



LSE Housing Plus: Tenant Think Tank Headlines

November 2013

LSE Housing and Communities held a 24-hour Think Tank with 70 tenants and support workers from a range of social landlords at the beginning of November 2013. The following are the main 'headlines' that emerged from the event.

- ❖ There was strong support from housing associations and local authorities for tenants to come, learn and share experiences.
- ❖ Tenants showed real commitment in participating and getting their voices heard.
- ❖ Many tenants displayed angst and anger over the negative image of tenants and benefits.
- ❖ Many disabled people feel very vulnerable.
- ❖ There was significant suspicion of why LSE Housing and Communities were running this consultation event, and people worried that we would dilute what they said.
- ❖ Pros and cons to old system were discussed, e.g. it encouraged cheating; the system was humiliating, but fairer. Worries about the new system including arrears, bedroom tax, work requirements, IT, remoteness, uncertainty and confusion about consequences.
- ❖ A big barrier for many is making new benefit claims and having to do so online. There was a sense of terror about making mistakes, the pace of having to do things, the loss of familiar face contact. People were particularly worried about job centre penalties and sudden loss of income. The other big worry was disability reassessment.

- ❖ Tenants were worried about paying for helplines – most government advice lines charge people to hold on.
- ❖ Many tenants are struggling with bills – particularly food which was mentioned a lot.
- ❖ There was lots of positive local support and community action – participants prepared posters which captured this (copies are available). This theme also came out strongly when brainstorming ideas.
- ❖ Many participants wanted to campaign and some organised protest.
- ❖ Tenants see social landlords being badly affected by welfare reform, e.g. higher arrears. They are keen for landlords to help but understand they depend on rent income to do this.
- ❖ Tenants are not against change per se, but they worry that the most needy and least able are hardest hit by reforms, and least able to cope.
- ❖ Many (most) tenants reported positive actions to support communities in their areas – lots of help from informal get-togethers to IT access and advice, food and other immediate help.
- ❖ Tenants said many elderly parents were helping their grown-up children and grand-children, leaving themselves worse off.
- ❖ Several mentioned mental health problems – suicide and threats of it. In the direct experiences (of which we collected about 50) stress, anxiety and mental pressure loomed large.
- ❖ LSE Housing and Communities promised to try to arrange a second event for those excluded. Tenants were also reassured that they would be given the opportunity to feedback on notes from the event.