that even within its own sample, minority ethnic employees remained relatively under-represented at senior levels. Issues of indirect employment appeared to be marginalised, with only 14% of responding associations assessing the equal opportunities performance of their contractors and consultants. Harrison notes (1992c) notes that minority ethnic staff were even underrepresented in senior management, amongst site based staff, and the repairs and maintenance team, within a community based association which he surveyed which was progressive on equality issues.

The limited survey of employment practices within the CRE (1993a: 34-42) report, demonstrated a mix of achievement and failure. There was success for a number of associations in

the recruitment of more minority ethnic employees. However many associations still employed a relatively small number of minority ethnic staff in comparison with the representation of particular communities within the local labour force. Once again this was particularly noticeable in relation to senior employment positions. Whilst most associations were concerned with the race equality performance of contractors (CRE 1993a: 58), only 29% of those assessing contractors' race equality performance were monitoring the composition of their workforces.

Hajimichael (1988: 22-24) substantiates earlier studies (NFHA 1983: 12) which had highlighted minority ethnic exclusion from areas of influence within housing associations. Minority ethnic communities were not only poorly represented amongst the management committees within his case studies, but there were only limited organisational initiatives to address the shortfall.

Dalton and Daghlian (1989) identify that three out of their four case study associations were aiming to achieve fairer representation of minority ethnic communities on their committees. However the minority ethnic committee members who were being recruited were not necessarily from the ethnic groups which were present locally. Positive initiatives also remained contentious:

'...up to themselves (that is, Asians) to get involved', for '...they are welcome to come onto the Committee, there's nothing to stop them.'
(Dalton and Daghlian 1989: 97)

Kearns (1990) also notes the slow progress in achieving representative management committees. His survey suggested that seven of every ten committee members were men, 41% of Committee members were over 60 (compared to only 28% of the population) with a further 31% aged between 45 and 59. 61% of the total number of committee members had been invited to join the management committee by existing members and when black associations were excluded only 1.4% of committee members were from minority ethnic communities. Even when black housing associations were included, the number of minority ethnic committee members only rose to 2.6%. Tenants were largely excluded from influence comprising only 4.6% of committee members. Therefore housing associations were openly flouting the requirement that committees should be representative of minority ethnic communities (Housing Corporation 1989). Significantly this requirement is omitted from the latest set of *Performance Standards* (Housing Corporation 1994).

The NFHA (1991a: 17) suggest that imbalances on management committees may be caused by white committee members seeking to protect their controlling interests by recruiting other members in their own likeness. Committee member prejudices and meeting arrangements may also provide barriers to

minority ethnic communities. The NFHA's (1992a) *Equal Opportunities in housing associations: Are you doing enough?* report was unable to provide accurate data with respect to the numbers of minority ethnic committee members. However over a quarter of associations responding had no minority ethnic management committee members.

The CRE (1993a: 68) found two thirds of associations lacked any minority ethnic management committee members. It believed that this reflected the continuing use of word of mouth recruitment methods by predominantly white committees. Nor was there a clear process of training taking place to break this inertia. Almost a third of associations (CRE 1993a: 63) were not providing any race equality training, with only a fifth providing training for their committee members.

Places round the table (NFHA 1994) found that a quarter of housing association committees had no minority ethnic members. This is particularly topical because of the current debates concerning housing association governance:

associations need to demonstrate openness and accountability in the governance of their organisations which are charged with increasing amounts of public responsibility. Secondly, improving representation of black and ethnic minorities, women and disabled people will strengthen association committees by having access to people who, in addition to other professional and generic skills, bring an understanding and experience of issues facing these groups.

(NFHA 1994: 4)

The NFHA (1994: 1) suggest that committee membership is often outside the parameters of housing associations' equal opportunities policies. This is typified by the informality of committee recruitment methods which increase the likelihood of acceptability criteria gaining precedence over suitability criteria. Indeed Byrds Housing Association within the case study for this thesis demonstrates the importance of acceptability criteria. Whilst the Association sought minority ethnic committee members, the preferred individuals were part of conventional systems of influence and perhaps consequently did not challenge the values of the Association.

Whilst committee membership is critical in exercising influence upon housing association policies, the potential influence of tenants should also be considered. Tenant participation, from consultation on proposals to control of management, should be concerned with the empowerment of all tenants individually and collectively, irrespective of their backgrounds. However it may simply offer particular sectors of society the opportunity to replace the moral standards and political priorities of municipal paternalism, with their own value laden agenda (see for example CRE 1985 in the local authority sector). Therefore the concept of tenant participation must be inextricably linked with the active

implementation of equal opportunities policies to ensure the involvement of all sectors of society.

The voluntary practices of tenants' groups and housing organisations are underpinned by the guidance of representative bodies and agencies. This will typically include equal opportunities advice, for example it is a recommended standard of the Chartered Institute of Housing (1993: 8,9) that landlords should 'have an equal opportunities strategy to encourage participation by minority groups'. Clarke (1994) and TPAS (1994c) also stress the importance of equal opportunities considerations. However *Room for All* (CRE 1993b) found that minority ethnic households generally remained under-represented in tenants' groups, although their representation was highest where the landlord had taken clear steps to encourage their participation through an active commitment to race equality.

The confusion of liberal and radical perspectives in best practice guides (Clarke 1994, TPAS 1994c) affects the prospects of increasing minority ethnic representation further. Whilst the radical objectives of equality of representation and equality of outcome for minority ethnic communities are aimed for, voluntaristic liberal measures are promoted to achieve these aims. Thus best practice advice fails to address the potential contradiction between tenant autonomy from the housing organisation and the

latter's obligation to intervene to promote equal opportunities. In practice housing organisations tend to prioritise tenant participation above equal opportunities, by failing to remove recognition from all but the most openly discriminatory tenants' bodies (Brown and Tomlins 1994). Therefore tenant participation may continue to empower some and marginalise others.

The black housing movement

This thesis is primarily concerned with the performance of mainstream housing associations, who might arguably because of their performance in housing and employing minority ethnic communities be described as 'white' housing associations. Nevertheless some reference to the development of the black housing association movement is necessary, insofar as it is a reaction to exclusion from mainstream associations.

Black housing associations are defined by the Federation of Black Housing Organisations (FBHO) as those where 75% of the staff and committee members are black (Harrison 1991a: 3). This is intended to include all minority ethnic communities within Britain discriminated against on the basis of colour. They have existed since the late 1950s (CRE 1989b: 25), yet enjoyed little official encouragement at that time. Indeed

they found public policy working against them in the early 1970s, when the expansion of funding favoured associations with a stronger financial base (a situation which is arguably being repeated at the present time). Consequently most black associations ceased to exist independently at this time, merging with mainstream associations.

The current or second phase of the black housing movement developing in the 1980s can be seen as deriving from:

racism and discrimination in predominantly white associations and in local authorities. Black people were neither being provided with housing to a sufficient degree - in terms of quality or quantity - nor were they being recruited as staff and committee members.

(Crawley and Lemos 1993: Introduction)

The facilitation of the second phase of associations in Britain through the support of the Housing Corporation's two five year plans enjoys a clear legal basis. Misra (1995) notes that the Corporation's strategies have been justified under section 35 of the Race Relations Act as 'temporary positive action programmes'. They can also be seen as gaining momentum from the additional race equality responsibilities gained by the Corporation through the 1988 Housing Act. Nevertheless, this duty might have been met through mainstream provision and does not explain why the Corporation embarked upon a programme so radical that

Harrison (1993b: 23) describes it as unique within British governmental public policy.

Indeed there appear to be few comparable initiatives to the black housing movement's provision for particular racial groups throughout the 'developed' world. Goering (1992: 134) notes a similar spirit of self-help in the United States where prior to the Civil Rights movement black communities provided housing aid within their own communities. Clark (1993) also describes a related development in the United States, whereby housing co-operatives developed as a response to housing difficulties within Harlem largely at the instigation of African Caribbean women. Latino co-operatives had also developed to meet the particular needs of their communities. In an analogous way, in the Netherlands housing associations may represent religious communities of Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Whilst there is a legal legitimacy for the black housing movement in Britain, associations have still been contentious in social policy terms, with critics arguing that separate provision will create ghettos rather than integration. Whilst Tomlins (1995c) disputes this assumption, it should be noted that it is not the intention of black associations or the desire of the FBHO to exclude white households from their accommodation (Jones 1994: 95). Indeed Jones notes a stream of schemes which, whilst

targeted upon a particular community, are in practice 'mixed'. Nevertheless housing which does focus upon a particular client group can meet cultural and social needs which would otherwise go unmet by mainstream provision. It offers an alternative to the subsumption of minority ethnic identity within uniform provision based upon the needs of the white community.

Harrison suggests a niche market for the development of black housing associations:

They may be better at defining community needs than a mainstream white-run organisation is likely to be, they may offer more effective channels for local participation, they may have special skills and knowledge in terms of tenant management, and they can create opportunities for work experience and training that are much needed. Furthermore, there may be gaps in the provision of social housing which are particularly significant for households in minority ethnic communities, and where a locally-based housing association can take a leading role.

(Harrison 1991a: 1)

Therefore black associations not only develop a more responsive housing provision, but also increase the involvement of minority ethnic communities within housing provision (Harrison 1992b: 429).

Black associations appear to have performed a complementary role to mainstream organisations, and encouraged them to improve their own race equality performance (Harrison 1992b: 435). Indeed many mainstream housing associations have

worked with black housing associations, often by providing commercial services:

There are essentially three inter-linked perspectives on why involvement is felt worthwhile: the view that it is valuable for reasons of commitment and integrity; the view that it is useful because of corporate image and standing (or to satisfy Housing Corporation requests); and the view that involvement in development programmes is itself financially useful to the larger organisation.

(Harrison 1991a: 83-84)

Nevertheless the Housing Corporation's black housing strategy has provided a contrasting mixture of success and failure. There has been a great increase in the number of black housing associations being registered. However this seems as likely to reflect latent demand as the effectiveness of the Housing Corporation initiative, (Black Housing 1990b: 12), and the development of these associations has been hampered by the Housing Corporation's inadequate revenue funding. Its inability to provide sufficient capital allocations or facilitate sufficient stock transfers, has also hindered the aspirations of emerging black housing associations to become independent and financially viable. As the FBHO suggest, the Corporation's black housing programmes have been flawed because of a:

lack of strategy both at a national and a regional level and, partly as a consequence of this lack of strategy, insufficient resources devoted to the programme....

Was it about providing more homes for black people or a community development exercise for the benefit of black-led housing organisations. Whatever the intention the end result has been largely the latter.

(Black Housing 1990b: 12)

Despite public commitments of support from the Housing Corporation, black housing associations have regularly expressed concern at their future prospects. This reflects their position as relatively newly formed organisations with small asset bases, seeking to compete for funds with larger mainstream organisations which have developed under more favourable funding regimes. An editorial in *Black Housing* articulated the anger at cuts to the black housing movement one year into the second five year plan:

already the strategy is being shaken to its roots. Targets are not being met...promises are being ruthlessly revised or broken, and old bogeys being revived.

(Julienne 1993: 2)

As Harrison starkly notes there was:

an inconsistency of official policy here. On the one hand was the desire from the mid-1980s onwards to encourage the emergence of housing organisations more representative of black and minority ethnic communities. On the other hand there was awareness (post-1988) that the new economic climate made viability and potential rent levels more problematic.

(Harrison 1992b: 429)

Indeed in a NFHA Executive Committee paper Misra suggests that the political legitimacy of the black housing movement is under threat:

in the wake of the inner city disturbances Government vigorously supported housing initiatives for black people by black housing associations. This is no longer the case, and in the current political climate the Housing Corporation, DoE and others tread a very cautious line, and have in the past even questioned the very existence and the role that independent black housing associations play in meeting housing needs.

(Misra 1995: 4)

In practice the number of organisations funded through the black housing programme has been scaled down, potentially reducing diversity and the geographical spread of the movement (Harrison 1993b: 25-26). Black housing associations have also been encouraged to work with mainstream providers, threatening dependency upon white organisations and restricting the empowerment of minority ethnic communities. Whilst in percentage terms black housing associations' share of the development budget has remained relatively steady (rising from 9.12% in 1994/5 to 10.44% for 1995/6), in cash terms it has significantly declined (falling from £91 million to £43.77 million over the same period).

The key factor for the future of the black housing movement is now the outcome of the Housing Corporation's (1995) consultation on the future direction of the black housing strategy. This document appears to signal the end of a

cohesive black housing strategy, in favour of an assessment of the viability of individual black housing associations in comparison with mainstream housing providers. Black associations which are unable to compete within the mainstream may individually be able to access continuing capital allocations through offering 'value added services'. Nevertheless the importance of their community role is underplayed throughout the report. Whilst the Corporation perceive that they are being required to move from the promotion of individual housing associations to a 'consumer-oriented approach' (Housing Corporation 1995: 10), the consultation document lacks the vision to develop the new structures as opportunities for the black housing movement. The regional disparity in black housing association provision is also ignored. When this is combined with the Housing Corporation's laissez-faire attitude towards mainstream associations' self-monitoring of their race equality performance, there must be serious doubts regarding the ability of the Housing Corporation to fulfil its Section 71 duties.

Harrison describes the progress of black housing associations in the 1980s as:

one of the most significant positive occurrences during a decade of housing policy which often seemed to offer little for disadvantaged households.

(Harrison 1992b: 436)

Nevertheless the future is one of uncertainty for black housing associations. It seems as if there will continue to be a pluralist approach to meeting the housing needs of minority ethnic communities, with separate provision being incorporated alongside universal provision. However the relationship between black housing associations, mainstream housing associations and the Housing Corporation seems to be in a state of flux.

An optimistic prognosis would see black associations building on their gains over the last ten years to continue meeting minority ethnic housing needs, whilst acting as a financial and skills resource within minority ethnic communities. In this way they could expand their role to provide competition to mainstream associations, whilst retaining the ethos of community oriented and sensitive provision. The pessimistic prognosis suggests that only a few favoured major players will thrive in regions where the Housing Corporation has been particularly supportive. The commercialisation which they will require to survive, will make them in many ways indistinguishable from mainstream associations and perhaps increasingly predatory. The lot for the majority of black housing associations could be dependency and loss of identity to mainstream associations and other larger black housing associations. The diversity and community base of the movement could be lost.

The race equality performance of the housing association movement

The above analysis suggests that housing associations have not equitably met the needs of minority ethnic communities in access to housing, employment, and participation. It questions the extent of the movement's progress towards race equality objectives. Whilst it might be argued (Harrison 1992a: 24) that the shortfalls are areas of detail rather than issues of principle, they appear to be areas of substantial detail.

This partly reflects common experiences with the local authority sector, such as the discriminatory actions of housing visitors. However there are also features which are more specific to the housing association movement such as the use of word of mouth advertising. Fundamentally there is the relative informality of the sector which may facilitate the continuation of 'colour blind' and/or discriminatory processes, although it could also be an opportunity space to bring about change. It is arguable whether the commitment of individual associations, the voluntary guidance of the NFHA, the regulatory framework of the Housing Corporation, and the national legislative structure will be sufficient to significantly improve the performance of housing associations by the end of the decade. It is perhaps

symptomatic of the lack of resolve to tackle race equality issues that the Corporation is itself becoming less formal in its supervisory powers.

Hajimichael argues that:

Housing Associations in Britain, as an arm of the voluntary housing movement, have had a tradition of being progressive in their roles through their concern to meet social needs. However, this traditionally socially conscious role of housing associations goes hand-in-hand with procedures and practices for meeting needs on an individual basis. Both these traditions, ironically may have encouraged associations to develop an exaggerated sense of their own benevolence, and, in particular, a resistance to the acknowledgment of the collective experience of racism.

(Hajimichael 1988: 7)

As the next chapter will show, the promotion of organisational equal opportunities policies has usually been seen as addressing these shortfalls. However the development of approaches committed to 'managing diversity', might be seen as legitimating a continuing unwillingness to tackle group discrimination.

Chapter Six - Equal opportunities and organisational change

Research studies of the race equality performance of the housing association movement have predominantly examined housing processes, rather than the generic implementation of equal opportunities policies. Therefore the general social science literature on organisational equal opportunities performance must be drawn upon to provide a framework for the assessment of voluntaristic equality initiatives at Byrds Housing Association.

The political conceptualisation of equal opportunities agendas

'Equal opportunities policy' represents a generic label which does not necessarily describe a codified body of knowledge. In particular there may be liberal and radical perspectives of equal opportunities which can intentionally or unintentionally disguise policy intentions:

we repeatedly observed situations in which participants in the policy-making process were unaware that other groups and individuals drew unintended, and often hostile, conclusions and implications from their statements and utterances.

(Jewson and Mason 1992: 219)

Jewson and Mason suggest that it is quite common for radical policies to be portrayed as liberal ones and liberal

policies to be portrayed as radical ones, in order to develop the broadest constituency of support for particular policy measures. This can be problematic when policy outcomes do not subsequently match the expectations of all of the policy's supporters, leading to disillusionment with equal opportunities initiatives.

The liberal approach concentrates upon processes rather than outcomes. There is a deliberate 'bureaucratization of procedures' (Jewson and Mason 1992: 224) to demonstrate the elimination of bias, and to provide parity of access for a competitive struggle for resources. The radical model aims to secure a 'fair' or proportionate distribution of rewards within the organisation, mirroring the composition of society. In effect the ends of the policy shape and justify the means, which may include positive discrimination.

Indeed it is the unlawfulness of positive discrimination within British race and sex discrimination legislation, which may contribute to the contradictory agendas of many equal opportunities activists as they pursue:

a policy of positive discrimination whilst claiming to be engaged in positive action or procedural reform. In other words, a radical policy may masquerade as a liberal one.

(Jewson and Mason 1992: 227)

Gibbon (1992) stresses the limitations of liberal equal opportunities policies. He argues that whilst they are able to affect the demand side of recruitment and selection processes, they are unable to reach the supply side. This remains unbalanced because of societal bias. Gibbon (1992: 237) suggests that positive action campaigns have marginal potential for affecting the 'qualification deficit'. He emphasises that:

the identification of all employment with individualistic professional employment, and the correspondent identification of the selection process as one of rewarding merit, itself embodies a bias towards those possessing formal qualifications and/or the ability to substitute for them verbally in socially acceptable ways....EOPs reproduce and even increase the employment prospects of the already formally qualified.
(Gibbon 1992: 238)

Therefore Gibbon's argument offers a rigorous critique of liberal approaches which rely upon fair procedures within the existing supply of labour. In contrast it might be argued that the promotion of positive discrimination within the radical model might offer a means of overcoming the legacy of discrimination within the education system.

Influences upon the development of equal opportunities policies

Jenkins (1989: 115) suggests that there is a tradition of voluntarism within organisational policy in the United Kingdom, providing a precedent or even a receptive culture for the development of corporate equal opportunities best practice. This is particularly important given the weaknesses in equality legislation which Lustgarten (1989) notes. However, despite its flaws, equal opportunities legislation appears to be an important factor in securing at least some degree of senior organisational commitment for the introduction of an equal opportunities policy (Jewson, Mason, Waters and Harvey 1990: 12). For example, the 277 respondent organisations in Kandola and Fullerton's (1994: 67) research suggested that the requirements of legislation were amongst the most important influences upon the development of an equal opportunities policy. Other key factors noted were business advantages and the commitment of senior management.

Jenkins (1989: 113) suggests that voluntaristic race equality policies often reflect a number of objectives rather than being determined by a single catalyst. Therefore to search for a single explanation for the development of race equality programmes at Byrds Housing Association may prove to be fruitless. Jenkins outlines seven possible

influences which can be conceptualised as internally or externally focused. Internal influences might be: a particular workplace problem or issue; a desire to develop best practice in advance of a problem occurring; the development of general personnel best practice, or an individual advocate's career development strategy. External influences might be the development of an equal opportunities policy as: a public relations strategy; a political response to a specific constituency of community opinion, or as a multiorganisational or even multinational strategy. In the last case there may be little ownership or stimulus for the policy within the local organisation in which it is located.

Solomos and Jenkins (1989: 4) also suggest that the typical objectives of the formal equal opportunities policy will include a commitment to satisfy the requirements of the law and in particular to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination as entry barriers to employment. However they emphasise internal organisational motivations, that the policy should provide: career development opportunities; a common policy for decentralised organisational units; positive action training opportunities and a more cohesive workforce through increased race equality awareness amongst white workers.

Implementation strategies for equal opportunities policies

Young's procedural and declarative models

Young (1992: 262) argues that the major dichotomy within policy implementation is between a procedural approach and a declarative approach. Within the procedural approach 'equal opportunities are achieved by changing the rules and standard operating procedures of the organization and enforcing and policing their observance.' Alternatively, the declarative approach advocates the effectiveness of measures which change the nature of the organisation, for example by statements of intent and training strategies. Young notes that the declarative approach can be characterised as, 'reflecting perceptions of power relations within the authority as well as perceptions of the change process itself'. This foreshadows policy debates within Byrds Housing Association through its characterisation of the tension between the opportunities and constraints for organisational change.

The role of best practice guides

Whilst Young (1992) conceptualises equal opportunities implementation strategies, a number of prescriptive guides have attempted to codify the requirements of equal

opportunities change. These are predominantly, although not exclusively, procedural approaches. The CRE's (1984a) *Race Relations Code*:

aims to give practical guidance which will help employers, trade unions, employment agencies and employees to understand not only the provisions of the Race Relations Act and their implications, but also how best they can implement policies to eliminate racial discrimination and to enhance equality of opportunity.
(CRE 1984a: 5)

Jacobs (1985: 24) from a radical perspective argues that the CRE's approaches towards achieving race equality represent insignificant 'minor administrative reform'. Indeed the Code is largely limited to the prevention of discrimination, rather than a wider consideration of the means of achieving equality. The influence of organisational structure and organisational culture upon measures to meet the Code's recommendations is outside its focus. However Forbes and Mead (1992: 17) and Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter (1995: 46) suggest that the Code should be seen as an important moment in the development of professional equal opportunities expertise and the formation of organisational equal opportunities policies.

The dominant procedural equal opportunities standard, *Equal Opportunities Ten Point Plan for Employers* (Employment Department 1991) is perhaps also open to radical criticism. The Employment Department argues that equal opportunities

policies address 'unfair discrimination' and embrace a moral, legal and business imperative. Whilst the plan's contents are not innovative, they are an establishment endorsement of the importance of equal opportunities policies during a period of laissez faire approaches to the economy. Most significantly the guide officially endorses measures which had been fighting for mainstream acceptance (Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: 10), such as numerical equal opportunities target setting. The component parts of the strategy are:

- 1 Develop an equal opportunities policy...
- 2 Set an action plan including targets...
- 3 Provide training for all...
- 4 Monitor the present position...and monitor progress in achieving objectives...
- 5 Review recruitment, selection, promotion and training procedures regularly...
- 6 Draw up clear and justifiable job criteria...
- 7 Offer pre-employment training...and positive action training...
- 8 Consider your organisation's image; do you encourage applications from under-represented groups?
- 9 Consider flexible working...
- 10 Develop links with local community groups, organisations and schools, and so reach out to a wider pool of potential recruits.

(Employment Department 1991: summary sheet)

Although the plan is not intended as a sequential set of points, it may be seen as a rather mechanistic approach to achieving equal opportunities change. Like the CRE's (1984a) Code, it makes limited reference to the organisational context of implementation. This is problematic because:

such documents are of limited use in analysing the social processes through which equal opportunities policies are generated or in identifying the relations between policy, practice and outcomes.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: 62)

Policy implementation, discretion and the role of the professional

Policy implementation

Young argues that any implementation strategy will face barriers, and that these are often exacerbated by flaws in framing the original policy:

Unrealistic expectations, and a failure to understand the sheer intractability of large bureaucratic organizations have compounded the ever-present difficulties that stem from covert racial hostility or entrenched professional attitudes.

(Young 1992: 258-259)

Dean attempts to address some of the obstacles within organisational structures through a consideration of the dangers of policy marginalisation:

'Almost all equality programmes have been dogged by the problem of "marginalisation". This has involved the creation of parallel structures which replicate the rest of the organisation without substantially altering its direction. The dilemma...is how to make equality activity part of the mainstream decision making without losing the clarity of purpose required to make real progress.'

(Association of District Councils 1993 cited in Dean 1993: 40)

Dean outlines a model whereby equal opportunity policy is converted into regularly reviewed organisational objectives which in turn are translated into management objectives, and applied:

to each function or unit where management can be given responsibility for integrating equal opportunities with other policy and service objectives.

(Dean 1993: 5)

However Dean does not explicitly relate this advice to all organisational functions, only particular service delivery areas. For example the consideration of equal opportunities within an organisational finance section is concealed, despite the implications for resource allocation. Thus Dean invites the marginalisation of equal opportunities which she seeks to avoid.

Organisations are faced with fundamental choices in establishing corporate policy ownership:

an equal opportunities policy may be seen as 'everyone's concern' or as the province of specialists. It may be seen as a management issue or as a matter of all staff. It may be led and monitored through the political structures - thus becoming a 'member's issue' - or it may be seen as something to be built into the mainstream of management practice. Finally, its achievement may be seen as something to be sought through the absorption of a generalized moral concern into the normal run of decision-making or as something to be handled programatically through specified targets and action plans.

(Young 1992: 262-263)

These considerations characterised the formal equal opportunities process at Byrds Housing Association. However it is the 'identification...of those who are to act as the principal instruments of policy' which Young (1992: 262) emphasises is the critical factor within any successful implementation strategy.

Stone (1988) notes that local authorities with equal opportunities policies frequently fail to establish clear responsibility for policy implementation. She argues that even where officers are given formal responsibility to implement equality programmes, they often lack sufficient status to tackle their objectives, for example because of an inability to intervene within other sovereign departments. In effect there is scope for individual managers to block, corrupt and subvert. The fundamental epithet for the process of equal opportunity change is to describe it as a process of ambiguity, in Young's (1992: 267) view a state of flux.

Obstructive actions may be precipitated by a distrust of organisational change and the additional pressures which it is perceived as bringing. For example Bagilhole drawing upon Lansley, Goss and Wolmar (1989: 71) highlights the possibility that long serving staff will contribute to a static organisational culture:

'The absence of any root and branch re-organisation at the management and officer level' means that equal opportunities may be perceived as increasing the workload, further limiting autonomy with increased bureaucracy, and therefore something to be circumvented [sic] if possible.

(Bagilhole 1994: 45-46)

Indeed it is arguably the nature of equal opportunities policies that they will magnify dissent, since by design they seek to increase the opportunities available to those outside the existing hierarchy. Thus they attack the privileges of the senior managers charged with implementing the policy.

Discretion and the role of the professional

Even when there is comprehensive support for equal opportunities initiatives from senior management, policy direction takes place within an organisational context where it is unlikely that formal hierarchical authority will be absolute (Young 1992: 264). In effect there are varying potentials of equal opportunities policies which:

must be seen as social practices, i.e. social activities which engage groups and individuals in a dynamic structure of intended and unintended actions in relation to others.

(Jewson and Mason 1992: 229)

The trends of increasing organisational decentralisation and workteam discretion which Mason and Jewson (1992) identify,

might be seen as increasing the unpredictability of these interactions.

Young and Connelly (1981: 158) suggest that the diversity of local authority race equality practices demonstrates the prevalence of discretion within the policy making structures of the local state. This also implies that there is scope for a number of policy implementation strategies, perhaps including the initiatives of change activists in junior organisational positions. Young and Connelly's research demonstrated differences in practice not only between authorities, but between departments within the same authority and even within individual departments. Variation appeared to spring from two sources, the degree of autonomy allowed for individual departmental discretion and the notion of professional mystique:

Diversity in practice is then sustained by an acceptance, stronger in some authorities than others, that many aspects of practice are 'off limits' for policy makers. The boundary between policy and practice is an elastic one. However its exact location is never determined by the fiat of policy makers but has to be negotiated within the context of professional claims to autonomy.

(Young and Connelly 1981: 158)

Therefore an occupation may secure greater individual freedom in the implementation of policy for its members by securing professional status which may legitimise the de facto discretion of the street-level bureaucrat. The

professional is most likely to operate in organisations where 'there is high expertise in the lower ranks, a complex task to perform, difficulties in developing effective patterns of supervision and a need for flexibility and openness to change' (Ham and Hill 1993: 148).

This raises two important issues for the study of discretion within this thesis. Firstly, can housing managers be perceived to have professional status which might suggest that all housing managers have a degree of operational freedom from top-down decision makers. Secondly, is discretion likely to be used by professionals to develop or derail organisational policies?

The literature which attempts to define the common traits of a profession and the attributes which are required to transform an occupation into a profession is outlined by (Witz 1992: 40). She suggests that the core ingredients of professional status which recur within these debates are:

skill based on theoretical knowledge, provision of training and education, testing the competence of members, organisation, adherence to a professional code of conduct and altruistic service.

