



Is it time for consensual approaches to minimum standards in housing?

Mark Stephens

Director

The Urban Institute

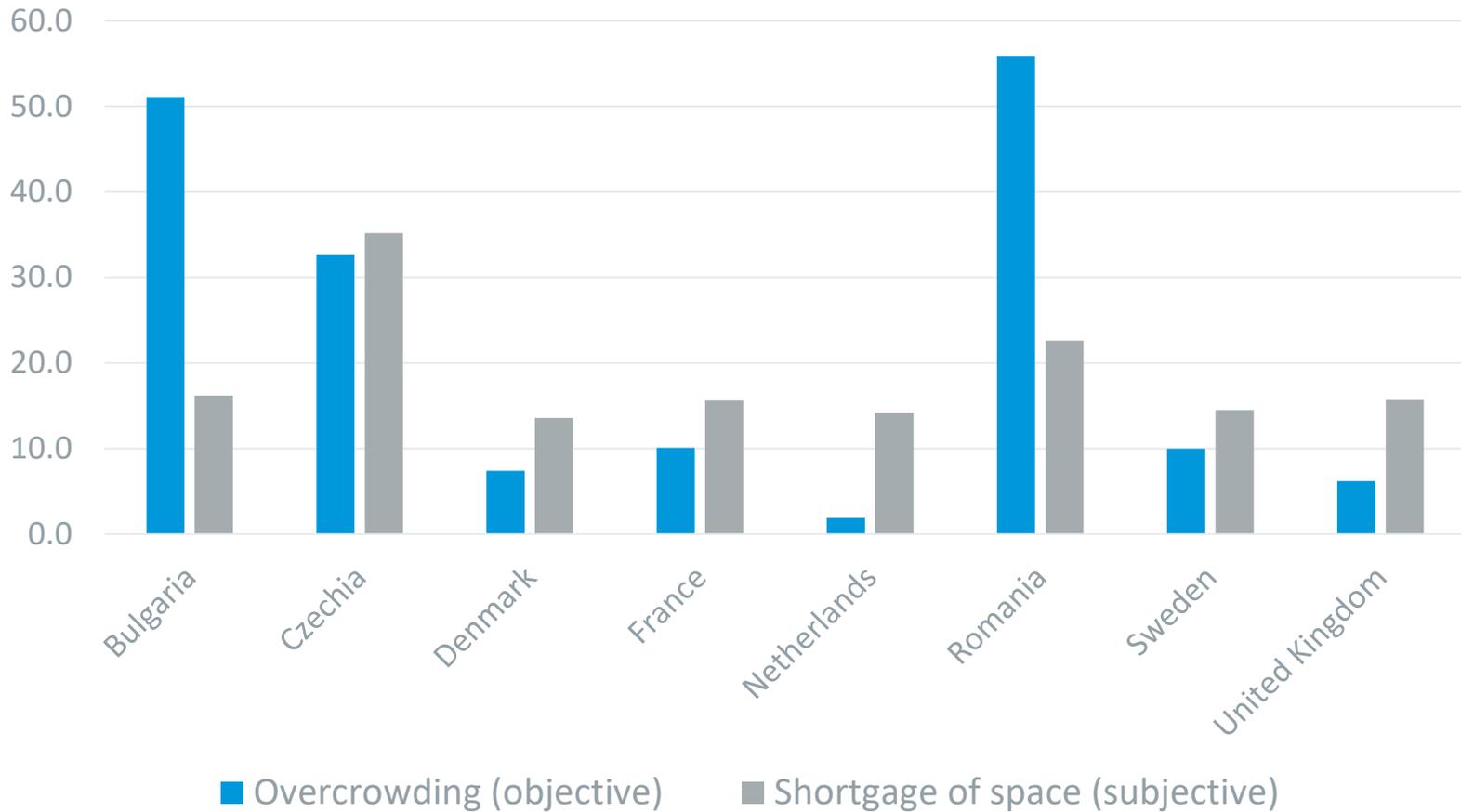
Co-investigator

UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

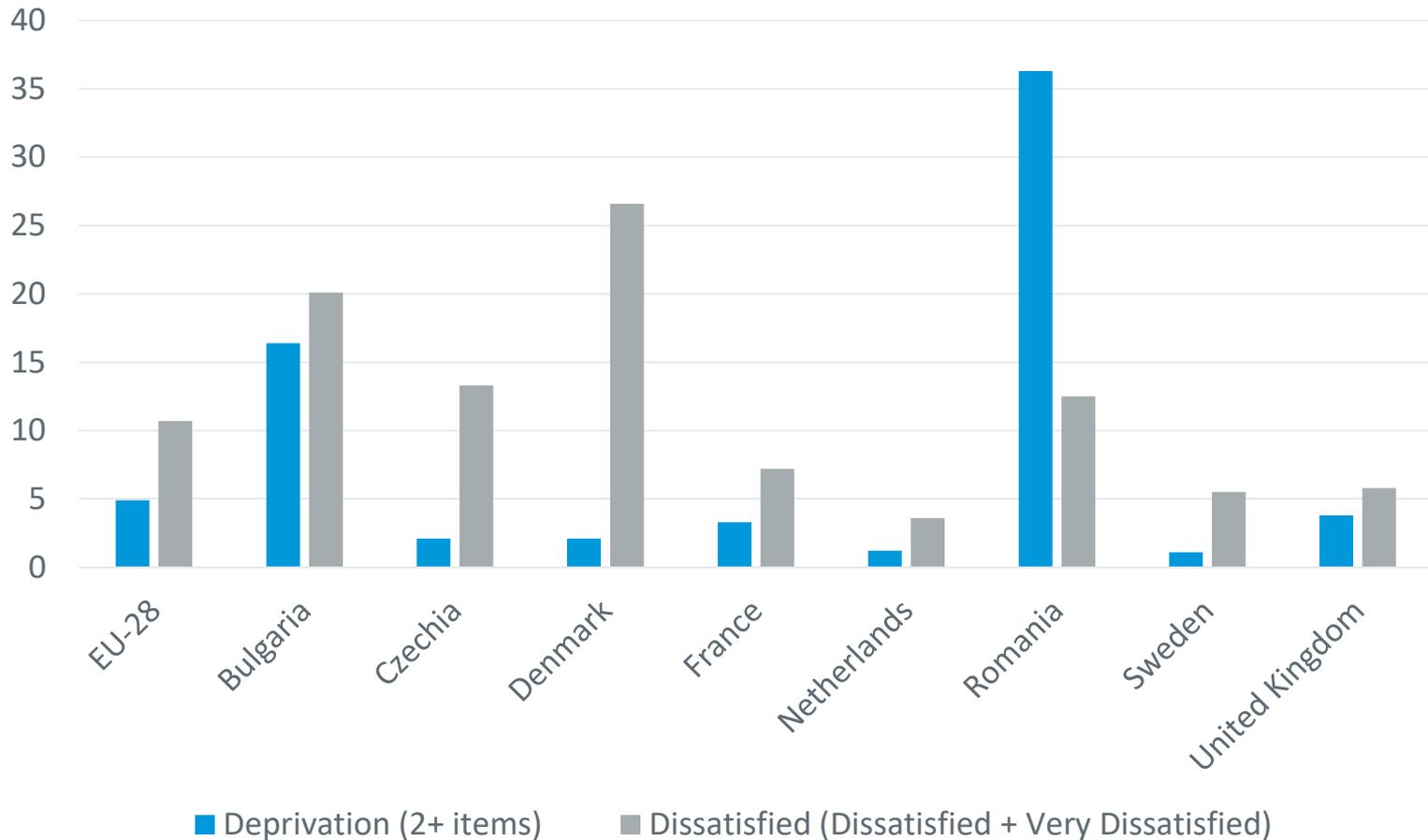
The issue

- Classic objective of housing policy: “*A decent home for every family at a price within their means.*”
- But
 - What constitutes “*a decent home*”?
 - What is a “*price within their means*”?
- The libertarian challenge

Objective overcrowding vs subjective space (2007)



