

Themes from Housing Plus Think Tank

Trafford Hall 13th February 2013

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1. Chronic housing shortage so building more 'affordable' homes is a very high priority
2. Big regional differences with social rents far below market level in London, the South East and other more affluent areas
3. Demolition is still common currency for undesirable social housing blocks and estates. Very little recognition of the social or environmental consequences; little discussion of the large inequalities within 'mixed' communities, creating many potential problems.
4. Housing associations are very different – varied sizes, varied histories, with local authority transfers having very different issues (local) than either mission-founded (Octavia, Midland Heart) or national (Places for People, L&Q, Affinity) all of whom incorporate both.
5. Some discussion about size and scale – but general consensus that size makes a difference and both can work.
6. General worry about 'demonising' social housing tenants and recognition that housing associations haven't been good at capturing public support. This bothered lots of participants. The need to promote a 'fairness, social justice, helping' image was on many participants' lips.
7. Environmental concerns weren't high on the agenda, but energy saving, energy bills and arrears were.
8. Should housing associations defend their roots, be a movement, promote their ethical, charitable purpose? We didn't take a vote! My hunch is the consensus is yes.
9. Important not to be patronising about tenants' roles.
10. Social investment is a major part of housing association activity – helping young people, financial inclusion and credit unions, skills training and apprenticeships, community centres and community hubs.
11. Strong trend towards diversifying what housing associations do – moving (fast) into private renting, building for sale to make profit, sub-market rents that pay their way. Lots of talk of 'commercial' business.
12. Unclear sense of how welfare reforms will hit housing associations, different in different parts of the country, e.g. Northern housing associations with a surplus of 3-bed properties (often under occupied) will face cuts in housing benefits, often making these properties unviable.