(Witz 1992: 40)

On this basis it might be argued that the largely University based routes to full membership of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the CIH's Test of Professional Practice

and the CIH's professional code of conduct indicate that housing management broadly fulfills the requirements of professional status. Nevertheless there are clear differences between housing management and the practices of a professional ideal type such as medicine. Housing management work unlike medicine, is not restricted to qualified practitioners. In this sense housing management does not meet the paradigm of professional status which suggests that a profession is not:

"an occupation but...a means of controlling an occupation" (Johnson 1972: 45). In other words, what professions aspire to is the power to control their own work-occupational autonomy, and a key aim of professional autonomy is an ability to define and defend their area of competence within the broad policy area-that is their "action space".

(Houlihan 1987: 225)

In addition to, and perhaps partly because of, the above factors and additional issues such as class (Ham and Hill 1993: 147), it might be argued that housing managers do not enjoy the same customer deference as medical practitioners.

In this sense housing managers might be seen as semi-professionals possessing some of the traits of professionalism or aspiring to them, but without sufficient security of status to enjoy the autonomy of medical practitioners. This would suggest parameters to their use of discretion within their daily work with customers, and other professionals and policy makers. However, we should

recognise that the concept of the 'semi-professional' has already been used in a patriarchal way to suggest limits to the ability of female dominated occupations to professionalise. It might therefore be suggested that housing management will struggle to achieve full professional status as an occupation originated by women (Brion 1994) and which operates within a patriarchal society (see Williams 1989 for various interpretations of the patriarchal nature of British society).

Houlihan supports the view that housing managers are represented at the weaker end of the spectrum of professional power since they are:

strongly dependent on state patronage, possessing claims to expertise based on social sciences [rather than physical science which has been perceived as more scientific and hence more legitimate], and, finally, working in a policy area that has few statutory defenses.

(Houlihan 1987: 225)

Nevertheless it is clear that the CIH (1996) considers itself to be a professional body. Prominent academic commentators on housing management, such as Kemp and Williams (1991), have also argued that housing management is a profession on the criterion of the development of an identifiable system of knowledge. This could indicate a willingness to stamp a professional identity upon generic equal opportunities policy, particularly if Wilding's (1982)

conception of the professional power of social workers and health professionals can be applied to housing. Wilding suggests that these professionals will possess power in the policy-making process, in defining needs and problems, over the allocation of resources, and will also have power over clients and be able to control their own work. However Cole and Furbey (1994) suggest that housing management may have a more extensive social control function than the other welfare professions which operate as brokers (Drakeford 1993: 67) between the demands of society and the proclivities of the individual.

Advocates of the professionalisation of street-level bureaucrats suggest that on entering service professionals not only have the ideals of public service, but also the professional rigour to ensure that those ideals are implemented (Ham and Hill 1993: 146). However Lipsky quoting from Roth endorses the view that:

There is no evidence that professional training succeeds in creating a universalistic moral neutrality....On the contrary, we are on much safer ground to assume that those engaged in dispensing professional services (or any other services) will apply the evaluations of social worth common to their culture and will modify their services with respect to those evaluations unless discouraged from doing so by the organizational arrangements under which they work.
(Roth 1974 quoted in Lipsky 1980: 85)

Lipsky (1980: 202) suggests that professionals have typically proved more interested in maximising income and

prestige than in meeting any high ideals of professionalism, paralleling the distorted style of service found in street-level bureaucracies. New professionals will be socialised into existing patterns of accepted behaviour whilst the dominance of formal peer review will exclude the customers' perspective. In addition the typically isolated working conditions of professionals will conceal instances of incompetence from the gaze of their colleagues and deter their intervention. This view appears to support Young's (1992: 258-259) concern about the obstacles which professionals present to equality policies.

Lipsky's criticism can be seen as symptomatic of a more extensive weakening of professional prestige within society (Laffin 1985: 8). Houlihan suggests that this has been fed rather than met by a mood of self-reflection within the professions:

The normative and value consensus apparent in the 1960s in many of the welfare professions has substantially evaporated. Whilst the consensus within the housing, planning and social work professions has always been fragile, public disagreement within the profession has provided fuel for the external critics.

(Houlihan 1987: 224)

Therefore professional power becomes a variable within local power relations and consequently organisational policy making. As Houlihan argues:

Each profession must negotiate its eventual status locally.

They must therefore adapt to the existing organizational and political context or attempt to adapt them.

(Houlihan 1987: 225)

Therefore officers may not be constrained by a hegemonic professional culture and could be seen, like unprofessionalised street-level bureaucrats, as change activists at a local level.

The outcomes of equal opportunities policies

Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter analyse the development of equal opportunities policies in the 1990s. They argue that organisations are increasingly seeking to establish corporate ownership of equal opportunities policies, and wish to target them upon particular employee needs. This implies changes in policy implementation. For example:

There was a discernible trend towards the incorporation of equal opportunities into training more widely in the organisation rather than its provision in separate, stand-alone courses. This might be seen as part of a general process of integrating equal opportunities into general business practice rather than regarding it as a 'bolt on' extra. An important development in this last context was an increasing acceptance of the legitimacy of targets and a recognition of the need to set them.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: 1)

However these developments were not common to all organisations, leaving five ideal types which Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter believe are indicative of the spectrum of equal opportunities performance. These are labelled; 'serendipity', 'dissociation', 'accommodation', 'integration', and 'assimilation', although there is no assumption that organisations will necessarily progress from one model to another.

The 'serendipity', 'dissociation', and 'accommodation' ideal types

Organisations characterised by the 'serendipity' ideal type have failed to even develop paper equal opportunities policies, and lack strategies targeted upon particular groups. A myopic focus upon business practice is likely to prevent the recognition of discrimination, and consequently any group benefits gained by minority ethnic employees derive from chance. The 'dissociation' model is typified by organisations with paper policies which are not put into practice. The policy may be a calculated attempt to satisfy legal requirements and public relations considerations without any intention of its accomplishment. Alternatively the implementation gap may stem from a failure to discern the requirements necessary for policy implementation. In both respects there is:

a dissociation between equal opportunities policy and business practice.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: 64)

The 'accommodation' ideal type describes organisations which lack a systematic implementation strategy and fail to incorporate equal opportunities throughout all their practices. This inconsistent approach may blur processes of cause and effect, mistakenly attributing credit or blame to organisational initiatives. In this scenario it is likely that processes of monitoring and review will be obscured and ineffective. In addition:

problems may arise when equal opportunities policy is seen as an enthusiasm of, or is institutionally dependent on, one particular individual. In these circumstances the departure, or institutional eclipse, of this individual may have disastrous consequences.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: iv)

The extent to which equal opportunities policies were continued at Byrds Housing Association following the departure of the Equal Opportunities Advisor might be viewed within this context.

The generic implementation of equal opportunities policies throughout housing association and local authority organisational structures might predominantly be characterised as falling between the 'dissociation' and 'accommodation' ideal types. Nanton's commentary on the

experiences of local authority equal opportunity policies at the end of the 1980s suggests that there were piecemeal improvements in; the fairness of personnel procedures, community contact, the employment of particular groups and the awareness of issues of discrimination. However he highlights:

a substantial gap between policy formulation and policy implementation; ad hoc achievements not linked to any overall strategy; limited inter unit cooperation; low community perceptions of units; and a lack of clarity of goals.

(Nanton 1995: 205)

The housing association reports of Hajimichael (1988), NFHA (1983, 1992a) and CRE (1993a) demonstrate similar shortfalls between paper policy and practical action.

Hajimichael stresses minority ethnic disillusionment with the equal opportunities process within his surveyed organisations. Associations' interest in equal opportunities policies (Hajimichael 1988: 14) had typically been aroused by external pressure. This would lead to a management committee report (usually considered by a predominantly white structure) and the adoption of an equal opportunities statement. However, the paper statement was often not developed into a detailed equal opportunities policy, producing cynicism from minority ethnic staff:

'EO! Have they got one? I've looked through a draft copy of the new policy and I don't think much of it.

It's all fine words but there doesn't seem to be much concept of strategy.'

Black woman, development department, large association.

'EOP is used as a PR job and that's that. The practice is a different matter altogether.'

Black woman, large association.

(Hajimichael 1988: 6)

This dissatisfaction may also reflect the continuance of informal organisational practices:

No matter how many decisions are made, documents discussed, or policies created, there remains a range of day to day activities which go by almost unnoticed and unmentioned. These can play a crucial role in determining the extent and form of the realization of EO.

(Hajimichael 1988: 15)

Recruitment and selection practices demonstrated that, 'at times, EO is abandoned, and supplanted by a set of informal practices, many of which run contrary to EOP' (Hajimichael 1988: 39). The generality of the equal opportunities policy also contributed to these discretionary opportunities. For example, Hajimichael (1988: 31) demonstrates that maintenance sections did not operate to a specific equal opportunities policy which was tailored to their work. Nor were equal opportunities training programmes integrated with organisational functions, contrary to Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter's general, albeit more recent, findings:

Our observations of both induction programmes and EO training confirm a widespread tendency to separate EO issues from mainstream housing association policies and practices. In the case of induction programmes, EO was marginalised both in terms of the time allocated to it

and in the failure to integrate it into sessions on major facets of associations' activities, for example, lettings and finance. Similarly, in the case of most EO training (including racism awareness), the substance of association activities seldom became the main focus of attention...EO must be related to the responsibilities specific to particular posts.

(Hajimichael 1988: 50-51)

Whilst Mason and Jewson (1992: 102-104) stress the importance of establishing ownership of an equal opportunities policy throughout the organisation, Hajimichael's (1988: 31) case studies indicate that equal opportunities policies were typically 'delegated from the top down without any clear sense of responsibility or accountability.' This is reflected in a lack of clarity amongst the workforce concerning the differing aims between equal opportunities statements and equal opportunities policies. The general perception, particularly amongst white staff, that the organisation's equal opportunities statement required that everyone should be treated equally, acted as a hindrance to positive action programmes which sought to achieve that objective. Nevertheless Association Directors and Chairs were confident of the efficacy of their organisational equal opportunities policies, in stark contrast to the disillusionment of their minority ethnic staff members. However Harrison's (1992c) case studies of three housing associations suggest greater progress towards implementing comprehensive equal opportunities policies and they are discussed further below in the context of the 'integrationist' ideal type.

Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter's (1995) 'integrationist' and 'assimilationist' ideal types offer an alternative to the implementation gaps observed by Hajimichael, and represent the policy approaches which are most likely to secure effective organisational change. Therefore these will be analysed in detail through an examination of Mason and Jewson's 'model equal opportunities plan' for a decentralised organisation and Kandola and Fullerton's concept of 'managing diversity'.

The 'integration' ideal type

The 'integration' ideal type characterises the experiences of organisations which not only have comprehensive equal opportunities policies, but which systematically implement them reviewing and refining policy and practice as necessary. 'Integrationist' organisations will have a long-term commitment to the successful implementation of the policy, and will proactively rather than reactively meet challenges and facilitate the career progression of minority ethnic employees. There is a:

vision of the way in which the organisation could and should develop - as well as a practical route map for change.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: 64)

Whilst equal opportunities issues may become the focus of intra-departmental wrangling, in particular between equal opportunities sections and other functional teams, they are typically incorporated throughout all organisational functions. Although equal opportunities policies are perceived as an area of professional specialisation, they are supported by policy ownership throughout the organisation.

Mason and Jewson (1992) have established the current conventional model of equal opportunities change, and this can be categorised as an 'integrationist' approach. They note the potential incompatibility of the traditional reliance upon objective criteria and formalised procedures, alongside the emergence of growing workplace decentralisation and autonomy. Equal opportunities policies will lose organisational relevance if they appear to be Fordist anachronisms promoting formalisation in a Post-Fordist world:

the new managerialism assumes an optimistic calculus of motivation - that people are 'essentially' creative and enterprising...[it] must break up systems of imposed control...and instead create conditions which harness, rather than repress, creativity.

(Clarke and Newman 1993: 430)

In any case Liff notes the futility of increasing formalisation as a means of securing equal opportunities:

tightening checks on adherence to bureaucratic procedures is only likely to result in a destructive spiral of even greater checks and controls followed by more sophisticated avoidance tactics.

(Liff 1989: 32)

As Hitner, Knights, Green and Torrington (1982) argue, equal opportunities policies must establish a dialogue with the workplace culture of individual organisations if they are to be successful.

Therefore Mason and Jewson propose an equal opportunities strategy, designed to meet the diversity of organisational environments, which is based upon seven factors:

- (a) Commitment of organisational power holders to be secured by financial, legal and other means....
- (b) Establishment of a group of managers with specific responsibility for equal opportunities policy....
- (c) Direct access to, and accountability of, equal opportunities managers to the effective locus of decision-making in the organisation (such as the Board)....
- (d) Performance targets with respect to equal opportunities, built into the business plan and specified for local units....
- (e) Routine statistical monitoring of all aspects of recruitment and promotion....
- (f) Powers of investigation and report by equal opportunities managers on the basis of prima facie statistical evidence....
- (g) Routine appraisal of managers in each localised unit with respect to equal opportunities targets, in the context of a system of rewards and sanctions.

(Mason and Jewson 1992: 102-104)

within this model discretion is regarded as a potential tool for ensuring responsive and consequently effective race equality policies, rather than a corrupting agent to be limited through formalised procedures.

As Dean notes:

Although discretion can often be the enemy of equal opportunities, properly monitored discretion is essential for the flexible and sensitive operation of the policy.

(Dean 1993: 7)

The prevailing business trend of decentralisation combined with this new equal opportunities approach, can be seen as creating a formalised and clearly delineated opportunity space for individual officers. Mason and Jewson's aim is to clearly establish the responsibility of particular personnel for achieving organisational equal opportunities objectives, for example through target setting and monitoring. However, they reflect changes in organisational culture by proposing that localised work teams should have discretion to devise responsive methods to achieve those objectives. They emphasise:

a more precise specification of formal performance indicators [with] less emphasis on the formalisation of procedure.

(Mason and Jewson 1992: 104)

Their analysis has been embodied within recent equal opportunities advice. For example the CRE's (1995c, 1995d, 1995e) new race equality standards address the requirements of devolved organisational units and the responsibilities of different organisational levels.

It is not clear how far these developments are reflected within the social housing sector. However, Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter (1995: 80) argue that setting objectives, target setting and monitoring are in keeping with the public sector Compulsory Competitive Tendering culture 'of monitoring, surveillance and performance appraisal'. Nanton (1995) has similarly called for equal opportunities policies to be presented as a form of social regulation, whilst Harrison (1992c) has reviewed the work of three housing associations which appear to demonstrate an integrationist approach to developing and implementing race equality strategies.

'Association A' aimed to "make everyone aware that equal opportunities concerns everything the organisation does" (Harrison 1992c: 5). A specific equal opportunities post with 'considerable freedom of action' (Harrison 1992c: 2) was seen as essential in realising the organisation's objectives. The post at 'Association A' unlike the role at Byrds Housing Association included working directly with tenants, and monitoring performance as well as providing a

central advisory and policy development function for the organisation. However, the work of this association was 'being redefined in the direction of a more strategic role' (Harrison 1992c: 3).

Harrison's description of practices at 'Association B' characterises the scope for regional discretion and initiatives within a general equal opportunities policy. He also highlights the importance of a dominant organisational equality culture in maintaining the profile of equality initiatives, even where incoming Chief Officers are relatively inexperienced in equality matters.

Similarly 'Association C' demonstrated an organisational culture expectant of equal opportunities change. Harrison concludes with respect to this association:

- a) Good practice is about a continuing process of learning and adaptation by organisations....
- b) Awareness of issues and knowledge about detailed problems are crucial....
- c) It is necessary to acknowledge that there may be a measure of failure, in order to work out ways of responding.
- d) Good practice combines effective procedures with people well-placed (and with the responsibility to implement and improve those procedures).
- e) Links, communications and inter-organisational co-operation help a community-based association achieve good practices....

(Harrison 1992c: 19-20)

Nevertheless the key point which Harrison identifies is the need to support all policies and practices with a strong organisational commitment to race equality.

The 'assimilation' ideal type and 'managing diversity'

Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter's 'assimilation' ideal type is typified by the 'managing diversity' model. It is a liberal approach which like the 'integrationist' ideal type can be characterised as a response to changing business environments. In particular Kandola and Fullerton (1994: 1) argue that it will allow organisations to harness the corporate opportunities offered by the increasing proportion of people within the workforce traditionally described as minorities.

In this ideal type the 'equal opportunities policy' is driven by the organisational mission, arguably in contrast with the 'integrationist' style of the organisational mission being driven by equal opportunities. 'Assimilation' offers the seamless embodiment of equal opportunities approaches within the organisation. Consequently equal opportunities are mainstreamed and cease to be viewed as a separate organisational function:

Specialised units typically disappear to be absorbed into human resource management...Indeed the very term

equal opportunities may disappear to be replaced by an emphasis on concepts such as 'diversity', 'citizenship' and 'empowerment'.

No longer is equal opportunities to be seen as a specialised set of practices, albeit with business payoffs. Now it is a natural prerequisite of the very process of doing business efficiently.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: iii)

Kandola and Fullerton (1994: 152-164) characterise the managing diversity approach as a 'mosaic'. This reflects the diversity of the 'new' organisation, and acts as an acronym for the core themes of this 'assimilationist' approach. These are:

- * - Mission and values; suggesting that a clear organisation mission and value structure will focus the resources of diversity upon organisational objectives.

- * - Objective and fair processes; emphasising that all organisational policies and procedures should not only be fair, but should also be seen to be fair. There should be a spirit of openness which 'orients' (Kandola and Fullerton 1994: 154) new employees to all of the formal and informal networks within the organisation.

- * - Skilled workforce: aware and fair; the organisation must ensure that all employees realise the benefits of workforce diversity and are able to identify prejudice and bias within personal and workplace practices. In addition

considerable attention will also be paid to developing managerial skills within the workplace, in order to maximise the personal and organisational benefits of diversity.

* - Active flexibility; the organisation will promote flexibility throughout every area of its operation, this will benefit the whole of the workforce rather than focusing initiatives upon particular group interests.

* - Individual focus; this represents the heart of the managing diversity approach, emphasising that it is concerned with the attributes of the individual rather than group membership or group disadvantage per se.

* - Culture that empowers; the organisation will ensure that diversity is positively valued, and that experimentation, innovation and creativity are key features of the working environment.

These core themes are to be implemented through a strategy incorporating eight elements, which whilst not sequential form a spider's web:

where it is impossible to touch one strand without having a simultaneous impact on all the other strands which make up the web.

(Kandola and Fullerton 1994: 76-77)

An organisational vision of the principles of managing diversity underpinned by top management commitment to it, provides the basis of the strategy. This can then be implemented through an audit and assessment of organisational needs which should inform clear objectives and accountability for achieving the management of diversity. This may require the coordination of diversity initiatives through a specialist post. Effective two-way communication of policy and initiatives are essential, not only to their introduction, but to their continuing progress and the ongoing evaluation of the process of managing diversity.

Kandola, Fullerton and Ahmed (1995) argue that the managing diversity model establishes closer links with organisational culture than conventional equal opportunities approaches. It represents a long term strategy (Kandola and Fullerton 1994: 150), since it aspires to the development of a supportive organisational culture which values the particular talents of diverse individuals. This will ensure that all employees are committed to the objectives of the policy rather than marginalising equal opportunities in the hands of a specific department. However this approach is not without dangers:

equal opportunities might be obscured by, or disappear into, broader developments in business strategies and organisational culture. Specific outcomes may depend upon the balance of forces within the organisation in

conjunction with a variety of potential external pressures.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: v)

Whilst Kandola, Fullerton and Ahmed (1995) have suggested that managing diversity is an evolutionary approach, its portrayal by Kandola and Fullerton (1994: 9-10) can be seen as a paradigm shift from previous conventions of equal opportunities. First, they suggest that the emphasis upon realising the positive attributes of a diverse workforce for business advantage is in contrast with a negative equal opportunities approach, which simply aims to satisfy the legal requirements of non-discrimination. Secondly, they argue that within the managing diversity model there is a commitment to meeting the needs of the whole workforce, including previously excluded groups such as white men, rather than narrowly focusing upon particular equal opportunities target groups. This individualistic approach addresses Nanton's (1989: 552) criticism of the way in which equal opportunities policies reify 'race' by labelling and then tackling group needs, contributing to 'the illusion that group boundaries are clearly identifiable and fixed.' In contrast managing diversity has the flexibility to recognise ethnicity and multiple identities.

Thirdly, Kandola and Fullerton suggest that organisations committed to managing diversity will develop an organisational culture which rewards successful individuals

in order to maximise their human resource potential for business advantage. Therefore they will focus upon individual achievement within the workforce rather than simply the number of staff employed from particular target groups. Mason and Jewson's (1992: 103) idea of using formalised objectives and targets to direct the new age of workteam discretion also seems to be rejected as reflecting a:

preoccupation with numbers possibly leading to a neglect of the processes that organisations use to make decisions about people and the skills of the managers in using these processes. The assumption seems to be that as long as the numbers turn out right, everything is fine. However, unless you have confidence in both your systems and your managers, this is a big presumption to make. Of course if you did have confidence in these two aspects, then you would not need targets anyway;

(Kandola, Fullerton and Ahmed 1995: 32)

Fourthly, Kandola and Fullerton argue that employers committed to managing diversity will establish policy ownership throughout the organisation, in contrast to the marginalisation of equal opportunities policies within personnel departments. This is because the skills of all organisational managers will be required to manage diversity. Fifthly, they reject positive action approaches which are concerned with group identity and are therefore anathema to the individualised approaches of managing diversity.

Kandola and Fullerton's 'assimilationist' model also differs from Mason and Jewson's 'integrationist' model through a more positive perception of organisational views towards heterogeneity. Mason and Jewson (1992: 101-102) suggest that 'the search for a flexible labour force; the introduction of self-regulating work teams; increased emphasis on customer care; and a stress on communication' have led to the re-emergence of acceptability criteria within recruitment and selection processes. They argue that cultural stereotypes may well drive these discretionary opportunities to perpetuate the existing white structure of management. In contrast the managing diversity literature contains a far more optimistic perception that organisations will value a diversity of backgrounds, as a means of increasing their flexibility, responsiveness and capacity to innovate.

Thus managing diversity offers a middle road within corporate personnel policies, between the specificity of traditional equal opportunities approaches and the tolerance of discrimination within 'colour blind' approaches. Kandola and Fullerton argue that whereas approaches characterised as assimilationist in the 1960s and 1970s required minority ethnic communities to refashion themselves in the image of the majority, managing diversity values all elements of the community according to their individual merits:

The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of

people....It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met.

(Kandola and Fullerton 1995: 8)

However 'assimilationist' approaches might be criticised as placing individual organisations within a vacuum, unaffected by society's structural pressures. The organisation is described as if it is a self-functioning and self-regulating entity, where societal inequality does not affect labour market access, and where the notion of indirect or institutional discrimination does not exist within that organisation or within competing organisations:

As Gary Powell, Professor of Management at the University of Connecticut, says: "women and men should be recommended for training and development according to their individual needs rather than their sex".

(Kandola, Fullerton and Ahmed 1995: 32)

This view presupposes that members of particular groups in society will be in an equal position to be assessed for training and development. Managing diversity by rejecting the group approach of equal opportunities policies, disregards the discrimination which faces individuals as members of groups. As Coyle argues:

Employers seem to be embracing the rhetoric of diversity in order to disentangle themselves from some of the more costly, politicised and frankly messy aspects of equal opportunities policies. It can be a good rationale for doing nothing.

(Coyle 1995: 5)

Similarly the CRE have argued that:

Diversity...should be seen as an "umbrella objective" with employers ensuring that individuals are being treated on the basis of individual merit, "but within that, it is crucial to ensure that action is taken to remove the particular barriers faced by some groups." In the early years of equal opportunities development it was common for employers to claim "colour blindness" and that "all individuals are treated the same". Equal opportunities policies challenge the simplicity of such responses and the complacency that lies behind them. Diversity..."is really quite a dangerous concept if we lose this equal opportunities angle".

(Equal Opportunities Review 1995: 4)

It is not clear whether managing diversity will supersede equal opportunities as a convention of organisational policy. Indeed Kandola and Fullerton (1994: 33) note that its benefits remain largely unsubstantiated. They identify demonstrable advantages as increased corporate access to the maximum potential workforce and increased organisational flexibility. However these gains might equally be claimed by adherents of conventional equal opportunities policies. They have also identified the necessity of responding to a changing external environment and a new age of managerial developments.

It might be suggested that Kandola and Fullerton promote an idealised abstraction of managing diversity in comparison with a distorted version of the 'integrationist' model in which equal opportunities targets are inevitably transmuted

into quotas (Kandola, Fullerton and Ahmed 1995: 32). As other commentaries point out, new age managerial developments may also be corrupted:

Team working arrangements can promote high levels of co-operation and the acceptance of diversity in all its forms. Equally, however, these organisational and labour strategies can be associated with new forms of acceptability criteria, small group hostility to outsiders and ethnocentric cultural attitudes.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: viii)

Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter (1995: 80) stress that legal, moral and political pressure must be maintained upon organisations to achieve equal opportunities change. Internally pressure from employees can also influence organisational action, an indication perhaps of the change activists' opportunity space. They argue that British advocates of managing diversity present a partial model, failing to recognise the context of the American best practice from which they draw:

It is instructive to note that in the US where the notion of diversity and its business benefits is much better entrenched, a commitment to the redressing of collective disadvantage has been retained largely because of a much stronger legal framework with more effective sanctions. The business advantages discerned for diversity are, then, greatly strengthened by the manifest business costs of not complying with the law. Moreover monitoring ensures that patterns of group disadvantage remain visible even in a situation where equal opportunities policy is increasingly based on individuals.

(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: vii)

The theme of managing diversity usefully reasserts the positive rationale for fair and responsive employment policies. It reminds equal opportunities advocates that the reliance upon satisfying legal obligations, can represent a narrow and unstrategic approach to the workforce. However its own implementation might offer nothing more than a repackaging of existing equal opportunities best practice, accompanied by the removal of a societal focus:

as time goes on, the question must arise whether assimilation will lead to a genuine integration of equal opportunities or the confusions, misunderstandings and complacency of [serendipity].
(Jewson, Mason, Drewett and Rossiter 1995: v)

One further weakness is common to both the 'integrationist' and the 'assimilationist' models. Whilst they provide a greater recognition of the role of officer discretion in policy implementation than previous analyses, the dynamic potential of individuals at junior organisational levels is not considered in creative terms. Even within new managerial strategies, this flexibility is still seen negatively as a reality which must be harnessed by the organisation. Insofar as it is viewed as a positive force, it occupies a secondary position within a top down model typified in this quote from an NFHA/Housing Corporation seminar:

It was stressed that it is extremely difficult for one person to change an organisations [sic] culture especially if that person is at a junior level within

the organisation. Consequently equal opportunities should be an integral part of an association's culture. (Dennis 1991: 10)

Whilst the ideal of incorporating equality issues within an organisation is accepted, the peripheralisation of the change potential of junior staff is one of the processes which this thesis seeks to redress.

Therefore chapter seven reasserts the importance of junior staff in achieving equal opportunities change, through an examination of the role of discretion at Byrds Housing Association. This primary research material is developed in chapter eight, to conceptualise the opportunity space for creative action enjoyed by some relatively junior organisational personnel.

**Chapter Seven - Discretion within the housing association
movement - a case study of Byrds Housing Association**

Previous chapters have clearly demonstrated that housing association policies and practices have played a part in continuing racial inequalities in access to the movement's housing and employment resources. They have also indicated that recommended best practice has been limited in its scope and in its impact in addressing shortfalls in provision. The primary research which follows offers an evaluation of remedial actions undertaken within Byrds Housing Association, a long established English housing association operating in four regions. These initiatives aimed to address perceived shortfalls within the organisation and provision of services for minority ethnic communities within the City area of the organisation.

These initiatives comprise two distinctive but interconnected strands. First, the introduction of radical race equality initiatives (according to Jewson and Mason's 1992 model) from a junior position within the organisational hierarchy, largely without formal organisational support. Secondly, the development of strategic organisational equal opportunities policies. These approaches are now analysed in turn with reference to the hypothesis which has been outlined within the introduction: that organisations may have a power vacuum within their structure, which can create

an opportunity space for even quite junior gatekeepers to act as change activists with the intention of implementing radical initiatives in organisational policies and practices.

The junior social gatekeeper as change activist

The 1991 census recorded the minority ethnic population as constituting 11.7% of the City's size. In 1987 when change activists began informal positive action programmes, minority ethnic households held 6.9% of the 1,029 Byrds Housing Association tenancies within City local authority boundaries. Between September 1986 and August 1987, minority ethnic households had comprised 7.9% of households applying for accommodation including white households not classifying themselves as 'White British'. In turn they represented 6.9% of households approved to the waiting list for accommodation.

Formal concern within the City Office was directed at the 'small' number of Asian tenants being housed, despite the location of between one quarter and one third of the Association's properties in areas which were locally stereotyped as being areas of concentrated minority ethnic residence, and predominantly Asian residence. In 1987 2.5% of households with Association tenancies had classified

themselves (or in a small number of cases been classified) as Asian. The 1991 census recorded 9% of the City population as Asian.