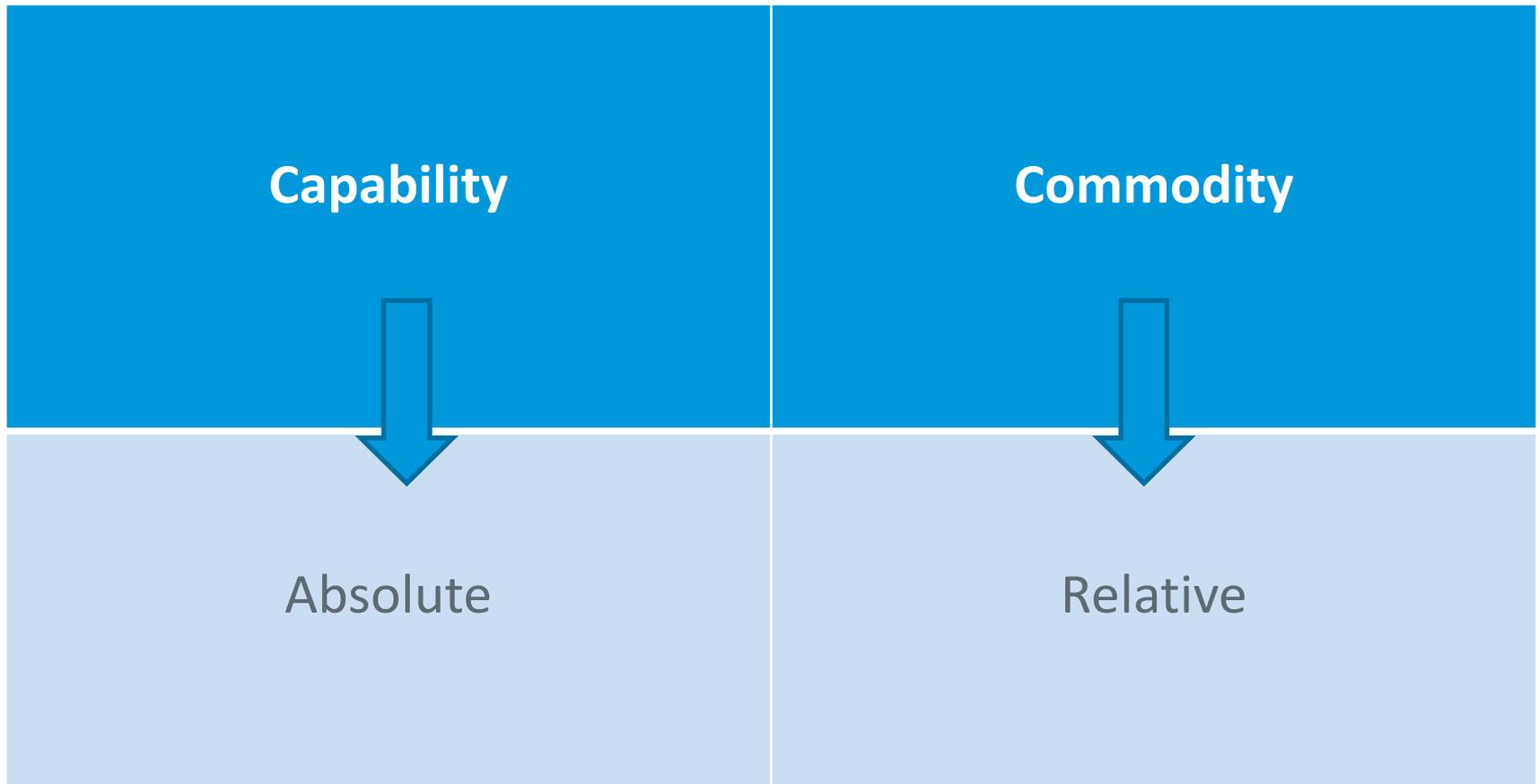
Housing Deprivation and Satisfaction (2012)



