

Housing Plus: Think Tank 1 Outline

Tackling an uncertain future: Are social landlords a problem or solution?

Housing associations are facing a crunch. Larger housing associations are keen to increase their stock and build more, while others are considering demolition and replacement with some higher cost housing. They are also upgrading existing stock, refurbishing and retrofitting homes to improve conditions, and installing energy saving measures such as insulation, double glazing and green technologies. Tenants need more support than ever, with the welfare reforms hitting those on the lowest incomes the hardest. We cannot ignore the combined effects of these reforms and spending cuts on housing associations and their tenants, which will affect new build, social investment, rental collection and tenants' ability to manage their housing costs. There are many interlocking issues: funding cuts; loss of services; affordability; housing benefit cuts; the reform of housing association grants, and their impact on housing association operations; wider welfare reforms; tenants' coping mechanisms; contrasts in impact between the North / South / London. Housing associations need to invest in social programmes, in order to support their tenants in difficulty. Only this way will landlords be able to help their tenants in ways they need.

But social housing providers are also in a strong position. They are grounded in the communities within which they are based and have many untapped resources. Many are trying new ideas. LSE Housing and Communities is running a 2 year knowledge exchange programme called Housing Plus. This is an idea that originated in the 1990s, about the social role social landlords need to play in the neighbourhoods they operate in, responding to community issues that affect their landlord role. It's about going beyond a narrow housing role.

Think Tanks and Breakfast Briefings will bring together forward-looking housing associations to join and widen current policy debates, uncovering pioneering new approaches to landlord services and realistic ways of solving the acute social and housing problems faced. Our first Think Tank *Tackling an uncertain future* is part of this series of events, and will uncover innovative ideas and experiments to create a new model for social housing. Future Think Tanks will go into more detail on specific pressing issues identified such as welfare reforms, funding and affordability; income, poverty and work; family, young people and community; environmental threats and energy saving. We will be taking findings back to government, and the key interested parties including the National Housing Federation, Homes and Communities Agency and Chartered Institute of Housing.