

Housing Plus Think Tank 6: Supporting tenants into work

An open forum led by LSE Housing and Communities to uncover the positive contributions of social landlords and demonstrate their value

Summary

Social landlords are acutely aware of the need to help tenants into work wherever possible. Welfare reform has created income pressures on tenants and therefore problems with rent payments and other bills. The core idea is that working age (from 16-65 years), able-bodied people of any skill level should be in work. Therefore the pressures on tenants are intense through benefits sanctioning; a shortage of openings for young people; the low skill of many older workers; confidence problems facing people who have been out of the workforce for a while, such as mothers; and a history of long-term unemployment. These groups are all heavily penalised under the new welfare reform rules. This raises problems for landlords having to collect higher rents, particularly for re-let or new property. It is no longer a given that people on very low incomes, with precarious work, will be allowed into these tenancies. Therefore the whole mission of social landlords has broadened into tackling the work-rent-income dynamic.

This is a huge issue for Housing Plus – the added value activities landlords do to help the disadvantaged communities they work in. While much of the focus is on young people, tenants all the way up the age bands are affected if they have low skill levels, a poor work record and live in places where it is hard to access jobs. Older age bands, particularly the over 50s, are also acutely affected. Even simple barriers such as the cost of transport or unpredictable hours, or large fluctuations in the hours worked and therefore the pay per week, make it very difficult for low income people to pay their way and survive; and therefore in turn makes it difficult for social landlords. As the landlords of around 4 million rented properties, collecting rent is vital. Yet around half of social housing tenants are of working age, and dependant on state support for either in-work or out-of-work benefits.

This workshop will explore why the problem of work now dominates, why public opinion has become hostile to supporting the unemployed, why social landlords need their tenants to work, and how they can achieve this. By bringing together social landlords from all over the country who are trying out new ideas or are anxious to uncover more good ideas, we hope to uncover some solutions.

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Outline Programme

Wednesday 16th – Thursday 17th July 2014

National Communities Resource Centre, Trafford Hall, nr Chester

Chaired by Professor Anne Power, London School of Economics
and Liz Richardson, University of Manchester

An informal supper and housing debate will be held on the evening of Wednesday 16th July. Bed and breakfast accommodation are available.

Wednesday 16th July

6.30pm Drinks and dinner
8pm Debate: 'Forcing people on benefits into work – will it work? Will it help?'

Thursday 17th July

9.00-9.30 Arrival and registration

9.30-10.00 **Session 1: Introduction – Housing Plus and work**

- What are the problems? Pensions; part-time, zero-hours contracts; why are so many young people on the margins?
- People need bridges into work
- Setting the UK experience in a European context

10.00-11.00 **Session 2: Balancing rent collection and meeting social need – where does work fit in?**

- Barriers to work – work history, transport and work-related costs, health, confidence
- Skills gap

11.00-11.15 Break and refreshments

11.15-12.30 **Session 3: Homes Work – carrot or stick?**

- Can social landlords help tenants be economically viable?
- Where does enterprise fit in?
- What scope is there for job creation?

12.30-13.30 Lunch, followed by a tour of Trafford Hall and its grounds

13.30-14.45 **Session 4: Innovative ideas and experiments**

14.45-15.30 **Session 5: Round-up**

15.30-16.30 End, networking, refreshments and depart