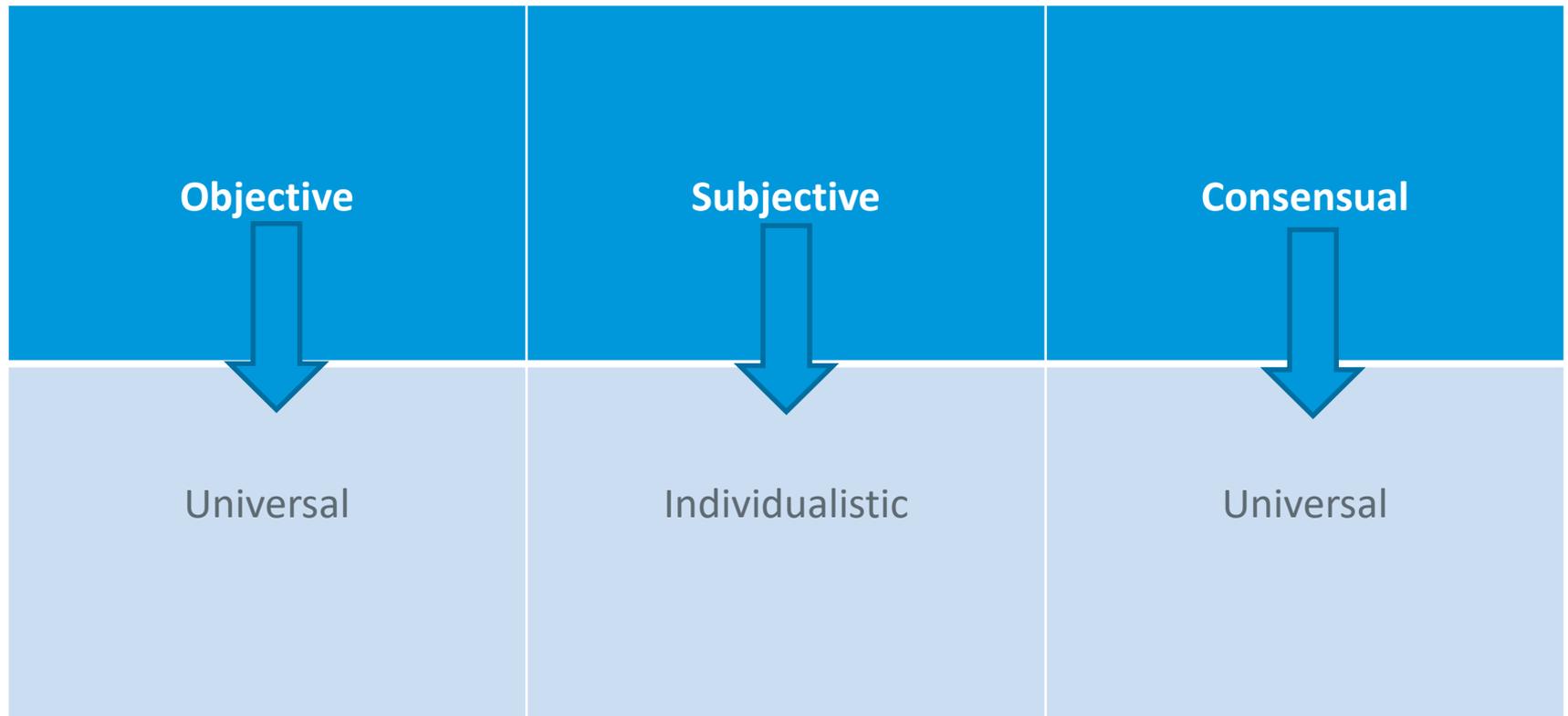
Characteristics of standards

- Origins often obscure
- Expert (e.g. Parker Morris)
- Arbitrary (e.g. affordability)
- Absolute/ relative (e.g. EC)
- At variance with individual perceptions or societal norms

Standards – concepts (after Sen)



Measures - conceptualised



Consensual approaches developed in area of poverty/ deprivation

- Reaction against arbitrary poverty lines (e.g. 60% median income)
- Breadline Britain/ PSE series of decennial surveys from 1980s
- Direct measure of deprivation via social and material necessities identified by majority public opinion
- “Necessities of Life” + “Living Standards Surveys)
- Most recently (2012) use lack of 3 or more items (out of 25).
- If lack through choice does not score

Minimum Income Standard

- Minimum Income Standard (JRF):
 - Basket of necessities established by qualitatively by groups *informed by experts*
 - Experts cost required budget