Whilst Byrds Housing Association possessed an equal opportunities policy (including a 'fair housing policy'), at this time there was no corporate initiative to encourage minority ethnic households to apply for accommodation to the Association. Nevertheless the formal equal opportunities policy can be seen as a tool to legitimate local initiatives. In fact a small number of positive action initiatives had historically originated within the City area with formal organisational authority from the local office. These aimed to encourage Asian households to apply to the Association for accommodation. However the initiatives were generally reliant on the individual skills of particular officers rather than organisational resources and consequently were, to some extent, dependent upon the continuing employment of those individuals. For example, attempts to distribute translated copies of the Association's fair housing policy within the Asian community ended for a number of years after the resignation of one officer in 1989.

Therefore to address the perceived inertia of the organisation, a small group of change activists who occupied gatekeeping positions within the Association, including

myself, became involved in implementing radical race equality policies in three different ways. These were, formalised positive action strategies, practitioner discretion within the allocations process and the exploitation of an organisational power vacuum. They are described in detail in the following sections. In common with Jewson and Mason's (1992) 'radical model', this alternative strategy sought to achieve the fair distribution of rewards (in this case as predominantly defined by white officers), the politicisation of decision making, and arguably an element of covert positive discrimination. However, in practice the daily discretion available to Association gatekeepers might be perceived as sufficiently removed from scrutiny to make the distinction between lawful positive action and unlawful positive discrimination a notional rather than a real constraint.

Formalised positive action strategies

Some of the positive action race equality initiatives can be defined as formalised strategies. On a localised level over the period of research, attempts were made to establish links with African Caribbean and Asian community groups to explain the Association's work to them and to encourage them to promote the Association's services to their customers and members. This involved offering to give applicants priority

if they were referred from the community group to the Association for accommodation, issuing the group with application forms to distribute on the Association's behalf, or in a smaller number of instances simply distributing housing application forms at 'black social events'. Initiatives to build referral networks have continued to the present date, although due to the introduction of a housing points scheme it has become a means of publicising the Association's services rather than serving as a network for accommodation referrals.

The number of households who were formally referred through this network formed only part of the approximately 5% of applications made through referral channels each week, although the Association may have achieved a higher profile within minority ethnic communities as a result of the links made with community groups. A greater number of referrals were received from a voluntary organisation for Asian women suffering from domestic violence, with whom the Association agreed to develop a hostel property. This was an initiative which was officially sanctioned from authority within the City Office and appeared to be motivated by the commitment of senior and junior gatekeepers, alongside the persuasive demonstration of 'need' by the voluntary group.

Practitioner discretion within the allocations process

The housing allocations system within Byrds Housing Association was until 1991 based upon an assessment of the relative merit or need of a housing applicant. Housing officers often used the stated qualitative allocations criteria to act as advocates for the priority of particular households, particularly those whom they had interviewed. The housing officer who managed a patch in which a vacancy occurred would usually make the final decision in the selection of a new tenant. Advocacy might be expected to be constrained within a context of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1980: 74) by the knowledge that workers' peers will become involved with the client at some point. However, the organisational distance between functions at Byrds Housing Association failed to activate this constraint.

On an informal but semi-regularised level, this gatekeeping discretion was utilised by change activists to give either absolute or relative preference to minority ethnic housing applicants. From 1987 until at least 1991, housing officers in the City Office either followed this policy of racialised allocations themselves or did not seek to challenge its implementation by others. Therefore there were significant opportunities for relatively junior organisational gatekeepers to exploit discretion in a radical manner. The radical policy which was introduced by these change

activists became sufficiently established in practice, to effectively become the Association's formal policy for a number of staff involved in the allocations process.

Individual commitment to these practices appeared to reflect a number of diverse motivations ranging from a moral commitment to radical race equality objectives, through to a pragmatic 'must improve the figures approach'. Nevertheless there seemed to be a common aim amongst a small group of staff that the number and proportion of minority ethnic households gaining Association tenancies needed to be increased. The methods used to try and achieve this aim were rationalised in a number of ways and to some extent represented short-term expediency in change activists' approaches. For example, whilst there was a consensus that the principal issue facing the Association was the low number of housing applications from minority ethnic communities, positive action was directed at the point of tenancy selection.

At the time that radical policies were being introduced by change activists, I believed that the Association had made little attempt to attract housing applications from the minority ethnic community and had been socially, although not spatially, distant from minority ethnic communities. In this context the use of discretion as a tool to achieve positive action or positive discrimination was rationalised

as a short term tactic. There was an informal consensus amongst change activists that the most effective strategy to encourage more minority ethnic households to apply for accommodation would be to house more minority ethnic households. It was presumed that their satisfaction with their housing outcomes would then publicise the advantages of applying for the Association's accommodation. However whilst it was believed that it was Asian households in particular who were 'failing' to apply for accommodation, officers tended to blur diversity and focus more generally upon all minority ethnic communities. Minority ethnic households were becoming objects who were to be encouraged to apply for accommodation with little consideration of the possibility of tenure preference, or antipathy, amongst particular ethnic groups.

The use of discretion at the point of property selection was also rationalised by arguing that minority ethnic households were more likely than white households to be discriminated against in access to alternative sources of housing. It could then be seen as the duty of the Association to compensate for this possibly covert discrimination. This view could be seen as formally legitimated in the assessment criteria of the Association's allocations policy, since housing officers were required to take account of households ability to gain alternative accommodation.

The opportunity space for policy making

The third positive action initiative demonstrated most clearly the scope for the introduction of radical policy initiatives. It concerned the exploitation of the opportunity space left by an organisational power vacuum. This example represented an attempt by an individual housing officer at a relatively junior organisational level to exploit for radical race equality objectives, the Association's decision to adopt a housing points scheme for the allocation of tenancies. It seems to be analogous to Stocking's (1985) conceptualisation of product champions, those individuals or groups who sponsor an idea to achieve organisational change.

In 1991, proposals were made to move from a merit system of allocating property to a points system, since within existing procedures:

it was difficult to show that there had been consistency of approach by different staff, and extremely difficult to prove we are helping those cases in the greatest housing need.

(Byrds Housing Association report received 7/91)

This policy revision seemed likely to eliminate the ability of individual gatekeepers to use discretion to give preference to minority ethnic households within the

allocations process, unless they chose to deliberately mispoint applications. The boundaries of discretion had changed. Whereas previously discretion was legitimated on a de facto basis at housing officer level and could be appropriated for personal objectives, it would now be much more closely bound by organisational rules. Officers would have to break the boundaries of the system to give minority ethnic households informal advantage, rather than following their former practice of filling the vacuum between policy and practice with radical initiatives.

Discussions with senior managers within the City Office indicated that it would be academic to argue for the retention of the existing merit system of allocations. The benefits of a points scheme as a means of assessing housing applicants had been accepted within the organisational hierarchy. However an alternative course of action was to try and appropriate the policy making process, to formalise the ethos of the City Office's positive action policies within the corporate allocations system. This would mean the Association adopting the radical practices of the City Office. Consequently I proposed a draft housing points scheme to the senior manager charged with developing the new allocations policy. Since he had no structured proposals of his own, this radical model proposed from a junior organisational position became the basis of the Association's new allocations system.

within the proposed system minority ethnic households perceiving themselves to be suffering from racial harassment, would be awarded points to give their application additional priority. This section was subsequently amended to state that households perceiving themselves as suffering from racial harassment would automatically be awarded a place on the accommodation waiting list without the necessity of their form being pointed. The most radical part of the scheme was the proposal to award additional housing points to all minority ethnic applicants, on the basis of the discrimination which it was presumed that they would face in gaining access to alternative public and private sector accommodation.

Minority ethnic housing applicants did not have to demonstrate or even perceive discrimination in order to gain these points, which sought to address disadvantage using a group approach rather than an individual approach. This was justified by suggesting that individual applicants were unlikely to be aware of discrimination in their attempts to gain alternative accommodation. Therefore they needed to be compensated for the covert discrimination which had been widely recorded in academic studies. This approach could also be rationalised as retaining the duty within the Association's merit housing allocations system to assess the alternative housing options of each applicant.

Outcomes from the processes of positive action change

Statistical record

Between 1987 and 1993 as table one shows, the percentage of White European households who were tenants of the Association fell, although they increased in numbers due to the Association's stock of accommodation growing by a third over the same period. The number of African Caribbean and Asian households increased in percentage and numerical terms, although their experiences were not homogeneous. Nevertheless the percentage of White European households as tenants remained above, and the percentage of minority ethnic households as tenants remained below their proportion of the City's total population in 1993.

At this time African Caribbean households were three times more likely, and Asian households less than half as likely, to achieve tenancies as might have been expected given their representation within the local population. However these global figures disguise many factors. For example, the figures continue to be influenced by the small number of minority ethnic tenants within the Association's properties designated for older residents. In 1993, only 2.4% of tenants of older persons' housing were from minority ethnic

Table One - Ethnic origin of Byrds H.A. tenants.

Sample: August 1987 1,029 households, August 1989 1,055 households, August 1993 1,322 households.

		White	Ethnic origin		Other
		European	African Caribbean	Asian	
% of City Census	1991	88.2	1.5	9.0	1.2
% of all tenants	1987 *	93.1	3.0	2.5	1.4
	1989 *	91.0	4.1	3.6	1.4
	1993 *	90.6	4.4	3.8	1.2
% of accom. for older people	1987	Data not available.			
	1989	Data not available.			
	1993 *	97.6	1.0	1.4	-
% of tenants in flats	1987	94.2	2.3	2.0	1.5
	1989	90.4	4.1	3.4	2.1
	1993	89.2	6.1	3.3	1.4
% of tenants in bedsits	1987	94.9	-	5.1	-
	1989	82.2	4.5	8.9	4.5
	1993	80.0	16.0	4.0	-
% of tenants in one bed accom.	1987	95.3	1.9	1.4	1.4
	1989	91.6	4.0	2.7	1.9
	1993	90.7	4.5	3.2	1.6
% of tenants in two bed accom.	1987	88.8	6.7	4.2	0.4
	1989	90.0	5.3	4.3	0.4
	1993	85.6	8.5	5.6	0.3
% of tenants in three bed accom.	1987	93.1	1.4	3.2	2.3
	1989	92.6	2.3	4.2	1.0
	1993	91.4	1.8	4.3	2.5
% of tenants in four bed accom.	1987	76.2	-	9.5	14.2
	1989	80.0	-	10.0	10.0
	1993	91.1	-	5.9	2.9

Notes: only figures asterisked include data on properties designated for older people.

communities, whilst in general family dwellings minority ethnic households occupied 11.4% of tenancies. It also seemed, even within the initial compilation of records in 1989, that whilst minority ethnic households were gaining access in increasing numbers to the Association's tenancies, they were doing so by gaining access to smaller and poorer quality properties.

Nationally minority ethnic populations tend to receive allocations of poorer quality accommodation in gaining access to the social housing sector (CRE 1984c, CRE 1988a). Whilst the variation in the quality of property available to be allocated by housing associations is generally far narrower than it is for local authorities, it was clear that the greatest proportionate decline in White European tenants and the greatest proportionate increase in minority ethnic tenants seemed to have occurred within the smallest sized accommodation. The increase in the number of tenancies held by minority ethnic households was particularly noticeable between 1987 and 1989 in one bedroomed properties, and flats and bedsits. Even within these categories, there was a disproportionate increase in the number of minority ethnic households taking the tenancies of bedsits rather than flats.

There were also differential patterns of access to particular house sizes, although these are less easily equated with quality. Whilst other measures of quality of property have not been projected through to the second stage of research, the initial study (Tomlins 1990) demonstrated some further areas of concern. For example the results presented in 1990 had indicated that Asian and African Caribbean households were far less likely to be in homes with full central heating, and were far less likely to have received a newly built or rehabilitated property, immediately upon handover from the developer.

There are limitations to these generalisations. First, there are temporal considerations. There are two quite distinct periods of positive action within the research. The period of relatively unbridled discretion recorded in the statistical data collected between 1987 and 1989 which ended with the introduction of the housing allocations points scheme in 1991, and the subsequent period through to the second collation of data in 1993. It is perhaps significant that the period of the greatest expansion of minority ethnic access to Association tenancies is recorded as having occurred between 1987 and 1989.

Secondly, the Association enjoyed a period of relatively rapid expansion in ownership of rented properties between 1987 and 1993. This was not spatially uniform nor

proportionate to the size of the existing stock, and combined with any differential preferences for particular housing areas between ethnic groups, may have influenced access to tenancies. Thirdly, the expression of access in terms of minority ethnic households, masks the divergent experiences of Asian and African Caribbean communities. For example Asian households were less likely to be housed in bedsits in 1993 than they were in 1987, whereas African Caribbean households who had held no tenancies of bedsits in 1987, held 16% by 1993. A fourth limitation is that quite small changes in numbers could indicate fundamental change where the sample size was small. For example by 1993 there were still only fifty bedsits in the sample, and only 34 four bedroomed properties compared for example with 354 two bedroomed properties and an overall total of 1322 units. Therefore applicants' varying household structures and housing choices will have interacted with the social engineering of change activists to produce a complex pattern of results.

Nevertheless it might be concluded that the Association or change activists succeeded in housing greater numbers of minority ethnic households at the expense of the quality of accommodation gained. Whilst there were attempts to 'sell' new good quality 'white estates' to minority ethnic households, the results perhaps reflect the preoccupation of change activists and the Association, with the number of

minority ethnic households being rehoused, rather than quality of outcome or indeed housing preference.

It is arguable whether the radical use of discretion within the housing allocations scheme succeeded in its overall objective of encouraging minority ethnic communities to view the Association as a key instrument in meeting their housing needs. Purely on a statistical basis, figures compiled from four organisational monthly returns in 1992 suggested that White British housing applicants had fallen to under 88% of the total number of applicants, and African Caribbean housing applicants had risen to over 5%. The number of Asian households applying for accommodation was also clearly increasing, although they were still significantly under-represented as applicants in comparison with their proportion of the local population.

It could be suggested from the data, that as a result of the strategies which were undertaken, minority ethnic households received accommodation who would not otherwise have done so and the Association's profile amongst minority ethnic communities was raised. The benefits to those individual households should not be underestimated. However the wider impact of the policy on the diverse minority ethnic communities within the City is less clear.

Indeed there are resonances of Modood's (1990) criticism of the ways in which white activists racialise minority ethnic communities. The strategies of the change activists can be seen as a short sighted response to the problems of racial inequality in housing, which served the interests of the officers implementing the policy, but not necessarily the interests of the minority ethnic households in the greatest housing need within the City. The strategies of the change activists were largely white led and can be perceived as insensitive to ethnic diversity despite being a mirror image of traditional distinctions of deserving/undeserving status. Consideration of the housing preferences of different minority ethnic groups played little part in devising the strategies, and there was little structured attempt to develop culturally distinct strategies for diverse minority ethnic communities. It might be argued that the energies of officers would have been better directed towards working with, and developing referral links with, organisations representing minority ethnic communities such as the voluntary organisation committed to meeting the housing needs of Asian women who had experienced domestic violence.

Points scheme

The radical elements of the housing points scheme were not formally challenged from within the Association, and

consequently the scheme was adopted as proposed. However, it was challenged by a CRE officer when I forwarded it to him in my new post of Equal Opportunities Advisor amongst a set of documents, as part of the CRE's investigation into the race equality practices of the housing association movement. A lengthy debate with the CRE ensued, which opposed a series of policy amendments devised with the support of external advisers. I was informed that a non-discrimination notice would be served upon the Association unless a satisfactory amendment was agreed. The CRE finally agreed to a proposal to award points for racial discrimination provided that sexual discrimination was mentioned in the same syntax to prevent a 'white backlash' from the public in response to the policy.

The role of the Equal Opportunities Advisor included an involvement in the implementation of the new housing points scheme, which allowed me to influence the revisions to the radical elements of the scheme. Nevertheless the discussions with the CRE demonstrate the boundaries of the opportunity space for a change activist, since a housing officer would not have been in a position to influence the revisions to the policy, or to prevent some of the concerns of the CRE from reaching the Association's senior managers. Indeed without this filter, the CRE's response might have affected the Association's attitude towards other equal opportunities initiatives which were being implemented at that time.

However, despite my ability to influence the revisions to the points scheme, Bachrach and Baratz' (1970) theory of nondecision making highlights the way in which I deferred implementation of the original scheme because of my perception that the CRE was likely to make a formal challenge to the policy. I did not believe that my own organisational position was sufficiently strong to continue pursuing a policy which I believed in, but which might provoke a confrontation in which I could not be sure of the support of the Association's gatekeepers. The institutional importance of the CRE and the sanctions at its disposal, coupled with my uncertainty regarding my power base were the key factors in creating a scenario of nondecision making.

Strategic organisational race equality initiatives

The effectiveness of the largely informal and sometimes radical approaches to race equality change described above, can be compared with the organisational race equality strategies introduced by Byrds Housing Association as part of a wider equal opportunities programme during 1991 and 1992. The focus of these new formal change strategies was the creation of an equal opportunities action plan and the introduction of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor (EOA). My appointment to this post ensured that I remained closely involved in equality initiatives, although it might

be hypothesised that at this point the change activist with a junior organisational position becomes the change agent described by Nanton:

in the mould of what organisational change theorists describe as 'hero innovators' (Georgiades and Phillimore 1975). These interventions, it is argued, for the most part result in failure. This failure arises because in attempting to establish a new commitment in the organisation, it is necessary to transfer this commitment to others.

(Nanton 1995: 207)

The motivation for the introduction of formal equal opportunities strategies at Byrds Housing Association is not entirely clear. Ostensibly these new formal initiatives were designed to improve the equal opportunities performance of Byrds Housing Association. The Association had previously received a poorer monitoring score for equal opportunities performance from the Housing Corporation than in any other area of its work:

Results have been disappointing, partly because of the suburban location of much of [the Association's] stock and the overall scatter of its property. Good work with the Asian community in [...] and an Asian elderly scheme in [...]. There is a recognition that the employment of black staff needs to be given greater emphasis.

(Housing Corporation monitoring report to Byrds Housing Association 1990)

The CRE summarised the history of Byrds' equal opportunities policy in the following way:

The Association has had an equal opportunities policy since 1983, however, progress on implementation has generally been slow. Ethnic monitoring was introduced in 1983, however the collection and presentation of data has been piecemeal and reports have not consistently been presented to the Board of Management. There has been no staff or committee members training on race equality issues until February 1992. (CRE draft report to Byrds Housing Association 8/92: 29)

The processes which led to the creation of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor can be charted from an Executive Group Policy Team (GPT) meeting in January 1991 (see diagram two and table two below, for organisational structures and roles). However it is not clear whether the new equal opportunities initiatives reflected any corporate awareness of the practices of change activists.

Diagram Two - Decision-making structure of Byrds Housing Association

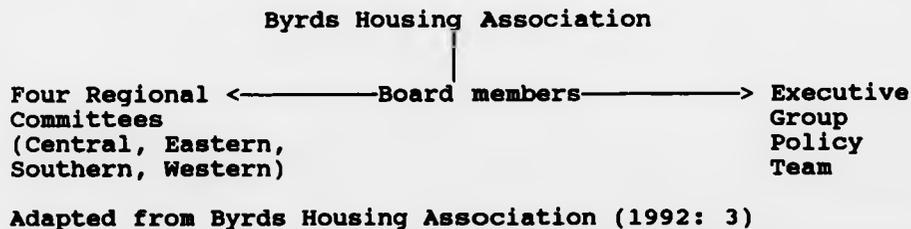


Table Two - Hierarchical decision making roles

The role of the Board of Management

Board meetings are held every two months at which Board members formulate policy, examine problems and consider remedies, explore development opportunities and monitor performance.

The role of Regional Committees

Working within policies approved by the Board of Management, Regional Committees meet every two months to control and monitor all the Regional operations - housing management, technical, development, financial and staffing.

Group Policy Team

The Group Policy Team is chaired by the Chief Executive and comprises the two Head Office Directors and the four regional directors. The team makes recommendations to the Board of Management on forward planning, financial strategy, information technology and all day to day issues covering the work of [Byrds Housing Association].
(Byrds Housing Association 1992: 4)

GPT considered the Association's equality performance against measures of the Housing Corporation's (1989) *Performance Expectations* and the impending CRE (1991a) *Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing*. It requested that a race equality action plan should be prepared for its February meeting, whilst its deliberations were briefly noted at the Central Regional Committee in the same month, for whom I had also prepared a ten page summary of my Chartered Institute of Housing dissertation on race equality issues. GPT's February meeting indicates for the first time

the consideration of a specialist approach to equal opportunities within the organisation, since it was agreed that an existing member of staff should have race equality issues (although not explicitly wider equal opportunities issues) added to her/his 'normal' duties. In effect this required attendance at Housing Management Policy Group (HMPG) in a purely advisory role.

It was agreed that the Central Region would contribute the member of staff to perform this role, as there were now two minority ethnic committee members and a number of staff who had a particular interest in 'racial' issues within that area. The ancillary race advisor duties were then offered to me as an addition to my housing management work within the City Office. The rationale for this choice was not revealed to me. However senior officers, albeit not in attendance at the GPT meeting, suggested that my interest in equal opportunities issues and recent completion of a CIH dissertation around race equality issues were important influences upon the appointment. Applications were not invited from other members of staff who might wish to fulfill this role, despite its equal opportunities focus.

Subsequently the Association's Board of Management decided to consider race equality issues at the plenary session of its Annual General Meeting in March. Following a request from the Board, I prepared a paper with the Central Regional

Housing Manager. The paper was intended to stimulate discussion on the issue of race equality in access to the Association's accommodation, by highlighting issues which the authors felt represented weaknesses in the Association's existing performance. One potential remedy identified in the paper was the creation of a separate specialist post, (although funded through the organisation's Charitable Trust rather than through mainstream funding), in order to research equal opportunities issues within the Association.

The opportunity for a housing officer to attend a Board of Management meeting and propose additions to the organisational structure could be seen as reflecting a formal opportunity space, and the empowerment of a junior gatekeeper by sympathetic senior managers. Equally my desire to stimulate the introduction of new formal race equality strategies within the organisation, suggests a self-perception of the fragility of informal approaches. Indeed the vulnerability of real and potential informal gains was demonstrated at the meeting by the intervention of ACAD, a right wing academic and Board member. He forcefully argued against the suggested race equality initiatives, although it was not clear from the meeting whether his views opposing the creation of a specialist post prevailed at this time.

Nevertheless since the responsibilities of providing race equality advice soon appeared to be greater than the

resources available in the ancillary role which I had been given, the HMPG recommended that the Association should introduce a full-time equal opportunities post. This was a view which also seemed to be held outside HMPG, since at the request of two of the Association's six directors I prepared a paper presenting the case for a separate equal opportunities post for consideration by the GPT prior to their May meeting. I suggested that a post was particularly needed because:

i) The CRE's Code of Practice was more radical than anticipated and has highlighted a considerable number of areas in which the Association falls short.

ii) Consequently the workload is greater than could be realistically tackled whilst carrying out the duties of a Housing Management Officer, particularly since no extra resources have been provided to lighten my workload as a Housing Management Officer.

iii) It has been unclear whether my role would be to ensure that the Association's policies pay attention to good practice or to initiate patterns of working to ensure that good practice is achieved.

Given the pressure of workload on other departments and offices the latter would seem to be the only effective way of improving the Association's performance on racial equality however the input of time which would be required does not make it feasible.

iv) Despite my place in the Housing Management Policy Group the access to decision making bodies and availability of delegated authority to action items has not become clear.

v) Finally the action plan approved by Group Policy Team in February appears to have only been taken on board in a limited form by the regions.

(Report submitted to Group Policy Team May 1991)

At the GPT meeting the Chief Executive argued that it was essential that the Association showed a commitment to improving its race equality and equal opportunity performance, 'in order to do that, action plans must not merely be written, but acted upon with demonstrable results' (Byrds Housing Association GPT minute 91/86).

Subsequently it was agreed that I should be seconded full-time to the Corporate Planning Team for 6-12 months on terms to be agreed with the Corporate Planning Director, with the requirement that I should produce a new equal opportunities action plan. The Chief Executive emphasised that the resource established must be creative, and not simply an extension of the audit process. He argued that a separate post was clearly needed to comply with the requirements of the CRE's (1991a) *Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing*, in particular the development of good practice within the Association and the construction of a database.

The May 1991 Board of Management meeting agreed that these recommendations would be channelled through the Regional Committees before being presented in detail to the Board of Management in July. ACAD was the only vocal dissenter, and in an apparent concession to his objections the Board agreed that he should take a special interest in the development of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor. He effectively became the Board of Management's shadow to the EOA.

Subsequently a meeting with ACAD took place at the instigation of the Association's Corporate Planning Director to discuss the draft version of the twelve month workplan which was due to be presented to the Association's July Board of Management meeting. The details of this meeting are discussed later in this chapter.

The Equal Opportunities Advisor's role specification and workplan (appendices 1 and 2) were agreed by the Board in July. The post's objectives stressed the need for the EOA to:

6.1 Provide effective systems and procedures to meet the Housing Corporation's Performance Expectations on Racial Equality and Equal Opportunity

6.2 Provide effective systems and procedures to meet the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Code of Practice in rented housing [sic]

6.3 Liaise with the Corporate Planning Director, policy advisors and other staff members at all levels within the Association to implement new systems and procedures in the different functions.

(Equal Opportunities Advisor's job description 18/7/91)

The post would be non-operational and advisory, initially operating for twelve months. Therefore there would be no management responsibilities, or power to intervene directly in the work of individual regions.

The non-operational, non-interventionist elements of my job specification were not unique to the post of Equal

Opportunities Advisor. The roles of other Head Office staff such as the Housing Policy Advisor were similarly restricted. However it might be argued that since the organisation employed regional housing management specialists this was a more logical role constraint. I believe that the separation of regional function from central control not only reflected the organisation's decentralised structure, but also demonstrated that individual regions were anxious to protect their autonomy from the centre and their scope to follow individual practices. This could place them at variance with the Association's agreed equal opportunities policies.

My own non-operational role, also seemed to reflect the wish of the Corporate Planning Director to prevent me from becoming enmeshed in detailed policy areas. This would leave me with greater time to develop new policy initiatives within the restricted term of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor. I recognised the dangers of preventing ownership of the equal opportunities policy by interference in regional equal opportunities work. Nonetheless I felt that regional expertise in equal opportunities matters was so low, that intervention was necessary in order to ensure the implementation and ownership of policies such as target setting.

The creation of the post of EOA was coincidental with the decision to produce a Corporate Plan. Therefore consideration of equal opportunities issues might be seen as part of a wider evaluation of organisational policy. The Corporate Planning Director and the Central Regional Director suggested that the post was intended to translate policies into practice and to meet the best practice requirements of the NFHA and Housing Corporation. However, there were arguably more specific explanations for the development of equal opportunities initiatives at this time. Despite the designation of the post as Equal Opportunities Advisor, there was a clear initial emphasis upon the need to address race equality issues. This appeared to reflect an assessment of the priorities of the Housing Corporation, and as stated by the Chief Executive the publication of the CRE's (1991a) *Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing*. However the introduction and direction of the post may also have been influenced by rumours of the impending CRE housing association investigation.

Therefore the Association's renewed commitment to equal opportunities might be seen as the product of institutional pressures upon the organisation which a (white) officer was able to exploit for career development. It might alternatively be considered a product of the momentum created by a change activist at a junior organisational level.

During April 1992, towards the end of the twelve month equal opportunities workplan, the Group Policy Team made a request to the Board of Management that the post should be extended for a further twelve months due to 'good progress' in equal opportunities matters and to prevent this momentum being lost. However agreement was only secured to extend the post until the end of 1992, at which point a decision would be made as to whether permanent arrangements were necessary. It seemed unlikely following discussions with senior officers that the post would be extended further, and when I consequently left the Association prior to the planned completion of the equal opportunities workplan, the post was abolished.

It might be argued that the time limits on the post gave an urgency to the equal opportunities debate which would not otherwise have existed. It might also be argued that despite my junior status as a seconded employee in terms of salary and grade, the equal opportunities mandate from the Board provided me with negotiating power over higher paid colleagues. Indeed the Corporate Planning Director believed that I enjoyed wider access to meetings and individual decision makers than any other officer below Director level.

However I find the opinion of the Technical Policy Advisor more persuasive in view of the difficulties I faced in

implementing my workplan. He suggested that my junior status as a seconded Housing Management Officer meant that some staff would not prioritise equal opportunities matters because of the Association's organisational culture of deference to hierarchical control. It might be argued that members of staff judged the organisational importance of equal opportunities by the rank and resources devoted by senior gatekeepers to my secondment.

The uncertainty of the long term future of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor hindered strategic equal opportunities planning, leading me to prioritise measures designed to produce visible short term gain. Indeed the designation of the post as being of temporary status may have encouraged opponents of equal opportunities to obstruct new initiatives, and to hope that the pressure to implement new equal opportunities policies would wither at the end of the twelve month programme. Other staff, whilst sympathetic or neutral to equal opportunities may simply have viewed the twelve month mandate as ambivalent support for equal opportunities and continued to prioritise other areas of 'core' work.