“A crucial aspect of MIS is its method of developing a negotiated consensus among these socially mixed groups... While participants do not always start with identical ideas... through detailed discussion & negotiation they commonly converge on answers that the group as a whole can agree on.”(Davis et al, 2018)

Application to housing

- AHC housing poverty (Stephens & Leishman 2017)
 - Estimated monetary poverty line from non-housing items identified as necessities in PSE
 - Used housing items to identify if AHC poverty caused/ avoided by over/ under consumption of housing (space + hard to heat or damp)

Shelter's Living Home Standard

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

Stage 1

- Literature review + KI interviews → 4 themes:
 - Affordability
 - Decent conditions
 - Space
 - Stability/ security of tenure

Stage 2: Discussion groups

- 16 Discussion groups + online discussion group to establish *“what was needed from a home to support an acceptable standard of physical, mental and social wellbeing and provide a foundation on which they could progress their lives.”*
- → 39 statements developed captured the majority of the most important attributes
- 5th theme added: neighbourhood

Stage 3: Survey (2,000)

- To identify most important attributes
- Distinction between “essential” and “tradeable” attributes
- Clustered around the 5 themes
- Draft LHS referred back to public (1 day workshop) + online community → list of attributes finalised

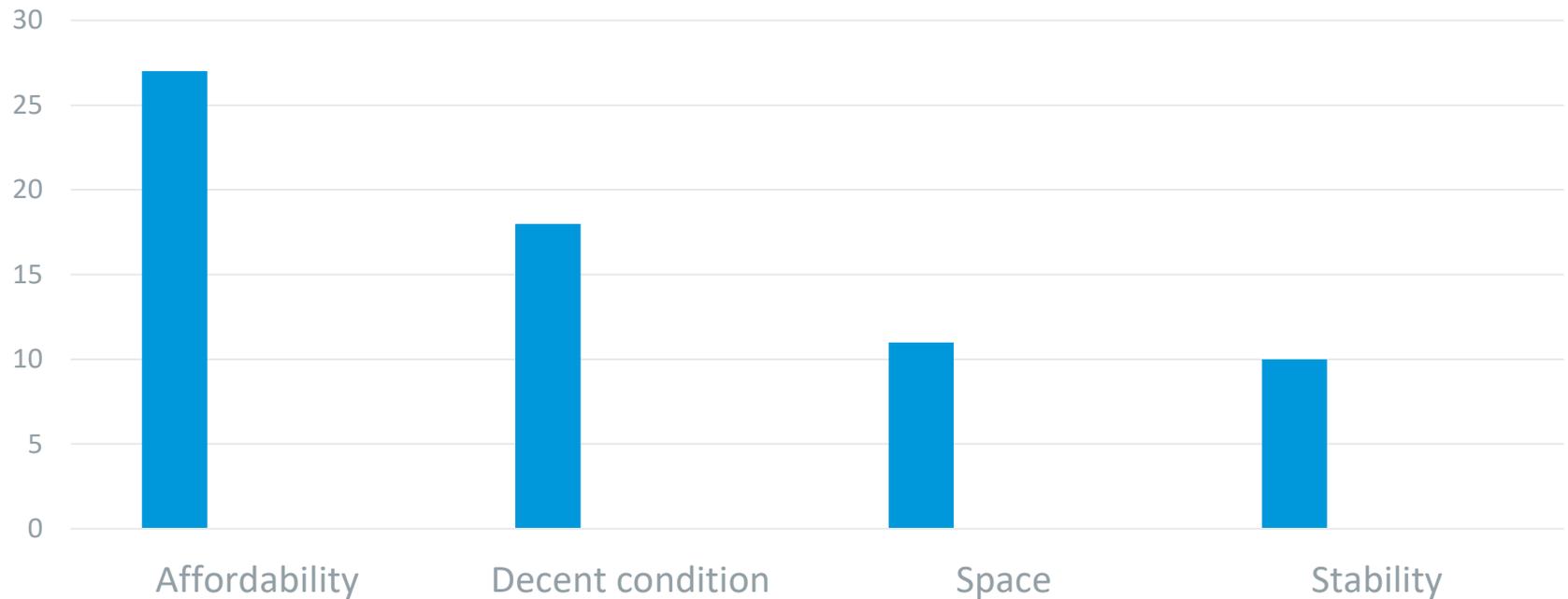
The Living Home Standard

- Affordability: 2 essentials + 1/2 tradeables
- Decent conditions: 10 essentials + 2/4 tradeables
- Space: 5 essentials + 3/7 tradeables
- Stability: 2 essentials + 1/3 desirables
- N'hood: 1 essential + 1/3 tradeables