Opportunities and constraints originating from the Board of Management

The need to shadow the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor with a Board member, mandated to take a special interest in the development of the post might be questioned given that the EOA already fell within the organisational management structure. It was an arrangement which was unique to this post, and as such could be construed as administering balance and 'fair play' in an institutionally racist way, potentially creating inertia in a superficially progressive equal opportunities workplan.

The meeting between ACAD, the Corporate Planning Director and myself, prior to July's Board of Management discussions, produced a forthright discussion regarding the proposed workplan and equal opportunities issues. As a result, the opportunities and constraints originating from the Board of Management which surrounded my role as Equal Opportunities Advisor began to become clear, and some areas of my Board paper were rewritten to take account of ACAD's comments.

ACAD was particularly concerned regarding the issues of contract compliance, my politicised use of language, and the breadth of remit for the post. I was proposing that the Association should implement contract compliance to ensure that only contractors and consultants which operated equal

opportunities policies were used for maintenance or new building works. ACAD felt that this would require the Association to perform a policing role which would be an inappropriate function for the organisation. Since the Corporate Planning Director and myself both pointed out that the Housing Corporation's *Performance Expectations* (1989) required the Association to implement contract compliance, ACAD agreed that it should remain as a recommendation within my submitted Board paper. However, his objections to contract compliance were to be noted in an introduction to the paper alongside a request that the issue should be given careful thought. This reflected ACAD's concern that he would not be able to attend the Board meeting himself to address the issue.

The contract compliance proposals were subsequently deferred at the Board of Management meeting as a result of ACAD's recorded concerns and were not implemented for a further twelve months. ACAD was also keen to emphasise that the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor should not become a post of Race Equality Advisor. I agreed with this point and was careful to emphasise a commitment to equal opportunities for all groups within my workplan. However, race issues retained primacy in line with the directions of the Housing Corporation and the internal priorities of the management structure of Byrds Housing Association.

The six points which were rewritten in the workplan as a result of the meeting are shown below. The sections which were rewritten or amended are indicated by italics where the original was deleted, and/or highlighted in bold to indicate additions:

2.12 Ensuring that membership of relevant voluntary committees of the Association reflects the ethnic composition of the areas in which the Association works where suitable members of the community are available

4.1 (xiii) Establishment of positive action programmes to ensure equal access to social housing, to good quality housing and involvement in the management of social housing. This could be by the development of referral networks and presentations to raise the Association's profile in the black and ethnic minority community, and identification of resources from other organisations which could be used e.g. CRC's and REC's. However the Association should be aware of CRE advice regarding the parameters within which positive action is legal.

4.2 (iii) Action to make the contractors that the Association uses more representative of the whole community by attracting new black and female contractors onto the Association's approved lists. The Association could hold open days with other local associations in a district in order to promote their activities and attract black and female builders. It should develop monitoring systems to examine the use of new contractors.

4.2 (iii) Action to ensure that ethnic minority and female contractors enjoy equal access to the Association's approved lists. The Association could hold open days with other local associations in a district in order to promote their activities and attract ethnic minority and female builders. It should develop monitoring systems to examine the use of new contractors.

4.3 (iv e) Develop contacts with black caucus "caucus", other ethnic minority groupings and FBHO to publicise the Association.

4.4 (iv) Develop good practice on the equal opportunities image that the Association projects to

new and existing clients in its reception areas by its displays and notice boards.
For example, Notting Hill Housing Trust prominently displays a sign setting out its equal opportunities policy and pointing out that anyone acting in a racist or sexist manner will be asked to leave the building.
[The second paragraph was deleted.]

6. The CRE advises that where target setting is implemented, the targets set should reflect the socio-economic position of the black ethnic minority community in addition to a head count of the local population.

I.e. given that the Association seeks to help those in the greatest need and the black community is most ethnic minority groups are overrepresented in this group then the targets set should be ~~may~~ be higher than merely the ethnic minority representation of the black population in the local population.

(Equal Opportunities Advisor's draft and final twelve month workplan)

The long-term impact of the revisions to these specific policy areas is hard to discern. Nevertheless they clearly limit the scope of the equal opportunities workplan within the conceptual parameters of a liberal approach to change. Those elements which offered radical potential were rejected. Didactic emphasis was replaced by ambiguous wording which could provide a loophole for uncommitted staff to avoid implementing the suggested equal opportunities policies. The revised wording might also fail to communicate a strong organisational commitment to equal opportunities.

The meeting with ACAD began to clarify the role that he would take in my equal opportunities work, which had not previously been specified by the Board to the Corporate Planning Team. Despite his opposition to the creation of the

post, ACAD would not present a complete block to equality initiatives, preferring to challenge them in debate at the Board of Management. As he noted in a letter following the meeting:

It is clear that a number of the aspects of policy and procedure which I find astonishing and regrettable are in fact part of the codes of practice issued by the CRE and the Housing Corporation, I hope that in so far as these codes are voluntary that the board will not automatically adhere to them merely because they have been handed down from on high, but will have given them the closest of scrutiny. However I note what you and [the Corporate Planning Director] said to me about the likely consequences of funding proposals of any deviation from their suggestions.

(Letter to EOA 7/91)

I had no further contact with ACAD until a meeting arranged to consider the draft six month progress report which I was preparing on the development of my equal opportunities work. This was due to be presented to the Association's Board of Management. The use of the term 'black' was again successfully challenged by ACAD and the issue of contract compliance extensively debated. However once the liberal principles of the policy had been reaffirmed, the meeting was non-contentious. This might be seen as reflecting a context of institutional racism, because the radical policies which might have most effectively tackled disadvantage were rejected as placing an unreasonable burden on the organisation and upon individual officers. By implication the Association would only formally accept

ameliorative policy measures, implemented within a framework which was an initial contributor to that disadvantage.

ACAD's continued opposition to the issue of contract compliance led to the creation of a shortlived Equal Opportunities Working Party. One of the papers discussed at the only meeting of this group was the future of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor, subsequent to the agreed twelve month secondment. ACAD argued that equal opportunities matters should become everyday issues for all staff. Therefore there should not be a separate equal opportunities post, since this would hamper the integration of equality issues into everyone's work. Whilst his opposition to a separate post was challenged, ACAD's comments highlight that the closest Board member to the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor expressed continued opposition to its existence. The freedom of action of the Equal Opportunities Advisor is clearly structured and constrained within this context, particularly in comparison with the discretion of the junior change activist. I was particularly frustrated by a subjective belief that I spent more time writing progress reports and justifying the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor, than I was able to devote to equal opportunities initiatives.

Nevertheless ACAD did not seek to exercise his power as a senior gatekeeper to prevent me from raising particular

policy items at Board Room level. In fact he often remarked that his views were in the minority at the Board, and consequently any objections that he made to equal opportunities policies would be overruled. Nevertheless it seemed to me, as if he was capable of exercising a powerful gatekeeping role at Board Room level. This was particularly the case because his views were not typically counterbalanced by radical views in support of equal opportunities policies. The Board Room debates around equal opportunities (perhaps not uniquely) were also characterised by relatively few interventions, increasing the relative importance of his views. Those passive Board members can be seen as part of a structure of institutional racism through their willingness to let racial disadvantage go unchallenged. Therefore a power vacuum was created which ACAD was able to exploit either consciously or unconsciously to gain acceptance for his views.

The Chair who exercised the most important gatekeeping function can either be seen as taking note of ACAD's objections in order to preserve harmony on the Board, or as arguably reflecting ambivalent support for equal opportunities issues. These power relationships enabled ACAD to make 'common sense' points regarding equal opportunities. This was demonstrated in the debate on equal opportunities target setting where his views could have been effectively challenged if other members had possessed relevant

expertise. Nevertheless when a Central Regional Committee member (NCM) with those interests was added to the Board, his influence was reduced by a reflexive awareness of the political sensitivity of his role as the Association's first minority ethnic Board member.

ACAD's influence might also be demonstrated by the extent to which I amended my behaviour to anticipate his reaction to policy proposals. I began the role wary of, and committed to combating his reported views. Whilst I did not discard individual policies because of an assumption of his likely response, there were occasions when I developed policies in a way designed to ensure their approval. For example I presented contract compliance as a requirement of the Housing Corporation, rather than a moral imperative.

The reaction of the Corporate Planning Director and myself to the interest of NCM in influencing the equal opportunities programme, might be seen as a clearer example of ACAD's underlying influence. I was also interested in meeting NCM, to lobby support for the continuation of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor. However, his offer to become a joint shadow to my post with ACAD was not pursued, particularly because of the concern of the Corporate Planning Director that NCM would seek a more interventionist role in the work than ACAD. This perception reflected NCM's interest in equal opportunities issues. We considered that

ACAD might also object to NCM's involvement, leading to political wrangling at Board Room level. Whilst this demonstrated nondecision making, it is clear that it was felt within the Corporate Planning Team that the role of Equal Opportunities Advisor had a degree of freedom which was worth preserving.

There was day to day discretion for the Equal Opportunities Advisor to develop and implement an organisational equal opportunities policy. The resulting opportunities were in some respects more far reaching than the housing officer's change activism, since they ambitiously sought to influence the policies of the whole organisation. Nevertheless discretion was also more closely delineated. Whereas my position as a junior gatekeeper had conferred a degree of invisibility and safety upon my initiatives, I could now be clearly observed by the Corporate Planning Team, senior management and the Board itself.

My reduced scope for discretionary action might be viewed as a reflection of job specification, and the smaller degree of role based discretion required within the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor than in the street-level bureaucracy of housing management. In Lipsky's terms the Equal Opportunities Advisor does not require discretion to the same extent as the housing officer who is forced into ad hoc action through the necessities of customer service delivery.

Whilst the EOA is ultimately concerned with providing a customer service, the point of customer contact is far removed from the limits of the EOA's job specification. These conclusions suggest that the paradigm of the organisational power vacuum and in particular the potential for change activists to exploit opportunity space is only pertinent to posts which are analogous to Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucrats, since other employees will not have discretion which they are able to exploit.

However, the relative amounts of discretion which I experienced within different posts could alternatively be a reflection of the organisational distance from supervisory gaze. Within this interpretation the constraints upon the EOA's freedom to direct policy were specific to the pressures upon that officer at that time and should not be generalised. Therefore any junior employee might find an opportunity space to exploit, irrespective of their service role. Indeed it does seem likely that whilst the street-level bureaucrat will have more scope for change activism because of the need for workplace discretion, there will also still be opportunities for other junior employees to intervene in unofficial policy making where they can find an opportunity space.

Ironically the long, and also rather loose chain of equal opportunities policy implementation at Byrds Housing

Association, flowing from the EOA to the customer, can be seen as providing officers with the opportunity to corrupt my formal equality initiatives. This might facilitate change activists seeking to free radical policy elements from organisational constraints, or officers opposed to organisational change seeking to obstruct the policy. The opportunities to disrupt equal opportunities policy were exaggerated by the absence of elements of Mason and Jewson's (1992) equal opportunities implementation framework, notably powers of investigation and report.

ACAD exerted a powerful influence on equal opportunities policies as a senior figure within the Association. His ability to intervene within the decision making process and affect the distribution of resources and policy direction indicates that he should be recognised as an organisational gatekeeper. ACAD's influence was increased by the composition of personnel on the Association's decision making bodies and particularly the lack of equal opportunities expertise throughout the organisational hierarchy.

It is not clear whether the presence of a job 'shadow' provided greater constraints than the Equal Opportunities Advisor would inevitably have faced in a relatively tight supervisory structure. Nevertheless the antithetical views of the 'shadow' are perhaps more clearly seen as a

constraint if alternative scenarios are hypothesised. For example the change potential enjoyed by the Equal Opportunities Advisor might have been far greater had the shadow been committed to realising radical equal opportunities objectives. In this scenario equal opportunities change might have been driven more forcefully throughout the organisation, through a clearer hierarchical lead. The reality was a somewhat clouded message resulting from the appointment as a shadow to the Association's Equal Opportunities Advisor of a Board member who opposed that very post's existence.

The Commission for Racial Equality investigation

The Association's role in the CRE's housing association investigation also demonstrates a divergence between the potential and realisation of equal opportunities change. The CRE announced in the housing press (Housing Associations Weekly 1991: 1-2) that it intended to assess the race equality performance of forty housing associations across England, Scotland and Wales. It was seeking to use the investigation to ensure that policies were being translated into practice and that the best practice requirements of the NFHA and Housing Corporation were being met. Similar objectives had been identified within Byrds Housing

Association as leading to the development of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor.

Indeed the creation of the post coincided with the CRE's announcement that it wished to include the Association in its investigation. This provided me with an opportunity to study the influence of a major institutional player upon the promotion of race equality strategies within a smaller organisation. It also offered an external perspective on the Association's race equality performance, to balance my own perception which was influenced by personal involvement in policy development.

The stated aims of the CRE's investigation were:

to conduct a thorough audit of housing association policies and practices within the framework of the Race Relations Act. Our aim was to isolate the problems encountered by associations and to provide practical solutions to these problems. We also aimed to identify examples of good practice. The report will provide a definite source of advice on the detailed implementation of race equality in housing associations and will thus fill an important gap in the range of existing advisory literature.

(CRE draft report to Byrds Housing Association 8/92: 2-3)

Byrds Housing Association accepted the CRE's invitation to take part in the investigation, the Chief Executive noting:

I assume that you will wish to look at our work in the [City and neighbouring area] rather than on a national basis.

(Chief Executive letter to CRE 6/91)

There was some basis for this assumption because the City area was one of the locations targeted by the investigation and was also the location of the Association's Head Office. However Byrds also worked within two other areas which the CRE had publicly announced would be studied. The Chief Executive's 'assumption' was considered by two of the Association's Directors to be an attempt to direct the investigation to the region with the strongest race equality performance. This may have represented a choice by senior gatekeepers within the Association to try and limit any CRE criticism of Byrds' performance, rather than expose the Association to a thorough and revealing audit of its equal opportunities work.

Whilst I was keen for the Association to receive a report acknowledging its progress in equal opportunities matters, I was also keen to direct the CRE to shortfalls within Byrds' equal opportunities provision. I believed that an accurate audit of the Association's equal opportunities work would encourage its Board of Management to continue to devote resources to equal opportunities policies and strengthen my own position as Equal Opportunities Advisor.

I felt that these aims could be achieved without detrimentally affecting the Association's reputation or position with the Housing Corporation. Other members of the

Corporate Planning Team, including the Corporate Planning Director, also wished to see the CRE's investigation implemented to support progress in the Association's equal opportunities work. To achieve a complete picture of Byrds' performance, the CRE would have to be directed away from the Central region to individuals and areas where the Association's equal opportunities policies were arguably not owned to the same extent. Therefore there were differences between the Chief Executive's aspiration that the investigation should reflect the strengths of the organisation and the desire of some other members of staff to highlight shortfalls in performance as part of a process of change.

At the request of the CRE the Association agreed to provide a contact point, (the EOA), in order to facilitate and arrange interviews and meetings between staff, as well as to provide background information for the investigation. For example I also provided the CRE with copies of ethnic monitoring reports which had been considered by the Central Regional Committee. This formed the greatest part of the limited amount of statistical material which the CRE examined during the investigation. The CRE noted that its field work, comprising a questionnaire and interviews with staff, was due to be completed by November 1991, a draft report completed for the Association's consideration by

February 1992 and its agreed report published in the late spring of 1992.

The proposed interview schedule included service providers within the City Office, and staff who would provide the CRE with an organisational overview from a corporate level. The CRE outlined the possibility of extending the investigation to the Association's national performance, although it did not do so in practice. Nor did they collectively carry out interviews with minority ethnic staff regarding the Association's race equality performance, despite suggestions from myself and some initial interest in doing so.

The first stage of the investigation was the completion of a sixteen page questionnaire:

aimed primarily at the corporate policy of your association. However where there are regional variations you should also try and supply the necessary information and submit relevant documents in relation to these.

(CRE letter to Regional Director 7/91)

The Association's devolved structure and operations meant that there were substantial regional variations in its operational practices. It was therefore difficult to comply with the requirements of the CRE outlined above, whilst also complying with the stated wishes of the Chief Executive that the investigation should focus upon the Association's activities in the Central region. Consequently senior

regional staff agreed that I should complete the questionnaire on the basis of Central regional performance, whilst including an acknowledgment to that effect.

Following the completion of the questionnaire, I prepared detailed background information for each set of interviewees to meet their concern that they should be able to accurately represent the policies of the Association. In addition staff at the City Office drew up their own list of resources which they felt were necessary to adequately prepare them for the interviews. This reflected the gravity with which the investigation was being viewed by some of the Association's staff, as well as shortfalls in existing knowledge and practice. The majority of my work as Equal Opportunities Advisor at this time was devoted to the CRE investigation.

After each interview had taken place between an Association staff member and the CRE, I contacted the interviewee and discussed the interview with them. This provided me with details of the questions asked, answers given and general impressions of the interview. This enabled me to brief staff who were due to be interviewed by the CRE on potential question areas and also to obtain further research evidence for this thesis. The interviewee was informed that I was collecting the data to advise other possible interviewees, and open questions were used to minimise the risk of questioner influence. Staff below director level volunteered

the greatest amount of information, but most seemed keen to talk about the interview in a candid manner, indicating areas of concern which had arisen. It is possible that interviewees' answers were distorted by a wish to vindicate their responses to the CRE, or a belief that they could not trust me with particular items of information. In order to overcome these potential limitations, I tried to speak to interviewees as soon as possible after the interview process to minimise the time which they had to rationalise their interviews. The consistency of themes which emerged from the interview process indicated to me that I was generally receiving genuine responses.

The key themes from interviewees' information involved issues of policy ownership. One employee had informed the CRE that staff within the organisation had not been used to thinking in terms of equal opportunities until quite recently. Similarly within my own interview with the CRE, the interviewer argued that employees remained unaware of the details of the Association's equal opportunities policy. He stated that interviewees were referring questions back to me rather than accepting policy responsibility themselves. The CRE felt that this provided a clear contrast with other associations, where individual members of staff had taken a greater degree of responsibility for the equal opportunities policy. However, the CRE also seemed to feel that in other respects too much autonomy was provided to regional teams.

In particular it was concerned that monitoring the implementation of the Association's racial harassment policy was the responsibility of Regional Housing Managers, rather than being controlled within Head Office by the Housing Policy Advisor.

The interview with the Central Regional Director suggested that the CRE had further concerns regarding the relationship between the Association's Head Office and its regions. Within this interview the CRE had focused upon the direction and instructions provided by the Chief Executive to the Regional Directors and their Regional Committees. It had sought to examine the methods which the Chief Executive used to increase the profile of equal opportunities within the organisation. The Regional Director had informed the CRE that in the mid to late 80s he felt that the Association had been making progress on equal opportunities issues which had been slowed down by organisational restructuring. He now felt that progress had been resumed.

My attendance at the interview between the CRE and NCM provided a further perspective on the race equality performance of the Association. It also provided an alternative to the explanations which I had been previously given for the introduction of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor:

CRE: How aware is the Board of equal opportunity issues?

NCM: It is very early days for me to comment. I enjoyed discussing issues on Regional Committee. I sensed from the management, the paid management, that they mean business, the programme from the Equal Opportunities Advisor was so good: although I wondered whether it could be accomplished because of its scope or whether we were just having a paper for paper's sake. The overwhelming number of Board and Committee members were thinking positively.

CRE: We have concern about the post. Our concern is it is only a 12 month secondment. Our experience is 12 months is never enough for someone to get equal opportunities going. If you start something that everyone is interested in and then remove the main person then the issues will die. What do you think?

NCM: I made that point at the last Board meeting, that is why the Committee [Equal Opportunities Working Party] was established. Personally I feel that if the Board is committed to pursuing this matter then it must have the right structure and someone organising the structure and monitoring. I will be saying we need someone permanent. Luckily I was in the right place at the right time.

CRE: Your impression of the Association's commitment to race equality?

NCM: I am quite experienced, had I sensed that they were not committed then I would not have joined them. I do not want to be a zoo specimen.

CRE: What is the level of discussion? Do people feel comfortable or nervous, or reluctant to express their views?...

NCM: On race: we had an equal opportunities paper. It was unanimously endorsed. There was a full discussion.

CRE: There are no barriers at all?

NCM: I can't say what will happen now we have the policy, how it will be implemented. There is no blockage at the policy end. I do know that [...] asked them to look at a scheme for Asian elders and the organisation established the scheme.

CRE: What is the level of race awareness of other Board members?

NCM: The Equal Opportunities Advisor will run sessions for half a day where the Board will receive race equality training. On the Regional Committee I pushed the issue and in response to that the advisor was appointed. Within one year we have a policy, we have a structured awareness and training. I don't know whether officers have been to race awareness in the past.

CRE: Are there any general initiatives that could improve the Association's position?

NCM: I would like to see a more positive policy, that policy to be implemented and for it to be monitored once that policy has started working, and a fair and balanced representation at Board, senior officer and junior officer levels. Also the encouragement of black contractors. The crucial thing is for policy to be enforced. I do not want to become a Board member if I think that they are dumping the policy. In any organisation financed by the Housing Corporation the Board should reflect the balance of the community and be paid. I would like the organisation to be more positive to black associations. We should be a leading association....If I wanted to start a housing association I would be in cuckoo land. White people are much more organised than us. [Byrds] have been much more helpful....Given the choice of other organisations I would prefer [Byrds]. They have responded very effectively. [The Chief Executive] said he was very glad for the balance at the January Board meeting.

(Interview between CRE and NCM)

A delay in the timetable for receipt of the CRE's report was revealed to the Association's Board of Management meeting in May. Since the Board of Management were due to consider the future of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor at this meeting, the Corporate Planning Director and myself had been anxious to find a way of drawing the Board's attention to the continuing investigation. In the absence of the completed report the CRE offered the Board some limited advice:

I have recently been informed by "the Corporate Planning Director" that there will be a Board of Management meeting on 21 May to consider a report prepared to outline the implementation of your Equal Opportunities Policy and to review the Equal Opportunities Officer Post.

Given that the Commission's draft report following our formal investigation into your Association, will not be completed until June, I am writing to ask you to consider carefully the following points:-

1 The Commission supports, in principle the creation of the Equal Opportunities Officer post.

2 You should note that the development of an effective Equal Opportunities Policy, requires considerably more time than twelve months.

3 We will of course, be making further and more detailed recommendations, affecting all areas of [the Association's] work. It is therefore, inappropriate for us to table all our recommendations at this stage.

(CRE letter to Byrds' Chief Executive 5/92)

The CRE draft report was finally received at the end of August, on my final day of employment for the Association. The CRE made a number of policy and implementation recommendations within its report, although in many cases the Association's equal opportunities initiatives had already superseded the investigation. Only a few proposals genuinely identified a shortfall. These highlighted specific details of an existing policy or a new perspective upon a policy area which was proving difficult to satisfactorily progress within organisational policy constraints. For example the CRE identified in detail the necessity for more comprehensive and systematic monitoring systems. Whilst this was already being addressed by the Association, the CRE suggested a more radical means of achieving effective

monitoring than I had felt that it was politic to suggest within internal documents. The CRE proposed that specific monitoring duties should be added to particular officers' job descriptions, to ensure responsibility for implementing the monitoring process. Similarly the CRE recommended a more radical means of recruiting minority ethnic committee members through the use of advertising, than I had gauged would be acceptable to raise within the Equal Opportunities Advisor's action plan. This proposal, which challenged those existing practices which had contributed to a predominantly white male management structure, stimulated some resistance within the organisation. This represented opposition to initiatives which aimed to tackle inequalities within the power base of the Association and consequently could be construed as reflecting institutional racism.

The CRE report also provided a reminder of some fundamental concepts. It noted that the Association should be assessing minority ethnic housing needs within its development process. This provided a useful restatement of a feature of the original workplan which had not been systematically implemented, indicating that equal opportunities had still not permeated all aspects of the Association. Likewise the CRE by stating the importance of employment targets, inadvertently drew attention to an implementation gap in the practice of target setting which is discussed below with respect to the Southern region. They also drew attention to

a performance concern which I was not able to address because of the non-operational role of the EOA. This was the failure of the Southern Region to select any of the 65 minority ethnic candidates applying for employment in 1991 for appointment. Within a relatively brief organisational overview the following points were made:

There is a need to decentralise the responsibilities for the implementation of equal opportunities policy in line with the structure of the organisation:

- Regional Directors should take responsibility for equal opportunity matters in their respective regions.
- The five Regional (or Liaison) officers should be responsible for day-to-day implementation of the policy in their regions.
- One member of the Corporate Planning Team ie the Equal Opportunities Advisor, should be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the policy across the Association.
- The Chief Executive should continue to have overall responsibility for the policy.
(CRE draft report to Byrds Housing Association 8/92: 26)

Once again the CRE's comments reflected processes of change which were already taking place and which were finally formalised within a comprehensive equal opportunities document which was issued in November 1993.

The process of enhancing the role of the staff who had agreed to act as a contact for equal opportunities policies within their region was already being progressed as a means of establishing regional ownership for the equal

opportunities policy. However, in practice this was a means of phasing out the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor, rather than complementing it. Consequently responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the equal opportunities policy was designated to the Corporate Planning Director.

The ability of the CRE's investigation to bring about organisational change within the Association was lessened by a number of factors which undermined the legitimacy of the investigation and arguably its findings. The presence of four CRE staff at some interviews created the impression of a formal investigation, rather than the informal consultancy suggested by the CRE prior to its questionnaire. Some interviewees felt that the CRE was trying 'to catch them out' and identify malpractice. This may be an accurate perception of the investigation. However it may simply represent an incompatibility between the CRE's aim of examining the practices followed by individual gatekeepers, and the gatekeepers' fear of being held responsible for bad practice.

The CRE's request that Association staff should be interviewed alone also became a cause of dissent, and consequently a further loss of legitimacy. Some members of staff requested my presence as an advisor at interviews. In the case of ACAD the 'watcher' potentially became the

'watched', as the Association requested that I should attend his interview to present official organisational policy should he digress into personal opinion. In reality ACAD appeared to be particularly sensitive to the danger of embarrassing the Association.

The CRE not only vehemently opposed requests that I should attend interviews, but also objected to the demand of the Association's Chief Executive and Chair that they should be interviewed together. This may have indicated that the CRE, in some ways, felt as vulnerable within the investigation as some officers of the Association. Irrespective of the motivation for the requests and objections concerning my attendance at interviews, the outcome appeared to be a trial of organisational strength. For example after vacillating as to whether they wanted to interview either person, the CRE decided that it wished to separately interview Byrds' Chief Executive and Chair. The Association secured concessions that not only could they be interviewed together, but that the Equal Opportunities Advisor should also be present. Once this privilege had been secured, the Chief Executive announced that I would not be required to attend.

The Corporate Planning Director and I became increasingly frustrated by the CRE's delay in completing its draft report. We felt that their failure to keep to their stated timetable for the production of the report was undermining

its credibility. The delays to the report also threatened the opportunities provided by the original publication timetable. This had offered the chance of incorporating the CRE's findings into my twelve month review of the Association's equal opportunities progress. Indeed it had been envisaged that the CRE investigation might facilitate the extension of the post beyond its initial term.

The CRE were made aware of the vulnerability of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor by a number of staff, and the intention of the Corporate Planning Team to use its report to argue for the continuation of the post. However, it is not clear whether it was aware of the extent to which this shaped the increasingly irritated response of the Corporate Planning Team to delays in the presentation of the investigation's findings. These were attributed within the Association to the CRE's inefficiency, which it was felt would delay the publication of its findings beyond the point where they could be used to support the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor.

Consequently a degree of antipathy began to develop between individual officers of the Association and the CRE with respect to the conduct of the investigation, and its value to Byrds. However, these views were not necessarily apparent within individual interviews. Byrds' Corporate Planning Director, Chair and Chief Executive all appeared to take

part in completely amicable interviews with the CRE, despite expressing antagonistic views prior to their meetings. Since these antithetical views were quite openly expressed within the workplace, it is interesting to examine why there was a dichotomy between expressed opinions within the organisation and reported attitudes within face to face meetings.

First, within the interviews which I observed, the CRE's administrative vacillation was replaced with a far more business-like attitude. This is likely to have diluted preconceived opinions. Secondly, the senior officers of the Association had not directly experienced the bulk of the CRE's administrative disarray and their personal antipathy was possibly as a consequence not deeply rooted. Therefore there was probably some scope for the antagonism which existed to be dissipated. Thirdly, personal contacts between the Chair and Chief Executive of the Association and the CRE led to concessions regarding the conduct of the interviews. As a result the post interview bonhomie of the Association's staff can be perceived as the generosity dispensed by the victors of an institutional power game. A further possibility is that during and subsequent to the interview, Byrd's senior gatekeepers simply adopted the language of equality because it became politically expedient for the organisation to do so. The CRE remained a major institutional player within the field of social policy. As

such there may have been a degree of organisational imperative to the implementation of its advice.

Nevertheless a senior member of staff reported to me that the organisational culture of the Association already embodied antipathy to institutions which sought to externally influence its actions. Therefore the CRE's investigation would have to be conducted with particular efficiency to gain legitimacy within the Association. Alternatively the CRE would have to gain acceptance for its conclusions by finding ways of identifying its report with the interests of the Association. The apparent attempts of officers of the Association to manage the geographical scope of the investigation and alter the comparative degrees of power of the parties involved is illustrative of this distrust of external agency. It suggested that the Association's organisational culture remained too closed and inward looking to allow the effective implementation of a wide ranging equal opportunities review which might challenge existing values and existing work practices.

Some of the factors which undermined the legitimacy of the CRE's investigation arguably did affect its ability to act as an agent of change. Its interview strategy certainly prevented it from comprehensively auditing the Association's practices. Whilst there was a desk top audit of Byrds' centrally produced policies, the CRE only examined the

Association's implementation of procedures within one region. Even within that region, there appeared to be a disproportionate emphasis upon the views of senior management, rather than an appraisal of policy implementation. On the Association's criteria, only six of the twenty interviews conducted involved junior staff or staff who were in regular contact with the public. The potential of individual officers to act as social gatekeepers or street-level bureaucrats was consequently understated. Nevertheless the CRE may have been able to satisfy its aim of providing practical solutions to the problems faced by housing associations by pooling knowledge from the range of organisations considered throughout the investigation, in spite of a poor focus on individual associations.

The CRE's analysis of Byrds' race equality performance did not produce suggestions of best practice which had not already been considered by myself or the Corporate Planning Team. However, its institutional influence may have facilitated the implementation of these measures, thereby realising a process of change. For example, the Association quickly endorsed the CRE's recommendation at its interview with Byrds' Chair and Chief Executive, that all Board of Management and Committee reports should highlight the equal opportunities issues of any proposed policy. Nevertheless although the measure was approved, almost all of the

Association's personnel appeared to be untouched by the change. Only a few staff submitted reports to policy making forums, and the policy did not appear to be being adopted by them when I left the Associations' employment.

The delivery of the CRE's draft report on the last day of my participant observation prevents me from firmly concluding whether its 'new' proposals, which I had considered too radical for inclusion within my own workplan, would generally be implemented. However, the CRE's departure from its original investigation timetable clearly prevented the implementation of its recommendations as part of the Association's Equal Opportunities Advisor's work programme. My impression is that the conduct of the investigation also prevented an identification of common purpose between the work of the two organisations which created barriers to the implementation of the CRE's recommendations.

The investigation caused serious disruption to the work of a number of individuals within the Association, and perhaps more significantly also to Byrds' equal opportunities programme, in direct contrast to the CRE's stated commitment to avoid organisational disruption. Consequently many of the Association's staff whom I interviewed believed that the organisational credibility of the CRE had been seriously weakened during the investigation. This arguably provided

opportunities to individuals who wished to undermine the Association's equal opportunities process.

Generally there did not seem to be an appetite within the Association to engage in an open debate with the CRE, for example to uncover weaknesses in organisational equal opportunities policies and practices. This indicates that whilst the organisational premise of an equal opportunities policy was owned at the highest levels of the organisation through the approval of an equal opportunities workplan, the ownership of equal opportunities issues was not deeply rooted. A number of sections of my participant research indicate a willingness to address explicit displays of injustice, for example the Chief Executive's determination to address through contract compliance comments made by contractors which were perceived to be racist. However, the Association does not appear to have possessed a sufficiently open organisational culture to be able to submit itself to a detailed equal opportunities audit. This might have demonstrated the need to tackle vested interests at the very highest levels of the organisation, for example in the selection of committee members. Therefore the process of equal opportunities change within the organisation can at this point be judged to be running ahead of processes of organisational change.

A brief area of discussion between the Association and the CRE concerned an evaluation of employment policies and procedures. One interview conducted by a CRE specialist employment officer with myself and Byrds' Human Resource Manager formed a follow up to questions targeted upon employment within the CRE's original questionnaire. This process adhered to the CRE's original commitment to provide a free consultancy for the Association. The emphasis was upon ways in which the CRE might help the Association to improve its equal opportunities performance, rather than the more aggressive approach adopted throughout the remainder of the investigation. It is beyond the scope of this research to come to any firm conclusions regarding the general efficacy of the two approaches, and whether they met the stated aims of the overall investigation. Nonetheless it seemed as if the more relaxed approach of the employment investigation achieved greater short term success. For example, whilst difficulties were experienced in obtaining conclusive advice with regard to the Association's proposed housing points scheme during the main investigation, practical advice on contract compliance was quickly obtained from the employment officer. This helped Byrds to carry its policy forward to implementation. The Association also agreed to externally advertise all employment posts upon the CRE's recommendation, and was implementing this policy by the end of my first twelve month workplan. The clash of organisational culture which superficially occurred during

the main investigation was not apparent within the employment investigation, nor did it provide the administrative drain on the Association's resources of the main investigation.

Whilst the gap in organisational cultures appeared to provide a corporate barrier to the CRE's overall investigation, there were also three important levels of personal interaction which can be evaluated. First, on a general organisational level, most of the Association's staff seemed to be largely untouched by the investigation. It did not appear to impinge upon their workloads nor did it appear to affect their daily behaviour. From my perception as Equal Opportunities Advisor the investigation did not appear to give any impetus to the Association's equal opportunities work, or to the equal opportunities agenda. In particular there was little additional progress before the CRE's meeting with the Chair and Chief Executive, produced a paper policy change.

There were some individual concerns on the part of staff who were awaiting an individual interview from the CRE, however the investigation did not generate noticeable organisational concern or even particular interest amongst the Association's employees. This was in spite of my efforts to use the staff newsletter to keep the workforce updated with progress in the inquiry. The limited but protracted scope of

the investigation ensured that most staff were unaffected by either the interviews or the CRE's organisational analysis. Nor were they likely to perceive any clear impact upon the work of the Association as a consequence of those interviews which did take place.

The second level of interaction occurred when the CRE investigation addressed Byrds' senior gatekeepers. It appears that the Association sought to establish a position of control within its organisational relationship with the CRE. The debate surrounding my attendance at the interviews which the CRE wished to conduct, initially reflected the genuine concerns of individual members of staff to have access to specialist advice within the interview. However the issue of my attendance arguably became a means of securing an admission from the CRE that the investigation would be conducted on the Association's terms. The organisation therefore asserted a degree of autonomy against the regulation of external agencies such as the CRE.

Thirdly, the investigation *did* appear to have an impact on the small number of individuals interviewed by the CRE, at least at the time that they were interviewed. From the pre-interview briefing sessions which I conducted, I was aware that staff involved in the schedule of appointments regarded it as essential that they should provide an accurate representation of the Association's work. They were

particularly concerned lest any of their individual actions should be judged by the CRE to be discriminatory. It is not clear whether their commitment was manifested by a desire to 'do justice' to the Association's best practice in equal opportunities, or whether it reflected the culture of fear that seemed to be pervasive throughout the Association. A large number of staff certainly appeared to believe that organisational sanctions would be invoked against them for any actions which exposed a poor public image of the Association.

The role of the CRE was important in adding equal opportunities to the agenda of these individuals for a short period of time. However, it was the potential reaction of the Association to poor practice or honest criticism of existing practices which seemed to be of greater individual concern. Staff appeared to believe that this reflected the Association's desire to protect its public image, rather than indicating a concern with equal opportunities best practice per se. Consequently equal opportunities was seen as a short term issue. Individuals would prioritise equal opportunities for as long as their involvement with it remained identifiable and accountable to the Association, in effect until their individual contact with the investigation ceased. At that point they would turn their attention to the next area of organisational priority, which reflected a threat to their own position within the organisation. This

indicates that a strong message of concern was required from the highest levels of the Association to achieve a clear and continuing prioritisation of equal opportunities. This might have been achieved as a result of consistent pressure from the CRE for Byrds to effectively implement its paper policies. However in the absence of an imperative to stimulate future best practice, the CRE investigation and equality issues appeared to become a temporary concern for the vast majority of the Association's staff.

It might be argued that I was the main victim of the delay in the completion of the report. First, I spent considerable amounts of time supporting the administration of the investigation which I could have used to introduce or develop new organisational equality policies. Secondly, the CRE's inability to meet its original timetable for the production of its report also meant that my equal opportunities workplan did not benefit from the impetus which might have been provided by a prompt presentation of findings. Therefore in spite of attempts at academic distance, my assessment of the competency with which the CRE conducted its investigation may not reflect an objective measure of its usefulness to Byrds. Instead it could indicate a view shaped by resentment at the lack of effective support provided by the investigation for the continuation of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor.

The prime aim of the CRE was to produce an organisational audit and not to act as a catalyst to extend the term of the Equal Opportunities Advisor. However because of delays in the investigation, consideration of its findings took place once the main process of equal opportunities organisational change had ended, following the termination of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor. It is probable that this will have weakened the impact of the investigation on the senior management of the Association. Since I was informed on a number of occasions that the CRE wished to see the retention of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor, and had expressed that wish to the Association's Chair and Chief Executive, the effectiveness of their investigation might ultimately be judged by Byrds' decision not to renew the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor.

Whilst its views on the Association's housing points scheme established that there are boundaries to the discretion of the change activist, the CRE's investigation of the Association also had the potential to facilitate change, to open an opportunity space throughout the Association for formal organisational change. For example I believed that it could create an ongoing equal opportunities dynamic whereby officers who would otherwise become change activists would be incorporated within the formal work of the Association. In practice the length of its investigation contributed to a loss of momentum in equal opportunities issues which can be

seen as leading to an outcome of static reassertion. The investigation (heralded by publicity within the Association) may simply have given the *impression* that radical equal opportunities policies were being implemented. Whilst initiatives were developing at this time, the effect of the lengthy investigation may simply have been to lead to an organisational equality fatigue and a barrier to future change.

Target setting

The CRE (1991a) *Race Relations Code of Practice in Rented Housing* and the Housing Corporation's (1989) *Performance Expectations* both recommend that housing associations should implement equal opportunities target setting. However this had not been adopted as a policy by Byrds Housing Association until it was approved, although without specific reference by the Board of Management, as part of the initial equal opportunities workplan. This section charts the development of the paper policy into practical action, as an example of the opportunities and constraints facing the Equal Opportunities Advisor within policy implementation.

Target setting was not simply about complying with the requirements of external agencies such as the CRE or the Housing Corporation. I also believed that its implementation

was essential as a means of achieving improvements in the equal opportunities performance of Byrds Housing Association. This was particularly because of the Association's organisational culture, whereby an item of work would lose priority, or might not be addressed at all, unless a deadline or a sanction was attached to it. Whilst this reflected the pressures of workload on each individual, equal opportunities had fallen outside the dominant performance orientated culture of the organisation. This contributed to the opportunity space for change activists, but reflected the marginalisation of equal opportunities from the daily priorities of most staff. Target setting aimed to secure the commitment of all staff throughout the organisation to clear equality objectives.

The initial thrust of the target setting programme was the quantification of a narrow range of housing management and employment processes where I felt that targets could be relatively easily agreed. The longer-term agenda was to incorporate equal opportunities perspectives throughout the Association's organisational functions, within a system of performance indicators. If reporting cycles for the achievement of targets were established at Board of Management and Regional Committees, then responsibility for achieving targets would be cascaded down the organisational structure and throughout the functional structure, as senior managers sought to achieve targets. Individual staff would

be incorporated into the system through functional objectives within their work teams, and individual objectives via their appraisal system.

Despite the potential of target setting to achieve visible results, the first race equality housing management targets were not formally agreed until April 1992. My decision to postpone the implementation of target setting can partly be explained by Bachrach and Baratz' (1970) nondecision making model, since I perceived that it was a relatively radical measure which most members of the Association would be unfamiliar with in an equal opportunities context. Therefore it was a policy which might attract opposition at a time when I was anxious to record visible equal opportunities successes and demonstrate the effectiveness of the equal opportunities post. In effect gatekeepers of the Association who had blocked equal opportunities policy development in the past, were influencing my subsequent reticence to follow particular patterns of change. It was only in March 1992, that I discovered that an association for whom Byrds acted as management agents within the Southern Region, had already implemented target setting. Other members of the regional team, in addition to Head Office staff also seemed to be unaware of this initiative suggesting the absence of an organisational pool of equal opportunities knowledge, and strongly indicating the importance of a continuing role for the Equal Opportunities Advisor.

The NFHA (1991a) provided two alternative models of target setting. First, it suggested a simple target comprised of the size of the minority ethnic community within a particular locality plus an estimate of its housing 'need'. Whilst the NFHA did not make clear which factors might be considered as comprising housing need, it is implied within the model that they concern measures of the quality of the property rather than social factors such as class or housing preference. Secondly, the NFHA proposed a complex model which was best suited to an Association with a large concentration of stock in one area, access to detailed local population statistics and perhaps local housing research studies. The first model was consistent with the description of target setting within my workplan, and was adopted during the Association's implementation of equal opportunities target setting within the Southern Region. This represented the first notable progress towards the implementation of target setting throughout the Association. However, the process of target setting was shaped by the non-operational constraints upon my role. Whilst I had a Board of Management mandate to implement target setting, I was reliant upon the goodwill of regional staff in order to put the policy into practice. Therefore there was potential for regional diversity in policy implementation which could hamper the development of a standard model for the construction of

targets, and the future comparability of regional performance at corporate level.

The support of the Southern Regional Director was significant in obtaining the agreement of regional housing management staff to the principle of target setting. At the suggestion of the Regional Director targets were set for all boroughs where the Association had a stock of over 50 units. He argued, in accordance with my workplan, that a widely applicable method of calculating targets should be adopted which could be quickly implemented by regional teams. Consequently targets were set at a level of 125% of the minority ethnic population within a particular area, using data obtained from the OPCS Labour Force Studies. Separate targets were agreed for the Association's sheltered and general family accommodation, reflecting the age structure of the minority ethnic community and the differing application and vacancy rates for these types of accommodation. The targets were to be agreed by the Regional Committee and included within their regular consideration of lettings statistics. Hence ownership of the equal opportunities policy would be promoted by ensuring that target setting and equal opportunities became a part of the Association's regular workload, and subject to executive scrutiny.

In areas where nomination rights existed for all its lettings, we agreed that the Association should merely ensure that the local authority's lettings policies met the Association's equal opportunities requirements. I was concerned that this might allow potential areas of discrimination to go unchallenged. However, I had gained acceptance of the principle of target setting, and established a formula for the construction of targets which could be applied to other Association regions. I was not willing to jeopardise this progress by continuing to press issues which would not directly affect the implementation of the main programme of target setting. Nevertheless my acquiescence regarding nominations reflects the limits of my influence within policy implementation.

I perceived that the Eastern Region would be the most difficult region in which to achieve equal opportunities progress, because of the relatively low numbers of minority ethnic people living in its regional centre. As a result I concentrated my regional target setting work in an area where there was a greater minority ethnic population, along with an Association area office. I secured agreement for target setting and supplied census data to the office. However, its prioritisation of workload prevented it from undertaking the local equal opportunities work which was designed to support target setting, for example the establishment of a network of community contacts to generate

housing application forms from minority ethnic communities. Whilst equal opportunities work seemed to be regarded as important by the office, it was also regarded as an additional demand on staff time. The regional staff did not intervene to provide extra resources, emphasise the importance of the equal opportunities issues or deprioritise other areas to facilitate the target setting work.

In contrast to the Eastern Region, the Association's Western Region translated their notional commitment to equal opportunities into practical action. Once again I visited the Regional Office to discuss equal opportunities issues and particularly to focus upon target setting. Within a few days of the meeting I received a set of minutes from the Western Regional Housing Manager confirming the points which we had agreed and demonstrating a clear ownership of equal opportunities issues. This was in spite of appearing to have extremely high pressures of workload within the region. This provided a clear contrast to the Eastern Region where I had produced the minutes of the meeting myself. The minutes of the Western meeting subsequently formed the basis of a paper from the Regional Housing Manager requesting the Regional Committee's agreement to a number of initiatives including lettings targets, community links and equal opportunities discussions with local authorities. The proposals were accepted.

Progress on the issue of target setting was slow within the Central Region, however I believed that this was because of attempts to ensure that individual offices owned the target setting policy. An example of this was the decision of the City District Manager to require her Area Housing Managers to collect their own data regarding the size of the minority ethnic population rather than request it from me.

Recruitment targets devised by the Human Resources Manager and myself were proposed to the Association's Group Policy Team and adopted at its April meeting. We judged that our ideal model of target setting based upon variation in travel to work/catchment area by grade, workplace distribution of scheme and office staff, and detailed census figures would be too complex to implement. It would have been impractical, since it would have required staff time to develop it which was not available.

In practice targets were devised for each area office, to be applied to the recruitment of office and scheme based staff, following consideration of national Labour Force Survey data for 1987, 1988 and 1989. The easiest targets to construct were for offices with a relatively clearly defined travel to work area. However the Southern Region represented a challenge of constructing simple targets for diverse employment catchment areas.

I also stated an intention within my workplan to use targets to develop equal opportunities accountability for Byrds' technical section. I hoped to monitor the performance of the Association's approved contractors and consultants, and the numbers of contractors and consultants owned by minority ethnic communities who were on approved lists. However Senior Development and Technical staff who were sympathetic to equal opportunities, indicated that target setting would be problematic to implement, as it was antithetical to the commercial laissez-faire orientation of the technical and development sections. It also appeared that equal opportunities had historically been seen as the concern of housing management and irrelevant to the work of the maintenance and development departments. Furthermore any attempt to change this ethos would be hampered by the absence of a central organisational focus to the development department. Unlike other organisational functions, there was not a Corporate Development Director to coordinate Regional staff in the introduction of new corporate policy. Consequently target setting progress for these functions was slow.

The Association was just beginning to devise a system for monitoring its maintenance performance to tenants, and I worked alongside the Technical Policy Advisor to ensure that ethnicity was a monitoring criterion. However, I deferred attempting to introduce targets for the employment of

minority ethnic contractors until the next meeting of all of the Association's development staff. I hoped that this would allow me to discuss any of their objections fully and develop a standardised approach, although it delayed the development of the policy as their next forum was held twelve months after the equal opportunities workplan began. Once again I might be seen as deferring initiatives because of expected reactions, demonstrating the nondecision making potential of a historic antipathy towards equal opportunities.

The proposal of an Association performance indicator system at the beginning of 1992, did eventually provide me with the opportunity to suggest technical and development targets. These were for the number of minority ethnic organisations for whom the Association should act as a development agent, and for the number of minority ethnic contractors who should be used by Byrds. The Development Staff team meeting which I attended in May finally proposed fourteen Performance Indicators to the Board of Management for future assessment of the Association's property development performance. These included two equal opportunities measures related to the provision of properties for disabled people, and a measure of the percentage of 'minority' owned consultants on the Association's approved list. This represented a partial success in establishing ownership of equal opportunities issues within the development function. However, it was

recognised at the meeting that it might be twelve months before realistic targets could be set for some of these performance measures and I left the Association's employment before it was possible to ascertain whether they were being implemented.

Despite varying patterns of progress within the organisation's functional areas, it seemed as if the principle of target setting had not only been adopted but was also beginning to be implemented. At the Board of Management meeting in May 1992, I presented a twelve month review of the Association's equal opportunities programme which noted:

The principle of target setting is a key management tool in ensuring ownership of equal opportunities policies and monitoring of equal opportunities performance. Two Regional Committees have agreed targets for lettings with a further two committees due to consider targets during June. The Group Policy Team has agreed employment targets for each office within the Association.

(EOA Board of Management Paper 5/92)

However, at this meeting the Board expressed a number of concerns regarding target setting which had not been aired when the policy was approved as part of the original workplan, a meeting which ACAD had not attended. Indeed the Board did not explicitly recognise that they were debating an issue which had previously been considered. The key to

their new approach appeared to be the gatekeeping power of
ACAD:

[ACAD] had certain reservations about the targets/quotas which had been included in the paper. Firstly given the fact that the Association was seeking to establish particular targets and quotas as an integral part of its equal opportunities policy, [ACAD] asked what the Association's policy would be once these targets had been met?

Would the employment or housing of members of the ethnic or other minorities be suspended at this point in time or would the Association instead review its targets/quotas? If the Association ceased to house or employ such people once its targets had been met, [ACAD] thought that this course of action would in itself be discriminatory. On the other hand if it raised the target percentages this could lead to discrimination against the larger white population.

Secondly, the targets devised by the Association were quite legitimately aimed at ensuring that they reflected the percentage of ethnic minorities or other minority groups present within the host community. However, taking an employment target from the Equal Opportunities Advisor's paper as an example ie "Head Office...12% minority ethnic employees of total," [ACAD] asked if any thought had been given to the possible discrimination that could occur within this target itself? In other words, what if [Byrds] employed 11% of the 12% total from the Afro-Caribbean community, when in reality the Afro-Caribbean community only represented 2% of the total ethnic minority population for the area...concerned. Would [Byrds] not be discriminating against the larger Asian community?

Board Members agreed that [ACAD's] questions clearly illustrated the danger inherent in the use of or too much reliance upon targets and quotas. [ACAD] had demonstrated that such targets, unless carefully devised and weighted, actually created discrimination instead of eradicating discriminatory practices.
(Byrds Housing Association Minutes of Board of Management Meeting 5/92)

I wrote to ACAD to address his concerns, once the minutes of the May Board of Management meeting had been approved. I

stressed that the Association had been careful to comply with the good practice recommendations of the Housing Corporation, the CRE and the NFHA throughout the target setting process. I quoted sections of Housing Corporation (1989) and CRE (1991a) documents which stressed the importance of targets as a management tool for the accurate assessment of equal opportunities performance. I also emphasised that the Association only intended implementing target setting and did not wish to implement quotas with regard to gender and 'race'. I explained the methodology behind the Association's target setting process, and tried to address ACAD's concerns regarding the Association's response once targets had been 'met':

Dates to review performance against the targets have...been agreed however the target will not necessarily be revised if it has been met at the time of the review. It will only be revised if improvements in available data suggest that the housing need or the size of the black and minority ethnic community has changed. Eg the targets are likely to be revised once detailed data from the 1991 census supersedes the OPCS figures currently used. Unless there are changes in the data available the targets will stand as an objective measure whether or not the Association meets them or exceeds them. However, where there are large discrepancies from the targets, Regional Committees should investigate and decide whether the reasons are justifiable. Ultimately the employment and housing of members of the black and minority ethnic communities should be made on need irrespective of the target.

(EOA letter to ACAD 7/92)

I also noted that:

Because the number of lettings or employment appointments involved will be quite small for each team it is not realistic to subdivide the targets into

different ethnic groups, however Regional Committees will receive reports broken down by ethnic origin and as suggested by the NFHA will be able to ensure that one minority ethnic group does not dominate the figures unless based upon need or merit.

(EOA letter to ACAD 7/92)

ACAD thanked me for this reply and emphasised that he was aware of the difference between targets and quotas. At the following Board of Management meeting the only reference to target setting occurred during the agreement of the minutes of the previous meeting. The Chair of the Association asked ACAD whether he had received a response to his concerns regarding target setting. ACAD confirmed that he had received a response, noting that the reply was more detailed than he deserved! Nonetheless, although I was able to answer ACAD's concerns in my letter to him, I did not have the opportunity of justifying the Association's target setting policy to the Board of Management. This gave his views legitimacy, particularly when combined with the absence of a challenge to his views at the original meeting. ACAD's arguments effectively became the official view, if not the formal policy of the Association, with regard to target setting. The arguments included in my letter to ACAD which justified the Association's target setting policy were never brought to the Board's attention.

ACAD's intervention in the target setting debate demonstrated that he possessed considerable influence as a senior gatekeeper within the Association. Almost twelve

months after discussing the draft equal opportunities workplan without opposing target setting, ACAD was able to make an effective objection to the policy. Whilst initiatives to implement target setting continued, ACAD's objections might be perceived to have influenced the Central Regional Committee's equivocal attitude to the principle of housing management target setting which is discussed below. Whilst I feel that the timing of ACAD's remarks were inappropriate, the concerns that he raised were still capable of rebuttal. Therefore I found it deeply disappointing that ACAD's comments were not challenged by any Board members or officers at the meeting, and indeed appeared to be endorsed by other members. This emphasised the fragility of the mandate which I had to implement equal opportunities policies. ACAD was exerting a disproportionate political influence at Board of Management level, by exploiting the power vacuum which existed as a result of the lack of equal opportunities expertise at senior organisational levels, including within the Corporate Planning Team.

On a number of occasions the Central Regional Committee had demonstrated clear ownership of the Association's equal opportunities policies. They had supported the creation of the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor, requested and received equal opportunities progress reports from the EOA and were proposing to the Association's Board of Management

that the post of EOA should be extended for a further twelve months.

Once targets had been agreed with District Managers within the Central area, broadly based upon the formula which had been adopted by the Southern Region, the Regional Housing Manager sought approval from the Regional Committee to implement target setting. Due to the apparent regional ownership of other initiatives, I anticipated that the proposals would be approved. However, to the surprise of myself and the Regional Housing Manager, the target setting paper was rejected by the Regional Committee. The minutes of the meeting record the following reasons for the rejection of the policy:

a) A single percentage target by local authority is crude and does not reflect either the different needs of different ethnic communities within each Local Authority area, or the type and location of [the Association's] housing stock.

b) The proposed targets had been based on an element of unreliable and outdated information eg the 1981 census.

As a result of the above two points, the setting of specific targets might be unrealistic which, in turn, might create problems in justifying the Region's performance.

(Minutes of the Central Regional Committee 6/92)

I felt the first two points recorded in the minutes were valid criticisms of the target setting process. The first echoed comments which ACAD had made unchallenged at the May Board meeting. Nevertheless they were criticisms which could

be addressed if the Regional Committee had a serious commitment to the principle of equal opportunities accountability through target setting. The allocation of additional resources to the target setting process could facilitate the construction of detailed targets, sensitive to the Association's stock and the heterogeneity of the minority ethnic population. Equally the Regional Committee could have endorsed the principle of target setting, but delayed its implementation until the publication of the 1991 Census data, in order to meet its concerns regarding the accuracy of available census statistics.

Officers who attended the meeting informed me that the minutes of the meeting did not accurately reflect the reasons for the rejection of the policy. I was informed by the Regional Housing Manager that the Central Regional Committee had opposed the initiative on two grounds. First the Regional Chair had argued that if targets were agreed at Regional Committee level, then there would be a danger that individual officers would positively discriminate in favour of minority ethnic applicants in order to be able to meet their targets. This was an argument which he continued to use at the Regional Committee's equal opportunities training session where his opposition to target setting was challenged by both myself and the Association's Chief Executive without success. I argued that the Association had to implement procedures such as target setting which

represented best practice, and trust the professionalism of its officers to implement those policies. The Association did not avoid targets in other areas of its work because of concern that its officers might act unprofessionally. In any case the professionalism of housing management staff in the area of equal opportunities was about to be supported by a series of equal opportunities training courses.

Secondly, there was the issue of the accountability of the Regional Committee which is touched on by the conclusion of the minutes. The Regional Housing Manager informed me that the Committee simply did not want the responsibility of monitoring the target setting policy. He believed that they felt that setting lettings targets by making them more clearly accountable for the performance of the Region's housing management team, would leave them vulnerable to criticism at Board Room level if they failed to meet the targets. As an alternative the Regional Committee authorised the Regional Housing Manager to set appropriate guidelines for housing management staff within the region to:

maintain or improve its level of lettings to ethnic minority households in proportion to the ethnic minority population of the areas in which [Byrds] operates.

(Minutes of the Central Regional Committee 6/92)

This was target setting by any other name but would be implemented by the Regional Housing Manager rather than the

Regional Committee, excusing the latter from monitoring the policy. The Regional Committee correctly judged that the Board of Management would not call them to account for failing to implement target setting and therefore neglecting to adopt the Association's equal opportunities policies.

The consensus of support for ACAD's target setting concerns may have contributed to the Regional Committee's confidence that it would not incur an executive sanction. Nevertheless it is unlikely that its motives reflected agreement with ACAD's objections to the principle of target setting, since the Committee remained willing to endorse the implementation of targets under the supervision of the Regional Housing Manager. The Regional Committee and the Regional Housing Management staff would therefore evade the accountability which I was seeking to establish for the equal opportunities policy through target setting. The gatekeepers within the Central Region had supported the equal opportunities process when there had not been a potential cost associated with the policy. They might now be seen as renegeing on their ownership of the policy when presented with a risk of visibly failing to achieve specified equal opportunities goals. Despite their apparent commitment to meeting disadvantage, they can be seen as willing to enjoy the benefits of institutional racism without taking action to challenge it.

Despite ACAD's intervention, some progress was made within the Eastern Region in implementing housing management target setting as a paper policy. The Regional Director produced an equal opportunities paper for the Eastern Regional Committee in June. However, although race equality targets were agreed at this meeting, they had not been notified to the local team by either the Regional Director or the Regional Housing Manager by the end of August when I ceased participant observation.