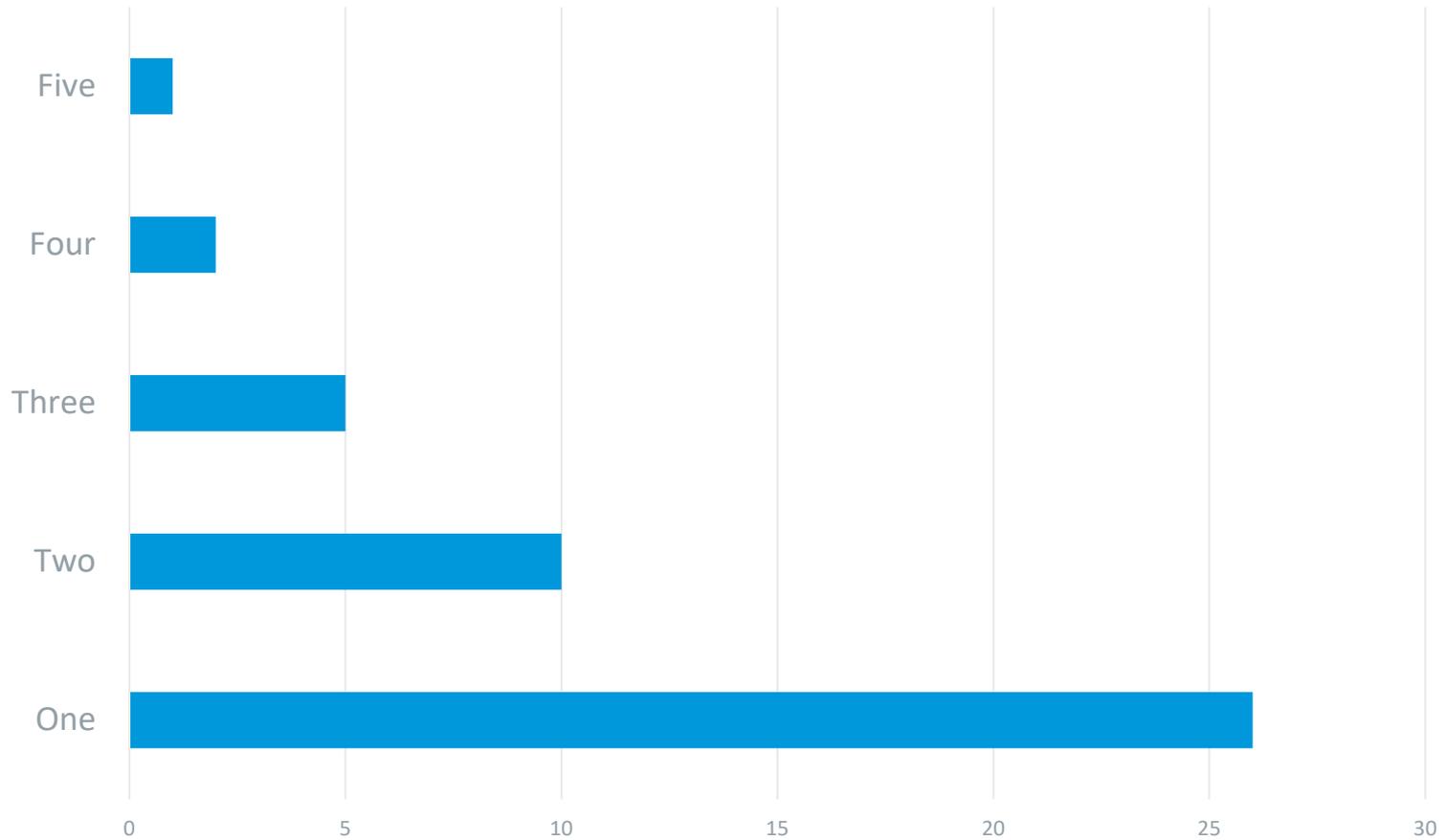
Space Standard

Essential	Desirable
No. bedrooms adequate for all members of household	Enough bathroom facilities for all to use at a suitable time
Enough space for privacy	Access to outdoor space (garden, balcony)
Enough space for all to spend time together in same room	Enough space for visitors
Enough space to prepare & cook food	Enough space to study/ work
	Enough space for guest to stay
	Enough space to store domestic appliances
	Enough space to store some personal belongings (e.g. books, toys)

Living Home Standard Failure Rate



Number of domains failed



Limitations

- Some of the standards cannot be operationalised into policy – they are expressed in capability space not commodity space:
e.g. “The number of bedrooms in the home is adequate for all members of the household.”
- There is no choice test, which may be relevant:
“There is enough space for a guest to stay...”
- Not everything can be reduced to a simple True/ False (self) assessment
- Subjective (self) assessment problematic for policy
- How much of an advance on what we have now?

Libertarian challenge

“It’s an aspiration of what would be nice for all to enjoy. It is not a description of anything like the minimum that we should be expecting people to gain... In reality the vast majority of what is being talked about here is simply that housing is too expensive in Britain.... We must blow up the Town & Country Planning Acts...” (Adam Smith Institute)

- Argue for building space standards to be reduced
- Reflected in *“permitted development”* policy



Developing project: The contested politics of residential space

The project aims to explore the values that underpin contested policies that influence levels of housing consumption.

It seeks to assist policy makers in three ways by: bringing *clarity* to the debate by:

- identifying what ***principles*** underpin policies affecting space standards;
- enabling them to attain greater ***consistency*** in their application;
- and seeking ***consensus*** in terms of the public's perceptions of need and fairness.

Scope: Selection of (controversial) policies

- “Bedroom Tax”:
 - Reduction of housing allowance for social tenants by 14% (1 spare room); by 25% (for 2 spare rooms) (introduced 2013)
- Shared Accommodation Rate:
 - Restriction of eligible rent in housing allowance for single private tenants aged under 35 (raised from 25 in 2012) to shared accommodation level.
- Single person’s discount:
 - Reduction of liability for Council Tax by 25% for single adults (all tenures)

Research approach

- Deliberative research has the distinctive objective “*to elicit a considered, informed collective value judgement from the general public.*” (Burchardt, 2012, p. 15), and has three distinctive features:
 - It aims to reach people’s informed and considered judgements and underlying values in relation to the subject through a process of public reasoning;
 - Researchers provide information to participants about the subject;
 - The information provided might change participants’ minds (Burchardt, 2012).

Stage 1: the policies and their impact Part I

- What is the policy?
 - Are there any exemptions or exceptions?
- What is the aim of the policy?
 - What values underpinned support for the policy?
 - What values are revealed by opponents of the policy?
- What are the impacts of the policy?
 - How many people are affected?
 - Who is affected?
 - How are they are affected?

Stage 2: policies and their impact

Part II

- Interviews with people affected by the policies
- Rationale: provide “real life” examples (vignettes) for use in Stage 3

Stage 3: Deliberative workshops

Process: Participants provided with information from Stage 1 → initial views → introduction of vignettes from Stage 2 → facilitator leaves room → further discussion takes place as (quasi) citizens' jury → facilitator returns and outcomes (consensus/ differences and reasons)

Stage 4: Search for generalizable values

- Analysis of outcomes of workshops/ citizens' juries seeking to establish
 - Values that are common
 - Values that enjoy majority support
 - Contested values
 - Role of behaviour (e.g. conditionality)
- How can these be used to create a toolkit to inform policy/ measurement of standards?

References

Burchardt, T (2012) Deliberative research as a tool to make value judgements, CASE/ LSE

Shelter (2018) Living Home Standard

Davis, A et al (2018) A Minimum Income Standard for the UK 2008-18: continuity and change, JRF

Stephens, M and Leishman, C (2017) Housing and poverty: a longitudinal analysis, Housing Studies