This did not appear to be an isolated example of failure of communication and lack of ownership of the Association's equal opportunities policy. In the Southern Region, an area office remained unaware at the end of August that its Regional Committee had agreed four months earlier that it should fulfil a target for lettings to minority ethnic communities. Whilst I was precluded from taking action since I was leaving the Association, I would in any case have been constrained by my role within the organisational structure. The decentralisation of authority to the individual regions and my own non-operational role prevented me from intervening to ensure that equal opportunities policies were being effectively implemented throughout the organisation.

The Southern Region's ownership of the target setting policy also began to appear equivocal with respect to employment issues. Although the Southern Regional Director attended the

GPT meeting which agreed employment targets, he subsequently wrote to the Human Resources Manager to request details of the calculation of the regional employment targets. He noted that he wished to check that the catchment areas which had been used were realistic, which suggested that he was considering querying the agreed targets. This request seemed to be inconsistent with his own previous involvement in the target setting process where he had promoted the idea of practical and easily implementable targets which could be refined at a later date.

The Southern Regional Director did not respond to my letter explaining the basis of the calculation of the employment targets. However the region's performance against its employment targets was subsequently left out of the routine reports which it presented to the Association's Board of Management. Whilst I queried the absence of these figures with the Corporate Planning Director, the report which should have contained the omitted figures had already been considered and approved by the Association's Board of Management. The region's actions may have reflected a genuine concern regarding the target setting data, however I believed that the failure to respond to my letter and the covert deletion of the figures suggested otherwise. Whilst the Southern Region was comfortable with housing management targets which would be monitored within the region, it seemed to be uncomfortable with centrally monitored

employment targets. This change in support for the process of equal opportunities target setting indicated that there was a greater concern amongst senior gatekeepers in that area with their regional image, than with the implementation of the Association's equal opportunities policies.

I felt that the region had decided that their image within the organisation could be better protected by doing nothing rather than potentially revealing a failure of equal opportunities performance. Indeed it appeared that they could avoid implementing an equal opportunities policy such as target setting, without provoking any sanction from the Association's Board of Management. Similarly the Central Regional Committee had escaped censure for declining to implement the Association's target setting policy. These examples question the effectiveness of the Association's senior gatekeepers in ensuring consistent implementation of the Board's agreed policies. It suggests that the lack of accountability of regional officers and regional committee members to Byrds' Board of Management, added to the failure of the Board to enforce agreed policies, hampered the implementation of organisational equal opportunities policies. The representation on the Board of Management of two members from each regional committee might have contributed to the Board's inability or unwillingness to ensure that individual regions pursued corporate policies. Indeed the existence of regional vested interests can be

seen as strengthening forces of organisational inertia and placing a greater burden to expose poor regional performance on members such as the Chair who did not have a specific regional loyalty.

Shortly after I had left the Association's employment, I learnt that the Southern Regional Director had renewed his challenge to his region's employment targets. He argued that the OPCS data which were used as a basis for the target setting process were unreliable, overestimating the minority ethnic population in the areas in which the Association worked, leading to unrealistic and unattainable targets. In effect he was challenging the same raw data which he had endorsed for the construction of housing management targets. Once again the only material difference between these two policy areas was that one target would be monitored regionally and the other would be monitored centrally. Consequently and with the agreement of the Corporate Planning Director, the targets for some offices within the Southern Region were significantly reduced. However when the Association received the 1991 census data it appeared that the revised targets had been set lower than levels of minority ethnic residence within the appropriate enumeration districts.

A review of the Association's introduction of target setting highlights the inexperience of myself and the remainder of

the Association's staff in this policy area. The equal opportunities target setting process was pragmatic and dominated by expediency. It appeared to be characterised by junior and senior gatekeepers developing policy and practice in an opportunistic manner. Individuals' actions seemed to be shaped by the degree of their own support for the target setting process and their assessment of the prevailing organisational attitude to equal opportunities change.

I judged that it was an organisational priority to establish the principle of target setting, and implement a basic but effective model. This would allow the Association's equal opportunities performance to be monitored against objective yardsticks for the first time. As a consequence of this accountability, I hoped that the implementation of target setting would promote the ownership of equal opportunities policies throughout the whole organisation. In some respects the actual numerical targets which were initially set were irrelevant, provided that they were credible and addressed the key hurdles which minority ethnic communities faced in access to the Association's employment and housing. Nevertheless it is clear that the model of target setting which was adopted did not include detailed assessment of housing preferences. It also did not include assessments of housing need or even social factors other than 'race', such as class.

Therefore it is unlikely that the Association's approach to target setting would be considered best academic practice. However, best academic practice does not always have to address the difficulties of securing agreement for and implementing target setting, as part of a process of organisational change. In any case clear advice was difficult to obtain, with one senior CRE officer from whom advice was sought, arguing against his own organisation's policies by suggesting that target setting was unnecessary. At the Association the target setting policy was merely one element of a major twelve months equal opportunities programme. It also became apparent that it was being implemented in an organisation where the commitment of senior gatekeepers to the process of target setting was fluid, and where there was negligible expertise in, or experience of, equal opportunities matters.

It was too early to judge whether targets were being implemented effectively when I left the Association's employment at the end of August 1992. Nevertheless I was concerned that the equal opportunities audit which I conducted at that time revealed that some offices were unaware of the targets which had been set for them. This threatened the mission of developing ownership of the equal opportunities process through the policy.

During the equal opportunities workplan, target setting did at least ensure that equal opportunities became an issue of housing management performance. As a result other elements of the equal opportunities workplan, such as building up housing referral networks amongst minority ethnic communities were implemented by some offices as a means of trying to ensure that targets were met. These issues might otherwise have been neglected. Similarly the employment targets ensured that the recruitment of minority ethnic staff remained an issue within the Association. For example positive action strategies were introduced by individual offices to reduce the hurdles which prospective minority ethnic staff faced when applying for employment. Nevertheless whilst further detailed research would be necessary in order to confirm my impressions, I believe that target setting was never effectively implemented within the Association because the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor was abolished. This left a power vacuum in place of the specialist who could have monitored the implementation of equal opportunities procedures within the Association.

The target setting debate illustrates clearly the contrast between the relatively independent discretionary role of the housing officer, and the Equal Opportunities Advisor reliant upon the goodwill and good intentions of other staff. Indeed it appeared that the accountability which I sought to establish ran counter to the desire of operational staff to

maximise their freedom of action. This clash of culture is also highlighted in the Association's debates upon performance standards.

There were three themes within these considerations. Consultations upon Housing Corporation draft performance expectations, consultations upon NFHA performance indicators, and the development of a Byrds Housing Association 'Performance Manual'. The Human Resources Manager and I submitted generally supportive comments to the Corporate Planning Director on the equal opportunities measures within the Housing Corporation's proposed performance expectations. However, we stressed that in some instances the Corporation's expectations of associations should be clearer. These recommendations were not encompassed in Byrds' final response to the Corporation, which noted that the Board of Management felt that some sections were too prescriptive! This indicated a clash between equal opportunities objectives which sought to establish greater accountability to particular targets, and an organisational philosophy which sought a freer rein for its activities.

The Association's own performance manual was still in preparation at the end of the period of participant observation. Nevertheless the Board of Management reporting cycle had been agreed and duplicated the functional areas of

the Housing Corporation's proposed performance expectations. This included specific consideration of equal opportunities. The Association's detailed performance indicators would draw upon those identified by the NFHA for the whole movement.

As part of the NFHA's performance indicators consultation, the Human Resources Manager and I recommended that the Association should propose a number of additional equal opportunities performance indicators, for example a measure of the percentage of staff receiving race equality training. In addition I noted that the proposed indicators marginalised equal opportunities as a housing management and personnel issue. Therefore development and technical indicators were also proposed. However the Group Policy Team responded:

it was decided that those PI's that have a statutory background or that refer to good practice and indicate quality of service provided should be included. Others that do not fit into the above categories should not be included.

A number of additional PIs were proposed by the Human Resources Manager and the Equal Opportunities Advisor. The Team did not feel that these should be included for the reasons stated above and also because the larger the number of indicators that are used, the more onerous it is for the Association to collect data.

A number of the indicators suggested are unlikely to produce results that are statistically significant. There is, in any event, little point in collecting information that would be difficult for the Association to use in changing its approach in any way.

(GPT Minutes 11/91)

Once again the fragility of the equal opportunities process is emphasised by the clear statement that equal opportunities issues are not synonymous with good practice or quality of service.

Training

One of the key features of the equal opportunities action plan had been to fulfil the criteria of the Housing Corporation (Circular 07/91) and the CRE (1991a) that all staff and committee members should be trained in equal opportunities issues and their consequent organisational responsibilities. To achieve this aim the Human Resources Manager, a training consultant and I devised separate but related programmes for five groups of staff. These were committee members (half day training); supervisors, managers and key decision makers (one day training); Housing Management Officers and frontline staff (two day training); finance and non-frontline staff (one day training); and scheme staff (two day training). The programme would allow 192 staff plus members of Regional Committees and the Board of Management to be trained by mid-1992. This represented approximately two-thirds of the Association's full-time staff. A second programme of training would then be arranged for the remaining one third of full-time staff and all part-time staff. The cost of the programme excluding the costs of

using directly employed staff was to be £7,200, representing one-fifth of the overall annual training budget. This included external tutoring of the first training programme, the purchase of the materials used within that programme and the tutoring of the Equal Opportunities Advisor, Human Resources Manager and nominated Regional staff in training skills.

The objectives of the training programme were to develop an awareness of equality issues and an awareness of the Association's developing equal opportunities policies. I hoped that this would establish a common understanding of equality processes within the Association. More specific training needs, such as to facilitate the development of equality monitoring systems, could be addressed at a later date.

The programme contained a mix of features which, in Wrench and Taylor's (1993) typology, drew upon 'equalities' and 'anti-racism training'. The style of training within a particular training session was determined by the employment functions of the group attending. For example for staff in daily contact with customers, training designed to shape behaviour within the workplace was emphasised.

Whilst the type of course content met the requirements of the Human Resources Manager and I, the time devoted to each

session of training represented compromise and an element of nondecision making. This reflected our perception of the likely costs and time spent training which GPT, who would have to approve the programme, would find acceptable. Whilst we felt that two day training sessions for staff in contact with the public would be approved, we were less confident of securing agreement for two day programmes for non-frontline staff. We also believed that staff in areas which had not traditionally been associated with equal opportunities would react more openly to a one day than a two day training package. Informal discussions regarding the training programme with senior and middle management had also clearly, albeit perhaps erroneously, identified that the crucial training needs of the organisation were equality training for the staff who delivered policy rather than those who constructed it. Whilst the actions of change activists perhaps support this view, the existence of the organisational power vacuum resulting from a lack of management control does not.

The regional committee members and the Board of Management were only requested to attend half a day of training. Whilst I would have preferred to arrange a longer training day, I felt that this was the maximum acceptable time which could be demanded from voluntary committee members. It was therefore ironic that the feedback sheets for the Western Regional Committee indicated that committee members would

have liked more time to discuss the issues. The views of other regional committees on this matter were not clear.

The quantity of training provided indicated that the emphasis of the programme was upon junior frontline staff. However the structure of the programme focused upon the crucial organisational framework provided by the actions of senior staff. The objective was to gain approval for the training strategy from GPT and then provide a first phase of training for the organisation's (formal) 'key decision makers'. As a consequence it was hoped that the principles of equal opportunities awareness would cascade down the organisation during successive phases of training to senior managers, frontline staff, non-frontline staff and scheme staff.

Subsequent to each training session an evaluation form was completed by participants. The noted shortfalls were: the negative responses of some course colleagues; that there had been too little time to discuss particular issues; and the need for more practical guidance upon tackling particular issues. Nevertheless the programme appeared to be viewed positively. The development of a general awareness of equal opportunities and language issues and a greater understanding of the Association's policies, procedures and progress in equality work were identified as particular programme achievements.

Contract compliance

ACAD had asked for his opposition to contract compliance to be noted in the papers presented for the approval of the first equal opportunities workplan. Consequently the Board had stipulated that whilst data on contractors' equal opportunities policies could be collected, the Association should not compel contractors to adhere to stated policies. The Housing Corporation *Performance Expectations* (1989: 192) appeared to require a stronger line to ensure good equal opportunities performance. Nevertheless I felt that this presented an opportunity to collect initial data with the intention of subsequently reopening the debate on contract compliance by presenting the findings of the research to the Board. Consequently the data was presented to the January board meeting as part of my first equal opportunities review.

314 data response forms had been received from contractors and suppliers. Two of the firms were owned by members of minority ethnic communities, and 65 employed workers from minority ethnic communities, although the numbers were usually small. 87 responses caused concern because of non or partial completion, lack of an equal opportunities policy or failure to keep ethnic records. These figures involved some

double counting, for example firms which did not fulfill ethnic monitoring were often those organisations without an equal opportunities policy. Eight of the contractors completing the data questionnaire made remarks which were felt by the Equal Opportunities Advisor to be a cause for concern. For example two cleaning firms argued that the presence of an equal opportunities policy was not applicable to them, another supplier noted that the equal opportunities section was 'irrelevant to service or standard of work'. Two organisations including one major national firm argued that keeping ethnic records was racist.

The data served their purpose by highlighting contract compliance as an issue to be discussed at the Equal Opportunities Working Party. This was set up following the Equal Opportunities Advisor's progress report in January 1992. Its brief was to ensure that the Association's equal opportunities policy was accorded a high profile, promoted consistently throughout the whole organisation and satisfied the various criteria laid down by the Housing Corporation's (1989) *Performance Expectations*. The working party was comprised of the vice chair of the Association, the Chief Executive, ACAD, NCM and myself.

At this meeting the Chief Executive argued that if firms declined to provide equal opportunities information to the Association, the Corporation's *Performance Expectations*

could not be met. ACAD replied that the extent of Byrds' obligation and the consequence of failing to meet that obligations should be clarified. He argued that the Association should not feel bound to follow contract compliance unless it was compelled by statutory requirement or the likelihood of a reduction in funding. ACAD's comments prevented a consensus at the Working Party. Therefore action to enforce contract compliance was deferred until further consideration of the issue at the Association's March Board meeting.

Consequently further advice was sought from the Housing Corporation on the Association's legal and regulatory obligations. Its rather laboured response suggested a lack of best practice within the Corporation. Indeed it noted that this was an area where few associations had introduced initiatives, and which had not been discussed at a high level within the Corporation (apparently despite its inclusion in the 1989 *Performance Expectations*). It in turn sought definitive legal advice from the CRE, who noted that the Association could be held to be vicariously liable for the actions of its contractors under the Race Relations Act.

This advice provided the context for renewed debate on contract compliance at the Board with lengthy contributions from five voluntary committee members (including the Association's Chair), the Chief Executive, the Corporate

Planning Director, and the Chair of the CRE who was coincidentally attending this meeting by previous arrangement. The Chief Executive noted that the issue had been thoroughly debated at a number of forums and the principle of contract compliance had the unanimous support of the Association's officers. Whilst ACAD continued to outline objections to the policy, the Association resolved that it should ensure that its contractors, consultants and suppliers should follow good equal opportunities practice.

It is not clear why ACAD became isolated upon the contract compliance issue in contrast to the target setting debate. Whilst the influence of the Chair of the CRE may have been important, the debate had by this time already swung against him. This may reflect greater familiarity with contract compliance amongst the Board and a distrust of targets as being uncomfortably close to quotas. However, it may also signify the greater opportunities for the Equal Opportunities Advisor to engage in the contract compliance debate and to counter the points made by ACAD. The target setting debate had moved from a position of apparent agreement to a platform where ACAD was able to unexpectedly voice opposition upon common-sense points which no others in attendance felt able to counter. In contrast the contract compliance debate was clearly going to be contentious following my initial meeting with ACAD. Therefore I was able to brief other senior officers who would be in attendance at

the Board and prepare information in the expectation that it would be challenged.

Contract compliance was also an issue where it was possible that there would be no regional losers. Whilst target setting appeared to stimulate a parochial regional protectionism, contract compliance would be implemented by Head Office and the contractors rather than the regions. The debate demonstrated that if I was provided with the opportunity to present equal opportunities arguments, the Association could respond positively to equality proposals. Nevertheless this conclusion also suggests that I was dependent upon a level playing field to achieve equal opportunities change, emphasising the lack of organisational resources at my disposal. Once other game players used the additional resources at their disposal, for example ACAD's ability to convey new and surprising objections direct to the Board, then the relative weakness of the equal opportunities process was exposed. The Equal Opportunities Advisor did not have the discretionary power to achieve unexpected results which was possessed by the housing officer as a change activist. Whilst the realisation of contract compliance falls outside the period covered by participant observation, it might be noted that ACAD subsequently resigned over its implementation.

Audit

Prior to leaving employment with the Association, I contacted all of its offices to discover how far the equal opportunities action plans had been put into practice at a local level. There were varying levels of implementation. Only three offices out of eleven surveyed had set up community networks for receiving housing referrals and four for distributing employment referrals. Of further concern, only seven offices indicated that they had established targets for lettings to equal opportunities target groups. I was aware that a further two offices had had targets set for them at regional committee level some time before. It was of particular concern that formalised equal opportunities policies were not being implemented in practice. However the majority of offices asserted that they had discussed equal opportunities issues with local authorities and voluntary groups with whom they worked.

Whilst ten offices claimed an awareness of the Association's racial harassment policy, one suggested that whilst there might be an awareness of the paper policy, it was unlikely that this was extended to accompanying procedures. Five offices had arranged access to interpreting services with a further two offices relying upon the additional language skills of office staff. It was not clear whether these roles were being formalised as part of the duties of all of those

staff. The main requests for future equal opportunities development were in areas away from race equality issues, perhaps reflecting the focus of the Association's initial programme. Nevertheless there was some interest in more specific training around racial harassment issues, and an overwhelming desire to see specialist solicitors employed to deal with racial harassment cases. This may simply be a reflection of the competence of the Association's solicitors who were proving unpopular for their general work in a number of organisational areas. Finally it appeared that there had been little progress on the appointment of minority ethnic owned firms to the Association's contractors' lists.

It appeared as if work which could be completed within the scope of existing practices was being accomplished, such as discussions of equal opportunities issues with local authorities. However, the implementation of new areas of work, such as the development of community networks, was patchy. The failure to communicate lettings targets was of particular concern and seemed to indicate that the equal opportunities process was not yet being fully owned within the Association.

The organisational response was to aim for policy implementation through increased regional ownership of equal opportunities. It was often suggested within the policy

making hierarchy of the organisation that once frameworks of best practice were established by the Equal Opportunities Advisor and a level of regional awareness of equality issues had been established, then my role might become counterproductive. In effect it might allow regional officers to avoid meeting their own responsibilities for implementing equal opportunities. The proposed solution was to delete the post from the organisational structure and pass on responsibility for achieving equal opportunities change to the regions. However, this presupposed that there was perennial equal opportunities knowledge which could be collected and passed on. Therefore it did not recognise that equal opportunities could be a dynamic and developing functional area. Nor did it reflect best practice in other organisational operations. As Mason and Jewson argue:

it is often said that it is undesirable to have people with specific responsibility for equal opportunities because 'equal opportunities are everyone's business'....However, precisely because equal opportunities are everyone's business, it is necessary for someone to have overall responsibility. By analogy it might be said that making a profit (or cost control) is usually everyone's responsibility but this is rarely used as an argument against having a finance director or an accounting function.

(Mason and Jewson 1992: 103)

The proposal to delete the specialist post of EOA, was also based upon an inadequate explanation of the reasons for the Association's poor equal opportunities performance prior to the appointment of an Equal Opportunities Advisor. What

would prevent the Association reverting to previous shortfalls? There appeared to be a perception that the Equal Opportunities Advisor could raise awareness of equal opportunities issues which would then be embraced by the regions. In reality, there was piecemeal implementation of a centrally agreed policy, and it was not clear whether regions or regional representatives would be able or willing to prioritise equal opportunities issues within the new structure. Indeed particular policy items such as targets, which were specifically intended to ensure the prioritisation of equality issues were being evaded, apparently quite deliberately.

Thus it appears as if there was an appreciable and appreciated gain in equal opportunities awareness and policies as a result of the appointment of an Equal Opportunities Advisor. However, there was policy slippage in decentralised implementation. Therefore it might be concluded that there was a need for a more proactive equal opportunities post with the power to intervene within the implementation of policy, rather than the abolition of the post. This debate was never fully concluded within decision making forums before I resigned and the post was promptly removed from the structure. This suggested a coalescence of the post, person, and process in senior eyes. Anecdotal conversations which have subsequently taken place between the researcher and current members of staff have indicated

that the momentum of the equal opportunities process has been lost following the deletion of the specialist post.

Chapter Eight - Individual discretion within the policy process

The case studies above and the literature around street-level bureaucracy suggest that Merton's (1957) characterisation of the rule bound conformist bureaucrat is outdated. Ham and Hill (1993: 136) argue that organisations are increasingly likely to recruit officers who are able to exercise initiative as a positive organisational virtue, whilst as Lipsky argues organisations are unable to control unofficial practices because:

The essence of street-level bureaucracies is that they require people to make decisions about other people.

Street-level bureaucrats have discretion because the nature of service provision calls for human judgment that cannot be programmed and for which machines cannot substitute.

(Lipsky 1980: 161)

Nevertheless organisations may still seek to recruit officers who will only exercise discretion within parameters determined by their own cultural ethos. This would renew the relevance of Merton's (1957) model of bureaucratic personality. Individual housing officers may feel that they have the power to determine whether a housing applicant is deserving of a particular home within value systems which are conventional or acceptable to the organisation, but might otherwise feel constrained from exercising discretion. Lipsky (1980: 155) notes that street-level bureaucrats need

to accommodate a rationalised view of their corrupted workplace in order to maintain job satisfaction. Thus it is easier to pathologise and create self-fulfilling prophecies of customers within existing organisational processes than it is to challenge the pervasive norm, reflectively deconstruct stereotypes and initiate new modes of workplace behaviour.

Discretion was more commonly used within Byrds Housing Association in an ideological way to support the perceived ethos of the organisation and conventional society, than to challenge conventions in a radical manner. Whilst this orthodoxy did not maintain hegemonic control, it played a part in lettings assessments alongside the arguments of change activists. There were debates within the merit selection of applicants concerning the 'deserving' status of households and the potential management difficulties posed by particular applicants. These considerations took place alongside change activists' arguments that minority ethnic applicants should be awarded waiting list places because of group as well as individual deserts. This indicated an implicit endorsement of Jewson and Mason's (1992) radical approach to equal opportunities practice. Although the deserving/undeserving considerations can be placed within the context of societal concern that individuals should merit public resources, they can also be seen as part of a

related, albeit lapsed, Association policy of taking references upon potential tenants.

The concern that particular tenants would be prone to cause management difficulties also represents a complex interplay of factors. There was undoubtedly concern regarding individual workloads and the ability of the Association to 'manage' 'problem tenants'. However, these considerations were accentuated by a belief that senior gatekeepers would intervene if housing management problems became visible, to curtail the workplace autonomy which housing managers expected.

The process of labelling applicants as potential 'problem tenants' reflected a degree of stereotyping of households based upon their social history. However these influences were not operated in a racialised manner and therefore did not necessarily provide an obstacle to the radical objectives of change activism. Nevertheless there was scope for a clash of objectives. For example an Asian man being referred from a drug rehabilitation project might be perceived as too great a management risk at a particular allocations meeting because of assumptions regarding his future dependency, despite the desire of change activists to house him.

The possibility of establishing a radical hegemony of change activism is arguably hampered by fears for job security. Bachrach and Baratz' (1970) 'nondecision making' model conceptualises this process. It highlights the way in which power can be exerted by the power holder to achieve a satisfactory outcome, by narrowing the options and discretion available to others. For example the anticipation of a punitive reaction from senior gatekeepers to unauthorised action might affect an individual's willingness to act as a change activist. Alternatively change processes might be restricted by the perception that existing practices are natural and immutable. As Cohen notes:

power often 'flows smoothly' in the tacitly reproduced practices of day-to-day life. Tacitly accepted practices therefore serve as one basis for 'non decisions'.

(Cohen 1989: 153)

Lipsky similarly argues:

generations of thoughtful and potentially self-sacrificing people are disarmed in their social purpose. They come to believe that it is impossible to find conditions conducive to good practice, and that public agencies cannot be otherwise structured. Their choices appear to be to leave public employment for other work or to resign themselves to routine processing of clients while instructing the next generation of idealists that there is little sense in hoping for change or in rendering human services.

(Lipsky 1980: 186)

Street-level bureaucrats may be too disillusioned for change activism. Discretion is exercised as a defensive action reflecting workers passivity and alienation from their work.

Exploiting the power vacuum

The paradigm of the organisational power vacuum challenges this view and asserts not only that public agencies can be differently structured, but that 'low-level' staff can play a significant part within this process. It seemed clear to me that even as a relatively junior employee at Byrds Housing Association, I not only had considerable discretion to shape the practical implementation of existing policies, but I also had opportunities to influence the character of new policies. Whilst the need to make decisions about other people (Lipsky 1980: 161) might explain why housing managers within the Association possessed discretion, it did not explain the availability of discretion over and above the amount required to react responsively to unpredictable situations.

It *might* be necessary for housing managers to have the power to decide which housing applicants should be accepted onto an organisation's waiting list. However, the organisation can still dictate the parameters of the discretion available. For example it can determine whether there should

be a rigid mechanism for assessing housing need, a discretionary system or indeed whether to leave an organisational power vacuum which will permit change activists to determine or lobby for their own system. The policy making opportunities which were available at Byrds Housing Association were not recognised within the formal organisational structure, nor are they adequately recognised within academic literature.

I was surprised that in most instances the discretion which I was implicitly or explicitly granted, did not appear to be related to an objective measure of its potential impact upon customers. For example there was an opportunity space to introduce a housing allocations points scheme although all prospective customers would be affected by its introduction. Rather, bounded discretion appeared to reflect the subjective interests (or lack of interest) of individuals throughout the hierarchy, their priorities within the formal organisational decision making structure, and whether the issue concerned was prioritised within the Association's organisational culture. Therefore the discretion available did not reflect an inability to supervise an officer or a particular situation. It also did not appear to result from deference to professional status since it was available to officers irrespective of whether they were professionally qualified or not, in fact almost all the officers studied were not professionally qualified.

There seemed to be an expectation within the organisation that discretion outside the formal decision making structure would be bounded or restricted by individual socialisation to the organisation's values and objectives. In practice the Association's belief that discretion would be constrained by dominant organisational values was ineffective where a gatekeeper wished to become a change activist. Therefore the organisation's reliance on informal controls, combined with the organisational distance of formal controls, created an opportunity space for the individual change activist.

My research within the Association also suggested that discretion within the housing management function was exaggerated beyond the bounds of functional necessity because of the organisational dominance of other professional disciplines such as finance. This was reflected in a relative lack of organisational interest in the regular work of housing managers. Whilst there was the potential of executive intervention when problems were drawn to the attention of the Chief Executive, in Lipsky's (1980: 16) terms there was an organisational tolerance for slippage of daily practice from prescribed policy.

Nevertheless to realise these opportunities and proactively create policy or radically alter practice, rather than

simply react to events, staff at Byrds Housing Association needed a commitment to bring about change:

the gates of change are then closed or opened depending on how the situation is defined and acted upon by those who might mobilize resources for bringing about a desired outcome.

(Kalltorp 1994: 67)

However, even the structural opportunities to bring about change, and an individual commitment to do so, might be insufficient to ensure that a junior gatekeeper had the scope to formally or informally introduce radical policies into the organisation. A gatekeeper would also require the time to develop policy. This could be problematic within Byrds Housing Association which was characterised by a long hours culture, reflected in individual responsibility for completing a heavy ongoing workload. Therefore pressure of work might limit the scope of the junior gatekeeper to creatively make policy, although it might in its place encourage the use of practice based discretion. This could still provide scope for radical policy making, despite Lipsky's (1980) emphasis upon the conservative outlook of job coping strategies. For example a housing officer could favour minority ethnic households within the housing allocation process, by automatically approving their applications at the expense of detailed comparative consideration of competing cases. This would represent a

time saving device for officers and also act as a radical measure of positive discrimination.

From reactive discretion to creative discretion

Young and Connolly (1981) devised the theory of the policy entrepreneur following their research into the implementation of local authority race equality policies. The policy entrepreneur is the practitioner with the organisational power and commitment to adapt, reshape or develop policy at the point of implementation, to meet objectives which s/he considers to be important. The scope and discretion for the implementation of individual initiatives potentially offered a positive source of help for minority ethnic communities:

all manner of marginal adaptations can be made by practitioners (even without the authority of 'policy') to provide services more appropriate to a multi-racial society. Moreover, there are areas in the provision of an essentially personal service where the most important adjustments have to be made at the level of the individual practitioner.

(Young and Connolly 1981: 2)

Young and Connolly's articulation of the beneficial effects of the use of discretion for minority ethnic communities, provides a clear contrast with the overwhelming majority of 'race' and housing research. Henderson and Karn's (1987), and Sarre, Phillips and Skellington's (1989) studies are

typical of a wide body of literature which (justifiably) highlights the way in which discretion has been exercised to the detriment of minority ethnic communities, particularly within the housing allocations process. Organisational best practice guides have also incorporated the convention that greater equality of opportunity and increased opportunities for minority ethnic communities will be enhanced by the formalisation of policy and the removal of discretion.

Young and Connelly's (1981: 162) identification of an 'action space' is useful, although not sufficient in developing a paradigmatic understanding of discretion and informal change processes at Byrds Housing Association:

Developments in practice...are constrained by the formal policies which define the 'action space' of practitioners. Beyond certain limits, change at the operational level of service delivery depends on the adoption of commitments and the allocation of resources at the policy level. In a similar way, the broad dispositions of an authority constrain the 'action space' of those who aspire to change and extend those commitments and resource allocations....Where the ethnic dimension is disavowed, policy entrepreneurs have to 'do good by stealth' or to place their faith in the (necessarily limited) development of practice.
(Young and Connelly 1981: 162)

My primary interest was to develop a better understanding of the processes by which organisations either fail to, or choose not to, exercise their overt organisational control and nondecision making capabilities. In essence to examine how a window of opportunity might occur which would allow

individual gatekeepers to empower themselves as agents of change or policy entrepreneurs and to identify the temporal and organisational parameters of that action space.

Bachrach and Baratz note that:

Certain contests are "lost" by those who are more powerful more authoritative or more influential than their adversaries, simply because the apparent losers consider the issue inconsequential and not worth expenditure of their (finite) resources.

(Bachrach and Baratz 1970: 47)

This only offered a partial explanation of my data. It seemed to me that particular contests were 'lost' not because of indifference to particular outcomes, but because senior managers assumed that individual officers had been inculcated with organisational values. This presupposed that any organisational discretion would be exercised on an individual basis within discrete and fixed limits. Therefore there was a more subtle attempt to exercise power:

A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have - that is to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?

(Lukes 1974: 23)

Therefore the action space which I have conceptualised as an organisational power vacuum might be a product of an organisational decision not to intervene within the full

range of operational decisions (formal sanctioned discretion), or through an individual decision made by an individual manager not to intervene (informally sanctioned discretion) or perhaps through the inefficiency or misconceptions of senior managers (de facto discretion). The motivations for these decisions may in themselves be complex.

An organisation may delegate discretion because of perceived organisational advantage, or may be forced to devolve power because of limitations to the constraints which can be applied to individual freedom within a given level of organisational resources. In addition as Lipsky (1980: 161) argues, in some scenarios individual officers must have discretion, because it is essential to the efficiency of the organisation that they should be able to determine access to particular resources.

Whilst the scope for their 'policy entrepreneurs' to exercise discretion and leverage upon organisational policies is specific to each scenario, Young and Connelly (1981: 158) argue that policy variation is most likely to occur at the lowest levels of the organisational hierarchy. This is where there is the greatest 'control loss' or distance from the locus of policy making, 'creative' interpretation of policy is most likely where the number of 'links in the implementation chain' (Young and Connelly

1981: 158) are the greatest. The increased daily autonomy of housing management at Byrds Housing Association caused by its marginalisation from the dominant organisational professions can be seen in this context as increasing the distance between the links in the chain, and enlarging the scope for discretionary decision making.

The concept of the policy entrepreneur offers a number of insights into the practices of Byrds Housing Association, through its exploration of the parameters of discretion. It highlights the potential for housing officers to positively apply discretion, including the scope to develop positive action strategies within their daily duties. However, it is less useful as an explanation of initiatives which are clearly policy based such as the introduction of a radical housing points scheme. Indeed the title of policy entrepreneur is something of a misnomer. Young and Connelly are primarily, although not solely, concerned with the entrepreneurial *implementation* of existing policy rather than the entrepreneurial construction of new policy. Whilst they offer the possibility that radical practice could become policy, there is no explicit consideration of the way in which an action space could be a vacuum which not only allows junior gatekeepers to misappropriate existing policies but actually facilitates the annexation of the policy process for individual aims and change activism. Whilst Young and Connelly (1981: 162) recognise that there

is some scope for policy development, they emphasise the restrictions provided by the unavailability of resources.

The thesis of the organisational power vacuum is essentially that Young and Connelly overemphasise the constraints facing the policy entrepreneur. In fact processes of practice based change and policy change are possible and they are facilitated as well as constrained by the parameters of the action space despite the assertion that:

explicitness is a necessary (though never a sufficient) condition for appropriate action.

(Young and Connelly 1981: 3)

Byrds Housing Association's equal opportunities workplan demonstrates that the adoption of commitments to, and the allocation of resources for, equal opportunities change are clearly helpful to the change process. A disposition for explicit race equality discussion within the organisation is also undeniably useful in promoting new practices. Nevertheless these are not prerequisites of policy development. The entrepreneur 'doing good by stealth' can use other tools such as a general appeal to equal opportunities; or to organisational efficiency, organisational gain, or customer care if it is not possible to appeal directly to race equality concerns. In the absence of even these generalised commitments, the action space of even a relatively formalised organisation can contain a

multitude of tools for the change activist committed to bringing about policy change through the exploitation of an organisational power vacuum. It is these tools which Young and Connelly underestimate and understate.

It is significant how individuals personally exploit these opportunities and:

what strategies and practices are deployed by given actors to persuade or recruit others to particular views of their interests.

(Michael 1994: 33)

In essence are individuals able to exploit organisational power vacuums through their own initiatives or do they require fellow change activists or supporters as allies? If so what tactics do they employ to gain those allies and how do the resources mobilised influence the longevity and sustainability of organisational change? These questions introduce the concept of static reassertion to the paradigm of the organisational power vacuum. In short is the power exercised by individual change activists within the context of the organisational power vacuum, of sufficient longevity to prevent a reversion to those policies and practices which were previously 'normal' or accepted practice? This will be of particular concern when an initiative undertaken within the protection of the organisational power vacuum ends without becoming a formal policy. However, if the change activist is capable of using the organisational power vacuum

to temporarily establish a new orthodoxy then there is the potential to bring about permanent change through the use of organisational sanctions.

Static Reassertion

It has been one of the central tenets of structuration theory that whilst societal structure can affect human agency, human agency can also affect the future shape of the structure of society. This two way process also forms part of the dynamic of this research. In addition to examining the way in which organisational structure constrained or facilitated individual action, I was also interested in assessing the scope for individual initiatives to bring about change in organisational structure:

The concrete transformations of events and circumstances are the outcome of the exercise of human agency; the interventions by agents that 'make a difference' in the course of system reproduction. Systemic relations are maintained and reproduced as these results of social conduct are transmitted or transported to other agents who may be situated in the same spatio-temporal setting, or who may be situated in the same setting at a later time, or who may be situated in another systemic locale across some interval of time-space.

(Cohen 1989: 127)

On an organisational level I was interested in discovering whether the positive action strategies which I had been a part of, had brought about fundamental or permanent

organisational change or whether there had been a static reassertion, an active process of change which had ultimately only succeeded in reasserting the existing dominant ideology of the organisation.

As a practitioner my personal action strategy was founded on the belief that permanent change could be achieved. Lipsky challenges this idea:

There is a necessary and inevitable tension between the desire to have an impact in the short run, and the recognition that problems are not reducible to short-term incremental manipulations. Furthermore, significant changes in street-level bureaucracy are likely to be realized only in the context of social changes that support the relationships that must be forged. Short of such changes, these lines of analysis simply become points of dispute in an ongoing struggle over the relationship of citizens to the state.

(Lipsky 1980: 193)

My research provides some opportunities to evaluate Lipsky's view.

It *might* be suggested that the radical actions of change activists will only have a temporary impact without a fundamental change in organisational ethos or even societal change. The result of radical initiative might be static reassertion, the reversion to previous practice. To that extent the actions of change activists might also restrict future opportunities for change and leave the exploitation of an organisational power vacuum as a negative rather than

a positive force of organisational change. In essence the staff within the organisation may have moved to a position of false consciousness, believing that radical initiatives have taken place through the actions of change activists, whilst in reality the change process may have been succeeded by static reassertion. Whilst the individual exploitation of opportunity space might have provided some tokenistic examples of change, it may have precluded the evolutionary growth of an organic organisational commitment to change.

Therefore an understanding of the causes of, and likelihood of static reassertion is important in informing the development of an equal opportunities strategy at a relatively junior organisational level. In the context of this thesis, that requires an understanding of whether Young and Connelly are correct that:

once the issue of race had gained a place on the policy agenda this momentum becomes self-sustaining
(Young and Connelly 1981: 169)

The audit of policy implementation at Byrds Housing Association demonstrates the possibility of static reassertion within the Association. The reports presented to the various decision making committees of the organisation indicated that a process of equal opportunities change had been taking place at a corporate level. However, regional disparities in performance had not been addressed. This

process of concealment might be seen as reflecting a greater regional commitment to the preservation of regional reputation than to securing genuine change.

The authority of centralised gatekeepers, by omission or design, was not enforced in the face of regional avoidance of target setting commitments. The non-operational parameters of the Equal Opportunities Advisor's role meant that I was also unable to intervene within day to day equality matters. Whilst I did make a number of progress reports to specific regional committees, they primarily concerned policy initiatives rather than policy implementation. However, given that I was driven throughout the equal opportunities process by the desire to demonstrate policy success and to prove the effectiveness of the equal opportunities post, it is arguable how far I would have felt capable of pointing out policy shortfall without undermining my own organisational position. It is also quite possible that critical reports would in any case have been vetoed by a Regional Director prior to presentation. This created an opportunity space for regional disparities in equality performance. Therefore an Association decision to consolidate its equality initiatives, rather than force the implementation of more radical change, could leave some areas of the organisation fundamentally untouched by the equal opportunities workplan and dependent upon the further

activities of change activists in order to stimulate policy development.

I concluded in a memo to the Corporate Planning Director (CPD) shortly prior to the end of the post:

Staff are generally aware of [the Association's] requirements of them regarding the equal opportunities policy. However additional work is required to ensure that they see it as a priority. I would suggest:

- (i) Regional Action Plans
- (ii) 12 monthly equal opportunities reports to Board and six monthly reports to Regional Committees.
- (iii) Continuing use of targets and performance indicators.
- (iv) Continuing internal and external publicity of [the Association's] policies.
- (v) Encouragement of regional committee members with an equal opportunities background.
- (vi) Head Office monitoring to ensure that equal opportunities does not return to being a purely housing management issue.
- (vii) Finally some policies (eg disability) contain a large amount of policy items which require strict monitoring to ensure implementation.

(EOA memo to CPD 8/92)

I believed that the Association had made substantial progress on equal opportunities issues, but there had not yet been a change in organisational culture which would ensure that equal opportunities were seen as integral to staff responsibilities irrespective of the area of work or discipline of employees. Despite the inclusion of equal opportunities on the organisation's policy agenda in 1991, its place there was not self-perpetuating. I felt that the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor was a useful resource for members of staff who were already committed to equal

opportunities or who wished to progress a particular issue. It did not at that point appear to be capable of exerting sufficient pressure or influence to change the behaviour of unsympathetic staff. Therefore I argued that it was essential to find ways of gaining the adherence of senior managers to the equal opportunities programme. They could then facilitate equal opportunities through appraisal target setting for their immediate staff. They would in turn be required to implement equal opportunities target setting throughout the management chain in order to meet their own targets. Whilst colleagues within the Corporate Planning Team had taken on extra equal opportunities responsibilities, the Association's regional staff had not yet become involved in significant areas of equal opportunities work. A strategy of personal target setting would force these staff to own the equal opportunities policy.

The commitments to developing community links which were made and have since been maintained, along with the formalisation of the housing points scheme, indicates that a process of static reassertion did not extinguish all of the Association's equal opportunities initiatives. However whilst there was a shift in organisational culture towards a more proactive equal opportunities approach, the radical element of the policy was of transitory influence. Indeed the radical approaches within the informal process of change

were as dependent upon individual officers as the formalised approaches of the local office introduced prior to 1987.

Chapter Nine - Conclusions

This dissertation analyses the hypothesis that organisations may have an organisational power vacuum, an opportunity space which can be exploited by change activists in order to achieve radical policy and organisational change. The hypothesis examines a tension between freedom of action and constraint upon action which provides a constant theme throughout the dissertation. Four detailed areas of the research will now be examined. These are: first, at a practice based level the requirements for the successful implementation of organisational race equality policies; secondly, at a methodological level the continuing weaknesses in the research models which seek to explain the differentiated housing outcomes between ethnic groups; thirdly, the continuing peripheralisation of the creative use of discretion within the literature of organisational equal opportunities performance; fourthly, a new conceptualisation of equal opportunities change - the organisational power vacuum.

Equal opportunities policy implementation

Bowman (1993b: 47) argues that implementing equal opportunities in the housing association movement is now about how to do it, rather than whether to do it. I would

disagree. The results of NFHA (1992a) and CRE (1993a) research indicate a greater concern amongst housing associations with paper policies and being seen to be doing something, rather than actually doing it. The current emphasis within housing associations upon customer care policies should not obscure from housing professionals the evidence that some of their customers have consistently fared worse than others in access to public sector housing resources. A return to the 'colour blind' approach by another name will not resolve this historic disadvantage.

The results from my case study appear to broadly endorse the continuing relevance of the integrationist approach to equal opportunities rather than the assimilationist approach. The latter can be rejected on a conceptual level as detaching organisations from their societal context. It ignores the inequalities which affect particular communities, and prevent them from gaining access to organisational employment opportunities.

My case study research also suggests that the integrationist model was best suited to the internal organisation of Byrds Housing Association. The organisation required a responsive policy framework, since it was too decentralised and differentiated to accept standard formalised criteria. The integrationist approach offered the flexibility required by a decentralised organisation whilst equal opportunities

target setting offered a way of engaging in dialogue with the organisational performance culture of the Association.

Whilst it is apparent that in practice, the implementation of target setting and indeed other parts of the equal opportunities programme was partial, this is an affirmation of the integrationist model rather than a rejection of it. The weaknesses of the Association's implementation programme demonstrate the importance of Mason and Jewson's (1992) approach to equal opportunities change. In particular shortfalls in implementation at Byrds Housing Association highlight the significance of three areas of their plan. These are the necessity of securing the commitment of organisational power holders; ensuring that equal opportunities managers have powers of investigation and report; and routine appraisal of managers in each localised unit.

The Board of Management's decision to introduce the equal opportunities post and endorse the resulting workplan demonstrated a clear commitment to equal opportunities work. However, the designation of ACAD as a shadow, and the fluctuating commitment to particular policy measures can be seen as undermining that commitment. The comparatively weak powers available for the Equal Opportunities Advisor to intervene and report on matters of concern illustrate that there was clearly potential for a far more rigorous

endorsement of the policy. These restrictions undermined my ability to incorporate equal opportunities within the Association's performance culture. Equally the resistance to incorporating equal opportunities within the appraisal process presented a barrier to the creation of an equality culture.

The impetus given to equality practices by the introduction of an Equal Opportunities Advisor emphasised the importance of a specific post. An exclusively designated post could play a far greater role in promoting issues than attaching responsibilities to a generic organisational function. The separate role appeared particularly important at an organisation such as Byrds Housing Association, where there was limited equal opportunities expertise, particularly within the teams which were responsible for co-ordinating the work of the Association. The tendency which the CRE noted for the equal opportunities post to be seen as solely responsible for equal opportunities, and the concern of the Board lest that should happen, reflect weaknesses within the Association rather than the creation of a separate post.

It was hardly surprising that officers should defer to the Equal Opportunities Advisor when they were being interviewed on a policy which was barely six months old, by an organisation with executive and judicial powers. Furthermore some of the key measures designed by the Equal Opportunities

Advisor to achieve ownership of the policy were precisely the ones which Board members and senior staff obstructed! A properly resourced and mandated equal opportunities officer is essential in providing an organisation such as Byrds Housing Association with the expertise and focus necessary to deal with complex equal opportunities issues.

A new model of 'race' and housing

Ratcliffe (1995) argues that the 1991 census provides researchers with expanded opportunities to understand the causes of housing outcomes, particularly through a comparison of the outcomes of UK born and non-UK born minority ethnic cohorts. Structuration theory appears to be the best model to take this debate forward because of its recognition of a diversity of influences including the roles of the individual and societal structures. It observes the dynamic processes involved in accessing resources on a day-to-day basis and consequently appears to be sensitive to the potential of change not only within society but as a future object of study. However, as Craib (1992: 112) suggests, structuration theory describes rather than explains. Therefore it can be argued that we need a revised model of structuration theory which focuses clearly upon common features of the 'race' and housing debate in order to seize the opportunities identified above by Ratcliffe. In

particular, this directed gaze should recognise the continuing potential of social gatekeeping to shape the distribution of inequalities and life chances within a given level of resources. This must incorporate an understanding of change activism. To shift the emphasis of one of Saunders' (1981: 138-139) conclusions, the study of street-level bureaucrats and urban managers is critical in understanding the way in which a resource constrained economic system exacerbates the inequalities of particular sectors of society and benefits others. Structuration theory already offers a methodology for an understanding of the actions of the change activist:

given the emphasis upon *praxis* performed by knowledgeable agents, all studies consistent with the principles of structuration theory...must include some insights into the practical understanding agents maintain with regard to their own conduct and the conduct of others, and how they make sense of the social circumstances in which that conduct occurs.
(Cohen 1989: 283)

The role of discretion

The integrationist and assimilationist models of equal opportunities change address the existence of organisational discretion. However, the radical potential of change activists is underplayed. Their capacity to bring about change is perhaps the key feature of this thesis and can be seen in the central role of discretion in the informal

change processes within the case study of Byrds Housing Association.

The greatest increases in minority ethnic access to the Association's tenancies appeared to occur whilst change activists exploited the discretion within the merit allocations system. Nevertheless although the Association succeeded in housing more minority ethnic households between 1987 and 1991, it seemed as if this was at the expense of housing minority ethnic households in the Association's poorer quality accommodation. This is borne out by the statistical records of housing outcomes in 1987 and 1989, and appears to reflect the workings of the Association's internal transfer scheme and the boundaries of practitioner discretion. White European households were requesting transfers from smaller properties as their personal circumstances changed. Subsequently they would move to better quality or larger accommodation. Change activists would then use their discretion to allocate minority ethnic households to the resulting vacancies, which would typically be within the smaller or poorer quality stock. This explanation of processes within the allocations system between 1987 and 1989, helps to explain the differential patterns in access to particular property types within an overall picture of declining White European and increasing minority ethnic access to tenancies.

There were different opportunities and constraints facing the housing officer as a change activist compared with the potentials of the Equal Opportunities Advisor. A review of the case study initially suggests greater freedom of action for the housing officer. However, this role was vulnerable to a changing external environment. As the participant observation moved from a focus upon the role of the housing officer to a focus upon the role of the Equal Opportunities Advisor, the constraints of a housing points system were being introduced upon the housing officer. In response the housing officer may have found new adaptations to create another sphere of discretion in daily practice.

The housing officer as a change activist also enjoyed freedom to propose policies, however s/he could be hampered by dependence upon the resources of others in order to be able to progress an item, and dependence upon the continuation of the organisational power vacuum. In addition, to some extent the ability to intervene within the equal opportunities arena reflected the absence of an effective equal opportunities focus which the Association subsequently sought to address.

During my participant observation my impression was that I faced a greater number of operational constraints as the Association's Equal Opportunities Advisor than I did as a housing officer. However, this seems to have reflected my

frustration with a non-operational role which meant that I was unable to translate my commitment to race equality change into immediate results in contrast to my previous housing management work.

The requirement that I should produce regular reports for the organisational hierarchy to monitor the implementation of the equal opportunities workplan, and by implication my own performance, clearly placed parameters on the discretionary opportunities of the Equal Opportunities Advisor. However, on reflection it now seems that I had considerable, if not greater, freedom within the equal opportunities workplan than within housing management. For example I devised the equal opportunities programme and had scope to prioritise the individual items within it. Whilst I did have difficulty in gaining an effective mandate for parts of the workplan and I also felt the pressures of nondecision making, none of my proposed initiatives were removed from the equal opportunities programme. I was now seeking to maximise the formal opportunity space for decision making, rather than seeking to indulge in informal decision making. Ironically my new equal opportunities initiatives might be seen as closing the opportunity space for other junior gatekeepers within the organisation to indulge in discretion. However, it again might be noted that those gatekeepers antithetical to change could have been hoping to derail the strategy and its possible effects.

The inability of change activists to perceive the limits to the effectiveness of bounded discretion in policy or practice might ensure that the covert change process fails to take root. Therefore they require an awareness of the extent of opportunity space and the means of rooting initiatives in organisational custom, convention and/or authority. Otherwise, it might only be possible to implement radical change for as long as informal processes escape organisational scrutiny. A change in personnel within the office or within the organisation, might remove the commitment to achieve radical change or increase the organisation's scrutiny of attempts to bring about change. For change activists this carries with it the danger that their impact will be temporary, indeed that the long-term impact of their strategies will be a static reassertion, a reversion of the organisation to previous practice, perhaps accompanied by the construction of new barriers to further formal and informal change.

The organisational power vacuum

The idea of an organisational power vacuum can be articulated in two ways. First as a descriptive term and secondly as a paradigm which provides a contribution to the analysis of organisational change. It is a descriptive term

for the organisational space which allows junior gatekeepers to achieve their own policy objectives, as well as exercise practitioner discretion. Thus it brings discretion to the centre of the organisational debate.

It is the window of opportunity for change activists to realise their own organisational objectives which may offer a radical break from existing practice. Whilst it shares common features with street level bureaucracy and the theory of policy entrepreneurs, it seeks to highlight the scope of officers to not only exercise discretion and informal practices, but to appropriate the formal policy process. It therefore provides greater emphasis upon the scope to introduce informal policies and bring about fundamental change than Young and Connelly's concept of action space.

The organisational power vacuum's opportunity space contains resources ranging from specific equal opportunities policies to wide ranging policy statements, for example an organisational commitment to meet housing need. Whilst these may be paper policies developed purely to meet the requirements of external agencies, they can be used to legitimate the strategies of change activists. However, the discretion and ability of change activists to carry out radical policy is not a free fire zone for informal policy making. The opportunity space is still bounded by those formal policies which the organisation does choose to

enforce, coupled with the proclivities and organisational vision of the change activists themselves.

In the case study, there was an opportunity space created by a conscious or unconscious withdrawal of formal authority from an organisational area. Since Byrds Housing Association seemed to be a relatively regimented housing association, it is probable that at least comparable opportunities for discretion exist within the rest of the housing association sector. Further research would be necessary to establish whether similar opportunities exist within other service delivery organisations.

As a paradigm the organisational power vacuum provides a new conceptualisation of equal opportunities change. It suggests that researchers should examine the role of individuals outside the formal policy making process of an organisation, when studying policy formulation and its practical implementation. They should incorporate the principles of Lukes' (1974) three dimensional view of power, which stresses the necessity of examining the way in which conflict and in this case initiative might be averted by formal power holders. This perspective should then be extended to analyse the circumstances in which constraint is not exercised, with consequent opportunities derived by individual change activists.

Therefore I echo Lipsky's (1980: xii) view that it is insufficient to try and understand the policy process within an individual organisation purely through the study of the policy proposals of senior managers and the processes of hierarchical policy consideration, acceptance and implementation. Researchers must also look at the role of junior staff within the organisation and the nature of organisational control. It is essential within policy research to analyse whether an organisational power vacuum exists and whether it is exploited. This is to provide an accurate understanding of not only the process of policy adoption, but also the likelihood of that policy being, implemented as framed at executive level or, amended at junior levels of the hierarchy. As McNaught (1988: 33) states, the question of 'who makes decisions in an organisation cannot be wholly predicted by...formal position'.

The paradigm of the organisational power vacuum emphasises the ability of the junior gatekeeper to consciously bring about comprehensive policy change. Policy change within the organisational power vacuum is not just the street-level bureaucrats' accumulation of incremental practices. It stems from the opportunity space which allows individual officers to help individual clients within their bureaucratic brief, despite Lipsky's (1980: 73) gloomy prognosis of the

opportunities for advocacy, and then to reshape organisational policy.

Therefore researchers of organisational policy development should ask, has the organisation left a window of opportunity which might allow junior gatekeepers to exercise discretion? Is it sufficient to allow gatekeepers to creatively develop and implement their own policy agenda or is it merely sufficient to allow them to improvise policy as a necessity of workplace pressure? If a window of opportunity exists and gatekeepers do not seize that opportunity, what does that indicate about the organisation's legitimacy, the legitimacy of the policy process and the legitimacy of the policy itself? Is the policy as a consequence more or less likely to be subjected to the vagaries of urban managerialism, street-level bureaucracy or policy entrepreneurship?

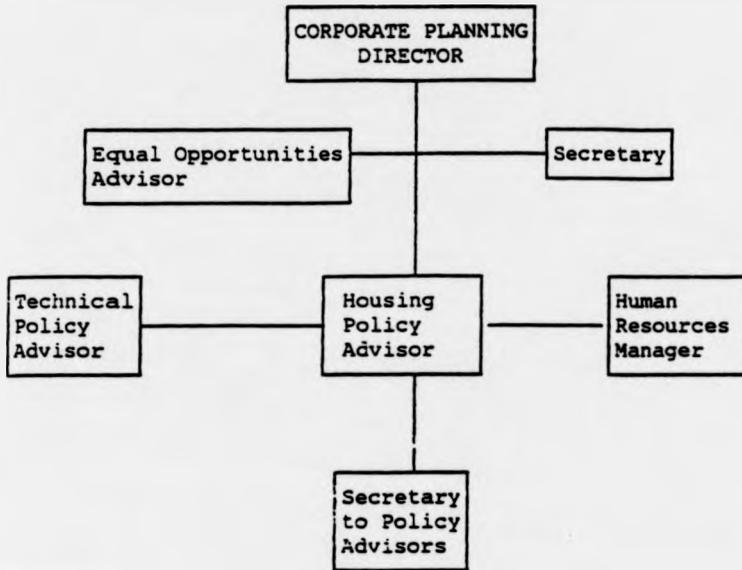
Applied at a practice based level, the organisational power vacuum stands as an affirmation of the potential capabilities of relatively junior employees to bring about corporate change. Therefore my hypothesis and the records of my own participant observation do not simply evaluate the concept of an organisational power vacuum as a paradigm or descriptive term. It also acts as a model for the exploitation of opportunity space. This model should be

criticised, evaluated and amended to provide further tools for future radical equal opportunities change within diverse organisations.

**Appendix One: Role specification - Equal Opportunities
Advisor**

ROLE SPECIFICATION: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ADVISOR

1. Title of Role: Equal Opportunities Advisor
2. Chart :



3. Type of Role: Technical Assistant (temporary 12 months secondment)
4. Accountability: Corporate Planning Director
5. Sub-Ordinate and Roles: None
6. Objectives :
 - 6.1 Provide effective systems and procedures to meet the Housing Corporation's Performance Expectations on Racial Equality and Equal Opportunity.
 - 6.2 Provide effective systems and procedures to meet the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Code of Practice in rented housing.
 - 6.3 Liaise with the Corporate Planning Director, policy advisors and other staff members at all levels within the Association to implement new systems and procedures in the different functions.
7. Terms of Reference

"he" shall mean "he or she" throughout the specification.

He shall ensure that he is fully conversant with:

 - 7.1 The law and all Corporation, Commissions for Racial Equality and NFHA practice guidance on race equality and equal opportunity.
 - 7.2 present systems, policies and procedures to provide equal treatment, positive action and elimination of racial discrimination as well as disabled discrimination.

- 7.3 He shall keep the Corporate Planning Director continuously informed of the results of the work and any difficulties that may arise.

Tasks

- 8.1 Construct a 12 month work programme with implementation targets to meet the requirements of the Housing Corporation and Commission for Racial equality Code of Practice.
- 8.2 In conjunction with Policy Advisors, change the Equal Opportunity Policy to ensure it meets the criteria of the Code of Practice and to consult with the relevant decision groups.
- 8.3 In conjunction with Policy Advisors, review all the existing practices and procedures of the organisation to ensure that they do not discriminate directly or indirectly.
- 8.4 Identify outstanding policies and procedures to the Corporate Planning Team to ensure there is equal opportunity and clear criteria in all activities of the Association.
- 8.5 In conjunction with the Assistant to the Chief Executive and Housing Policy Advisor, publicise the revised equal opportunity policy to all "customers".
- 8.6 In conjunction with Technical Policy Advisor review systems for contractor vetting to ensure equal opportunity in the selection of contractors and in conjunction with Technical Policy Advisor review systems for consultant commissioning to ensure equal opportunity in the selection of consultants.
- 8.7 In conjunction with Technical Policy Advisor review systems for assessment of the equal opportunities policies of consultants and contractors.
- 8.8 In conjunction with Technical Policy Advisor review design criteria to ensure housing provision sympathetic to the specific needs of all customers.
- 8.9 construct ethnic record keeping and monitoring systems to meet the access, quality and service delivery criteria of the Code of Practice. To consult through the Regional Directors with the local communities on why monitoring is being introduced and the views on the classification.
- 8.10 Identify any barriers to communications barriers and to investigate ways to overcome these difficulties.
- 8.11 In conjunction with Regional Development and Regional Housing staff, identify the particular accommodation needs of ethnic minorities in any given area.
- 8.12 In conjunction with Human Resources Manager, identify the outstanding training needs on the equal opportunity policy for all staff and Committee Members.

- 8.13 To provide information to Regional/Head Office Managers positive action employment initiatives such as "Path", Disabled Sheltered placements.
- 8.14 In conjunction with Housing Policy Advisor, monitor the effectiveness of the Racial Harassment Policy and procedures.
- 8.15 Produce regular reports on progress of the work programme and improvements on the equal opportunities statistics.
- 8.16 Propose policy changes as necessary to appropriate decision making groups.

Signed

Date

Appendix Two: Programme for Equal Opportunities Advisor

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ADVISER ACTION PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At present the Association has established equal opportunities policies but has not established many practices for implementing equal opportunities.
- 1.2 The post of equal opportunities advisor should be able to co-ordinate the response necessary to meet these shortfalls.
- 1.3 The Housing Corporation's Performance Standards indicate that race should be the immediate focus of equal opportunity policy.

However Associations are expected to ensure good equal opportunities practice for those with disabilities, other vulnerable groups with special needs, and women and it is therefore important to note that the post is one of equal opportunities advisor rather than merely race advisor.

- 1.4 Equally it is important that the creation of a post of equal opportunities advisor does not marginalise equal opportunities issues. It should aim to make all members of staff feel responsible for the Association having good equal opportunities practices.
- 1.5 Whilst the post cannot hope to alter attitudes it should examine ways in which behaviour can be altered so that the Association's procedures promote good equal opportunities practices.
- 1.6 The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) have now approached the Association to participate in their formal investigation into housing associations under the 1976 Race Relations Act.
- 1.7 Additionally it appears that the Code of Practice on Rented Housing issued by the CRE will be incorporated into Housing Corporation monitoring and that poor performance on this item will affect the Association's development allocations. This paper identifies the shortcomings in the Associations current equal opportunities provision compared with good practice identified by the Housing Corporation and the CRE. A twelve month action plan has been developed in order to tackle those areas where the Association either partly or completely fails to meet best practice.

2. EXISTING SHORTFALLS

The following areas of the CRE's Code of Practice in Rented Housing and the Housing Corporation's Performance Expectations are areas that we fail to meet or only partially meet.

- 2.1 Target setting based not only upon the local ethnic minority population but also other indicators of need to measure how far equal opportunities are being achieved in all areas of the Association's work.
- 2.2 Widening the scope of the Association's existing monitoring systems to include quality of accommodation offered to ethnic minority households, time on waiting list prior to offer, source of application and receipt of all services that the Association provides.
- 2.3 Training on equal opportunity policy for all staff and Committee members.
- 2.4 Tackling the informal barriers to access posed by communication difficulties and the lack of large accommodation.
- 2.5 Liaison between housing management and development to establish unmet needs within the ethnic minority community in local areas.
- 2.6 Encouragement of ethnic minority consultants and contractors.
- 2.7 The establishment of regular reviews of policies and procedures to ensure that they do not discriminate.
- 2.8 The encouragement of employment and training opportunities for black and ethnic minority people.
- 2.9 Consideration of employing black Housing Management Officers specifically to provide services for certain racial groups in order to promote their welfare.
- 2.10 The establishment of positive action to improve for the ethnic minority community.
 - i) Access to social housing
 - ii) Quality of housing
 - iii) Involvement in management of social housing
- 2.11 The formulation by development departments of action to meet unmet needs.
- 2.12 Ensuring that membership of relevant voluntary committees of the Association reflects the ethnic composition of the areas in which the Association works where suitable members of the community are available.
- 2.13 Associations are expected to ensure equal opportunities for those with disabilities, other vulnerable groups with special needs and women.
- 2.14 Provide at least 3% of jobs for registered disabled people.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 The trust and commitment of local offices will be needed to achieve progress at ground level. Therefore it is envisaged that during July, August and September a number of local offices will be visited to discuss:

- i) Local perception of the needs of the ethnic minority community.
- ii) The purpose of the equal opportunities post.
- iii) Ways of building a good consultation network with the local ethnic minority community.
- iv) The most effective way of communicating and monitoring policies so that they are effectively implemented.
- v) Mutually agreed performance targets.

It is hoped that from this process it will be possible to identify a local officer with responsibility for contact with the local ethnic minority community and responsibility for ensuring that new procedures are implemented.

3.2 It will be essential to work in conjunction with existing policy advisors.

3.3 To make use of Regional Committee, Regional Management Teams, Housing Management Policy Group, Technical Policy Group and Development Managers Meetings to disseminate information on equal opportunities.

3.4 To investigate the establishment of or to gain representation on regional forums relating to good equal opportunities practice.

3.5 Contacts could be made with other organisations to pool resources on some larger items of equal opportunities implementation, e.g. organisation of open day for contractors.

4. ACTION REQUIRED

This section lists by discipline in order of implementation the action that the Association needs to take in order to fulfil the requirements of the CRE and the Action Plan adopted by the Group Policy Team in February.

4.1 HOUSING MANAGEMENT

- i) EXAMINATION OF EXISTING TRENDS - Assessment of existing figures relating to race to identify variations in regional performance trends on equal opportunities - from July.

- ii) MONITORING SYSTEMS - Identify and agree areas for the extension of the analysis of housing statistics form to fulfil the CRE's requirements that quality of accommodation received by the ethnic minority community from the Association, the time that ethnic minority households spend on the waiting list, the route that people have gained housing from, and the receipt of other services should be monitored - from July.
- iii) RACIAL HARASSMENT POLICY - Monitor effectiveness of racial harassment policy and revise as necessary - from July.
- iv) POINTS SYSTEM - Continued involvement in setting up a points system for ranking new housing applicants is considered necessary because of the implications to the ethnic minority community of the new system - from July.
- v) TRANSLATIONS - Translation of the Associations activities by the Coventry based Ethnic Minorities Development Unit - from August.
- vi) CORE STATISTICS - Draw to the attention of the regions relevant trends from the core statistics - from August.
- vii) TARGETS - Agreement of targets for numbers of housing application forms to be attracted from the ethnic minority community, acceptance to waiting list and reletting.

These targets would then be monitored and would be extended when other monitoring mechanisms are added providing data to devise targets from - from September.

- viii) INTERPRETERS - Ensure that District and Area teams have arranged access to translation services - from October.
- ix) COMMUNITY LINKS - Direct District and Area teams to the type of forums where they will make productive contacts with local black and ethnic minority groups - from October.
- x) LOCAL AUTHORITY LINKS - Advise and support district and area teams on the items that they should be discussing with local authorities. For example whether council nominations are representative and the establishment of monitoring systems to examine trends - from October.
- xi) WAITING LISTS - Examine implications for equal opportunities where Area and District teams operate closed waiting lists - from October.
- xii) LETTINGS POLICIES - Once data is available from monitoring reports assessment of areas where indirect discrimination might be occurring and identification of action to rectify it can occur. For example the transfer system will need to be examined if it is found that it benefits existing white tenants in gaining the Association's best accommodation - from January.

xiii) POSITIVE ACTION - Establishment of positive action programmes to ensure equal access to social housing, to good quality housing and involvement in the management of social housing. This could be by the development of referral networks and presentations to raise the Associations profile in the black and ethnic minority community, and identification of resources from other organisations which could be used e.g. CRC's and REC's. However the Association should be aware of CRE advice regarding the parameters within which positive action is legal - from April.

xiv) DISABLED ISSUES

- i) Draw up a housing policy for the disabled.
- ii) Liaise with national disabled groups and direct district and area teams towards local forums - from February.

xv) SPECIAL NEEDS - Consider housing needs of other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups - from April.

4.2 TECHNICAL

i) EXISTING DATA - Assessment of existing data on equal opportunities - from July.

ii) DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

- a) Liaison with _____ Society Ltd and
as required.
- b) Input into development bids to ensure that the needs of the whole community are represented - from September.

iii) EXTENSION OF MAINTENANCE CONTRACTORS - Action to ensure that ethnic minority and female contractors enjoy equal access to the Association's approved lists.

The Association could hold open days with other local associations in a district in order to promote their activities and attract ethnic minority and female builders.

It should develop monitoring systems to examine the use of new contractors - from November.

iv) CONTRACTOR VETTING

- a) Review of systems for contractor vetting to ensure equal opportunity in the selection of contractors including assessment of contractors own equal opportunities policies.
- b) Establishment of monitoring systems to allow assessment to be continued.
- c) Establishment of complaints procedure and disciplinary action where contractors are found to have been sexist, racist etc. to tenants - from December.

- r) CONTRACTOR PERFORMANCE - Establishment of repair monitoring in order to ensure that ethnic minority tenants receive an equal service with regard to time taken for completion of repair and quality of repair etc. - from December.
- vi) DESIGN CRITERIA - Review design criteria to ensure housing provision sympathetic to the specific needs of all customers. For example inclusion of mixer taps and showers in all developments to make them accessible to Asian applicants. Assessment of suitability of existing design criteria to disabled clients - from February.
- vii) CONSULTANT COMMISSIONING - Review systems for consultant commissioning to ensure equal opportunity in the selection of consultants including assessment of consultants own equal opportunities policies - from March.
- viii) TARGET SETTING - IN CONJUNCTION WITH EACH ITEM
Establishment of agreed target for each issue.

4.3 PERSONNEL

- i) EXISTING TRENDS - Examination of existing trends of the Association's employees regarding equal opportunities - from July.
- ii) PATH - Liaise as appropriate with PATH - from July.
- iii) TRAINING - Housing Corporation Circular 07/91 requires all staff and committee members to receive training and guidance on the details of equal opportunity policy and to ensure that they are fully aware of their responsibilities under the Race Relations Act and its implications for their work.

Therefore a rolling programme of job related race equality training must be organised - from September.

iv) FORMATION OF RECRUITMENT POLICY

- a) Aid Area, District, Regional and Head Office in identifying local and national publications to attract applications from the black and ethnic minority community.
- b) Establish a policy for the recruitment of disabled people.
- c) Distribution of equal opportunity policy with all employment application forms.
- d) Aid Area and District offices in establishing a network of voluntary, community and religious organisations in the minority communities willing to display employment advertisements.
- e) Develop contacts with black "caucus", other ethnic minority groupings and FBHO to publicise the Association - from November.

v) SELECTION PROCEDURES

- a) Examination of whether existing selection procedures fulfil latest equal opportunities good practice.
- b) Target setting for numbers of disabled and ethnic minority applications expected for advertised posts, interviews and posts offered - from January.

vi) SECTION 11 POSTS - Investigate the feasibility of bidding for Section 11 posts - from January.

4.4 PROFILE RAISING

- i) CIRCULARS - Reply to circulars as necessary - from July.
- ii) TENANTS HANDBOOK - Discuss possibility of including some translated summary information in reprints of handbook - from July.
- iii) PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS - Publicise progress made by the Association in Inside Housing, HA Weekly etc. to continue profile raising - from August.
- iv) RECEPTION AREAS - Develop good practice on the equal opportunities image that the Association projects to new and existing clients in its reception areas by its displays and notice boards - from October.
- v) COMMUNITY LINKS - Monitor the work that each region has accomplished in establishing a network of groups in the black and ethnic minority community with regard to the full range of the Association's activities, and the information that they are disseminating through these groups - from October.

vi) AGENCIES

- a) Examine the records of agencies which work with the Association, for example Care and Repair,
- b) Ensure that they are meeting the Associations equal opportunities policies.
- c) Learn from good practice within the agencies - from May.

4.5 CORPORATE PLANNING

- i) PROGRESS REPORTS - Produce regular reports on progress of the work programme and improvements and areas of concern on the equal opportunities statistics, review the workplan as necessary - monthly.

- ii) CORPORATE PLAN - Identify equal opportunities policy and procedures for corporate plan - from August.
- iii) REVIEW OF POLICIES - Continuing review of all policies and procedures to ensure indirect and direct discrimination do not occur - from August.
- iv) EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY - In conjunction with the relevant decision groups amend the equal opportunity policy in the light of developments in good practice - from March.
- 5. RESUME OF TIMETABLE FOR ACTION START DATES

Most items are ongoing and therefore concentrated towards the beginning of the twelve month period to allow progress to be assessed. The initial start dates are:-

JULY	Consultation with local offices Involvement in points system Investigation of tenants handbook Establishment of monitoring systems Examination of existing trends Monitor racial harassment policy Liaise with PATH and training organisations as appropriate
AUGUST	Core statistic trends Use of in house publications Publicise progress in professional journals where appropriate Continuous review of policies Arrangement of translations Identify areas of equal opportunities applicable to corporate plan
SEPTEMBER	Input into development programmes Target setting Training planning
OCTOBER	Advise on community links and interpreters Advise on local authority liaison Arrangement of reception areas Issues of closed waiting lists
NOVEMBER	Open days for maintenance contractors Development of recruitment policy
DECEMBER	Examination of policy on contractor vetting Examination of equal opportunities performance of contractors

JANUARY	Examination of whether lettings policies are discriminatory Examination of employment selection procedures Investigation of Section 11 funding
FEBRUARY	Development of equal opportunities policies for the disabled Assessment of design criteria used by the Association
MARCH	Review of equal opportunities policy Examination of policy on commissioning consultants Examination of success of communication with black and ethnic minority community
APRIL	Development of equal opportunities policies for other disadvantaged groups Development of positive action programmes
MAY	Assessment of work carried out by agencies connected to the Association

6. TARGET SETTING

The CRE advises that where target setting is implemented, the targets set should reflect the socio-economic position of the ethnic minority community in addition to a head count of the local population.

I.E. Given that the Association seeks to help those in the greatest need and most ethnic minority groups are overrepresented in this group then the targets set may be higher than merely the ethnic minority representation in the local population.

7. SUMMARY

By consultation with local offices it is hoped that the regions will view the post as a means of helping them improve their own performance with regard to equal opportunities by mutually agreed target setting.

This is necessary not only to fulfil stricter monitoring in this area but also to enable the Association to fulfil its purpose of meeting the requirements of those in housing need across the whole community.

At the end of the twelve month period it will have to be reviewed which areas have been successfully completed and the causes examined where targets have not been achieved.

D. TOMLINS
08.07.91

Appendix Three: Equal opportunities - progress report

To The Chairman and Members of the BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

21st May 1992

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES - PROGRESS REPORT

1. Introduction

The Board of Management approved the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor as a secondment from 1st July 1991. A twelve month workplan was subsequently agreed and was reviewed in January 1992 (Appendix 1 notes the areas discussed).

The secondment is due to end on 30th June and consequently this Board meeting represents the final opportunity to assess the Associations progress in equal opportunities as part of the current workplan.

The report is split into two sections:

- (i) Work completed since January's progress report.
- (ii) Additional equal opportunity issues for the Association.

2. Items Processed in 1992

(i) Target setting

The principle of target setting is a key management tool in ensuring ownership of equal opportunities policies and monitoring of equal opportunities performance. Two Regional Committees have agreed targets for lettings with a further two Committees due to consider targets during June. The Group Policy Team has agreed employment targets for each office within the Association. A summary of targets currently being implemented by the Association is contained in Appendix 2.

(ii) Personnel Manual

The Recruitment and Selection Section of the Personnel Manual has been revised in line with best equal opportunities practice and will be issued with the new Personnel Manual in the summer.

(iii) Disability

A comprehensive disability policy is currently being prepared to be accompanied by detailed procedures addressing issues for housing management, technical and development departments and human resources. It is intended to produce draft copies of the policy and procedures for Housing Management Policy Group in May and Technical Policy Group in June prior to the submission of a paper to the Group Policy Team.

(iv) Training

The Association's equal opportunities training programme has begun. By the week ending 8th May 4 Regional Committee members and 77 staff had undergone training. It is hoped to train a further 121 staff by the end of June with 3 further Regional Committee sessions arranged for July and August. The total cost of the programme is £7,200. A number of items have been highlighted by staff as requiring further policy development as

a result of the sessions and in particular childcare, flexible working hours and job share. These are incorporated in section 2 of this paper.

As part of the contract agreed with the training consultant, the Equal Opportunities Advisor, Human Resources Manager and four regional staff are being trained to co tutor and it is intended to undertake the second phase of equal opportunities training in-house using the experience that is being developed within the Corporate Planning Team and regions. It is hoped to retain the services of the training consultant as an advisor to the second phase.

The provisional programme for the second phase of training to run from October to December is:

Policy Makers	1 x 1 day course -
Housing Management Officers	1 x 2 day course -
Finance	1 x 1 day course -
Non Front Line Staff	2 x 1 day course -
Scheme Staff	3 x 2 day course -

Thereafter it is envisaged that new staff will receive equal opportunities training in their first year of employment with a further need for refresher courses or specialised training such as disability awareness training.

(v) Performance Expectations

The Board of Management Equal Opportunities Working Party and subsequently the Board of Management received a report on the Association's performance against the draft second edition of the Housing Corporations Performance Expectations. The final edition has not yet been received for further consideration. Those Performance Expectations which the Association did not fully meet are incorporated in the second part of this paper.

(vi) Ethnic Minority Grant

The Equal Opportunities Advisor and Human Resources Manager are discussing with the Training and Enterprise Council the feasibility of the Association providing a training project for people from the black and minority ethnic communities in technical and development services. The next meeting is due on May 18th.

(vii) PATB (Positive Action Through Housing)

Liaison is continuing with the Path training scheme for placement of trainees with the Association. The total cost per trainee is currently estimated to be £6,405 outside London and between £9,280 and £11,030 within London. The Board of Management are recommended to support the view of Regional Committee that an Association wide policy should be established for the employment of PATB trainees. A paper would

then be drawn up by the Equal Opportunities Advisor for consideration by the Group Policy Team.

(viii) CRE Investigation

The CRE have now completed their interviews and information collection for their investigation into the Associations adoption of race equality policies. The Association has been informed that it should be able to consider and suggest amendments to a draft report at the end of June. It is disappointing that the Association is not able to examine this independent assessment of its work at this point as expected however an appendix is attached (Appendix 3) from the CRE in response to the Association's request for some preliminary guidance. It is expected that the Board of Management and subsequently Regional Committees will wish to consider the Report once it is issued.

(ix) Summary of Other Areas of Work Progressed in 1992

- (a) Investigation of organisations representing contractors owned by members of minority ethnic communities, people with disability and women.
- (b) Input to revised building design brief.
- (c) Proposal of equal opportunities performance indicators.
- (d) Follow up work on identification of interpreters, community networks, and areas for discussion with local authorities..
- (e) Participation in launch of Black Housing Associations Support and Empowerment Trust and surveys on housing provision to the black and minority ethnic community.

3. Additional Equal Opportunities Issues for the Association

3.1 Procedural

- (i) To continue to guard against marginalisation of equal opportunities issues and promote ownership of equal opportunities policies it is intended to develop a larger role for regional equal opportunities representatives. In particular to ensure that they are able to lead on operative issues within their Region.
- (ii) In conjunction with this aim Regional Equal Opportunities Action Plans should be developed to ensure that the Association is sensitive to community differences across the country and to varying levels of progress by each office on equal opportunities matters within the current workplan. The Equal Opportunities Advisor would continue to work centrally in conjunction with the other policy advisors to promote good practice, new initiatives and consistency of approach.
- (iii) All Reports to decision and policy making forums (i.e Board of Management, Regional Committees, Regional Management Team, Housing Management Policy Group, Technical Policy Group etc) should include a section on equal opportunities implications as recommended by the CRE. The aim is to promote ownership of

equal opportunities throughout the Association and avoid the dangers of indirect discrimination.

- (iv) Discuss with _____, the Association's officer responsible for public relations, a series of press releases to promote the Association's achievements in adopting equal opportunities policies.

3.2 Items to be Continued

There are a number of policies which have been introduced but which require development or evaluation of their implementation before they can be considered to be fully adopted. For example, the addition of contractors owned by members of the minority ethnic community, people with disability and women to the Association's approved lists, implementation of community networks for housing referrals and employment vacancies, monitoring of service provided by contractors to all groups of the community and ways of meeting targets.

3.3 New Areas of Work

The following is a list of areas of work which it has been suggested that the Equal Opportunities Advisor should investigate by members of Board of Management, Regional Committees and Staff. Whilst race equality remains a major issue the list reflects the diversity of equal opportunity concerns:

Human Resources

- (i) Phase II training programmes.
- (ii) Implementation of procedures for dealing with racial harassment of staff.
- (iii) Implementation of procedures for dealing with sexual harassment of staff.
- (iv) Investigation of childcare facilities, job share and flexitime.
- (v) Investigation of participation in "Opportunity 2000". Toward a Balanced Workforce.

Housing Management

- (i) Computerisation of the monthly housing statistics form and extension to cover gender and disability.
- (ii) Assessment of the equal opportunities impact of implementation of the housing points system and advice on the development of an objective transfer policy to be compatible with the points scheme.
- (iii) Development of policies within the Association's Emergency Response Unit to provide an improved service to residents within the Region suffering from disability or who do not have English as a first language.
- (iv) Provision of advice where requested regarding the equal opportunities implications of the implementation of common waiting list agreements between _____, local authorities and other housing associations.
- (v) Interpretation of equal opportunities aspects of the Residents Opinion Survey.
- (vi) Progressive translation of the Associations information into agreed minority ethnic languages and consideration of services for the blind and deaf.
- (vii) Advice on equal opportunities aspects of tenant participation.

Development/Technical

- (i) Investigation of ways in which low cost home ownership schemes can be targeted upon minority ethnic communities.

General

- (i) Guidance on stock transfer to black, minority ethnic and other specialist organisations.
- (ii) Review of equal opportunities monitoring categories following model guidance from NFHA.
- (iii) The introduction of policy and good practice for housing management and other disciplines where staff or residents are HIV +.
- (iv) The introduction of policy and good practice for housing management and other disciplines arising from staff or residents sexual orientation.
- (v) Liaison with Regional Directors and Regional Committees regarding the proposal of new Committee members.

3.4 Outstanding Items from Workplan

- (i) Equal Opportunities Vetting of Consultants/Contractors on the Associations approved list

Consideration of this issue had been deferred by the Board of Management pending further advice from the Housing Corporation, which has now been received. The revised second edition of the Performance Expectations will finally state that the Association's Board of Management is legally responsible for ensuring that the Association's staff and agents do not discriminate. The Corporation is still awaiting a second legal opinion clarifying whether consultants and contractors are legally agents of the Association. The detailed guidance from the Corporation is not yet finalised but is expected to recommend that the Association ensures that its consultants/contractors comply with equal opportunities law and Associations' policies. The Board is recommended to authorise the Association to take steps to meet this requirement.

- (ii) Assessment of Equal Opportunities Performance of Agencies Working With the Association

Scheduled to begin in May

- (iii) Relaunch of Racial Harassment Policy

It has become clear over the duration of the workplan that despite considerable publicity, awareness of the Associations racial harassment policy is low amongst staff and residents. Therefore the distribution of translated racial harassment policies will be used to relaunch the policy.

Recommendations

- (i) That additional equal opportunities issues arising outside the original workplan which require investigation are noted.
- (ii) That the Board of Management supports the development of an Association strategy for PATH trainees.

- (iii) That all Reports to policy and decision making forums should contain an assessment of equal opportunities implications in line with the recommendation of the CRE.
- (iv) That the Associations should follow Housing Corporation guidance on the vetting of consultants and contractors.

DICK TOMLINS
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ADVISOR

Resume of Equal Opportunities Advisor - Progress Report - January

The report noted the introduction of new policies and practices in the following areas.

- (i) Equal Opportunities Policy Statement
- (ii) Monitoring Systems - housing, technical and employment
- (iii) Housing application points scheme
- (iv) Translations
- (v) Training
- (vi) Maintenance Contractor Database Questionnaire
- (vii) Housing Development
- (viii) Interpreters and Community links
- (ix) Regional Contacts

The dangers of marginalization and overconcentration on race issues were also noted. These have been addressed since January's progress report and are also addressed in the attached paper amongst additional equal opportunities issues for the Association.

The following equal opportunities targets have currently been agreed by the Association and are subject to review dependent upon dates available and performance against the targets.

Employment

Head Office	-	12% minority ethnic employees of total
Region	-	12%
	-	13%
	-	6%
	-	6%
Region	-	2%
	-	7%
Region	-	12%
	-	15%
	-	6%
	-	3%
Region	-	8%

Region - 2 year target to appoint four registered disabled staff.

Lettings

Region -	11% of total lettings to minority ethnic households
	17.2%
	23.9%
	10.8%
	25.6%
	5.1%

Lettings to people with disability 10% of assured lettings.

Region - 8% of total lettings to minority ethnic community

Lettings to people with disability to be 50% of properties suitable or potentially suitable for people with disability.

As a footnote it should be noted that targets as a guide to performance and self monitoring are legal and recommended by the Housing Corporation, NFHA and RE. Quotas are illegal except in particular examples (e.g the minimum quota for the employment of registered disabled people).



COMMISSION
FOR RACIAL
EQUALITY

Date:

Dear

I have recently been informed by _____ that there will be a Board of Management Meeting on 21 May, to consider a report prepared to outline the implementation of your Equal Opportunities Policy and to review the Equal Opportunities Officer Post.

Given that the Commission's draft report, following our formal investigation into your Association, will not be completed until June, I am writing to ask you to consider carefully the following points:-

1. The Commission supports, in principle, the creation of the Equal Opportunities Officer post.
2. You should note that the development of an effective Equal Opportunities Policy, requires considerably more time than twelve months.
3. We will in due course, be making further and more detailed recommendations, affecting all areas of _____ work. It is therefore, inappropriate for us to table all our recommendations at this stage.

Yours sincerely

Appendix Four: Continuation of equal opportunities work

To The Chairman and Members of the BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

Continuation of Equal Opportunities Work

1. Executive Summary

This paper summarises the Associations strategy for meeting equal opportunities objectives to the end of 1992.

2. Introduction

May's Board of Management meeting agreed a six month extension to the post of Equal Opportunities Advisor. Within this six month workplan it was intended to consider the integration of all future equal opportunities work into the Associations permanent Head Office and Regional Structures. Since the Equal Opportunities Advisor leaves the Associations employment on 31st August it is now necessary to bring that process of integration forward.

It is essential that the progress which the Association has made on equal opportunities issues should be maintained and this paper plans the Associations equal opportunities work for the remainder of the year and identifies a structure in which to develop future policies.

3. Second Phase Workplan

Development of policy items within the second phase workplan have been divided as follows.

All staff - inclusion of equal opportunities implications in all policy papers submitted.

Regions - Define role of regional equal opportunities representatives
- Draw up regional equal opportunities action plans
- Attract representative range of Regional Committee members
- Develop equal opportunities practices within the Emergency Response Unit (Regional Housing Manager).

Corporate Planning Director - Audit implementation of first workplan
- Contract compliance (with Technical Policy Advisor and Regions)
- Response to CRE Report
- Guidance on revisions to equal opportunities monitoring categories
- Stock Transfer procedures (with Regional Director)
- Targeting low cost home initiatives upon the black and minority ethnic community
- Continuation of Translations Policy (with Corporate Planning Directors Secretary)
- Publicity of Equal Opportunities Initiatives (with Communications and Marketing Manager).

Housing Policy Advisor - Advice on equal opportunities aspects of common waiting list agreements
- Advice on equal opportunities aspects of Residents Survey
- Advice on equal opportunities issues of tenant participation
- Computerisation and revision of monthly housing statistic forms
- Introduction of policy and good practice for housing management and other disciplines arising from staff or residents sexual orientation (with Human Resources Manager)

- Assessment of equal opportunities aspects of housing points and transfer scheme

- Human Resources Manager
- Implementation of procedures for dealing with racial harassment of staff
 - Implementation of procedures for dealing with sexual harassment of staff
 - Investigation of childcare facilities, job share and flexitime
 - Phase II Equal Opportunities Training (with consultant)
 - Introduction of policy and good practice for housing management and other disciplines arising from staff or residents sexual orientation (with Housing Policy Advisor)
 - Investigation of participation in "Opportunity 2000" - Toward a balance workforce
 - Involvement in TEC equal opportunities initiatives
- Technical Policy Advisor
- Contract Compliance (with Corporate Planning Director and Regions)
 - Continued involvement in European Community Technology Initiative for the elderly and people with disabilities

Communications and Marketing Manager - publicity of equal opportunities initiatives/with Corporate Planning Director

The Equal Opportunities Advisor has completed a paper detailing the Associations response to meeting the housing needs of people with HIV disease. This will be forwarded to Group Policy Team.

Equal Opportunities Implications

It is essential that staff from all disciplines continue to integrate equal opportunities issues into their daily work and produce procedures to deal with specialist equal opportunities areas.

Conclusion

The division of the above areas of work will ensure that the Association continues to develop equal opportunities policies in order to meet the needs of all sections of the community.

IX TOMLINS
AL OPPORTUNITIES ADVISOR

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