



LSE Housing and Communities / Trafford Hall

Housing Plus Academy – A Partnership with Social Landlords

Prospectus

Supported by



1. Introduction – what is the Housing Plus Academy?

The Housing Plus Academy is a partnership between 15 leading social housing providers, the National Housing Federation, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Communities Resource Centre at Trafford Hall. It has been developed to promote knowledge exchange and participative learning among frontline staff and tenants of social landlords. The Academy will tackle burning problems affecting both housing associations and local authority landlords today, particularly welfare reform, financial pressure, energy saving, work and skills, community enterprise, and resilience. Below we explain how the idea arose and how we plan to make it work. The Housing Plus Academy is supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and LSE Housing and Communities.

The Housing Plus Academy at Trafford Hall arose from eight think tanks and five roundtable briefings with policy makers organised by LSE Housing and Communities as part of their Housing Plus programme between 2012 and 2015. Over 100 social landlords and over 350 people participated, with an additional 140 tenants attending three special tenants' think tanks supported by over 60 social landlords. Think tanks at Trafford Hall work as a knowledge exchange and know-how swap between social housing staff at all levels, specialists, researchers and government, to help social landlords respond positively to austerity.

2. What is Housing Plus?

Housing Plus is about the wider activities and interventions of social landlords in low-income communities beyond simply renting homes. The aim is fourfold:

- to help vulnerable residents manage current financial and social pressures, thus ensuring the viability of their rented homes. Housing Plus encompasses work-related training, support and opportunities; financial and debt advice; practical, safe, low-cost saving methods; energy saving, fuel poverty and environmental protection; special support for the young, the elderly, the disabled and families;
- to train frontline staff in their work with tenants;
- to foster self-help, community resilience and empowerment of front-line staff and tenants;
- to give voice to tenants and front-line staff by tapping into and sharing their direct experiences.

Housing Plus is partly driven by the harsh impacts of welfare reform and its wider repercussions in communities, affecting tenants' ability to pay rent, meet rising fuel bills and manage tight budgets to cover food, housing, childcare, travel and other essential costs. Housing Plus is a long-term, relatively low-cost approach that has stood the test of time.

Countrywide, from larger to smaller and community-based landlords, Housing Plus is galvanising support from social landlords for tenants in difficulty. By actively helping struggling tenants through placing staff in direct contact at the front line social landlords remain viable and retain control given the severe cut-backs that are affecting both tenants and landlords.

3. Why social landlords support Housing Plus

Austerity and welfare reform are putting major pressure on the budgets of social landlords and their tenants. Top priorities for action are:

- **Increasing front-line, face-to-face contact and advice** between staff and tenants to help the most vulnerable tenants to manage under the twin pressures of rising costs and falling incomes. It helps motivate staff, and it creates a positive direct conduit between marginal communities and housing managers.
- **Energy saving investment** to reduce energy bills, combat fuel poverty and meet rising rents. Tenants and front-line staff need basic training in insulation, energy saving and fuel economy. They need clear, ongoing advice and strong incentives to take action.
- **Access to jobs** to help working-age tenants become self-sufficient, particularly for young people. Work gets people out of the “poverty trap”, but it involves creating apprenticeships, partnering with local employers and colleges, providing job links. Job readiness training and development of soft skills are vital for access to jobs.
- **Tenant involvement and representation** to help tenants understand current problems and deal with them, to recruit active volunteers as “Community Champions” and develop community enterprises that can help communities **from within** and from the **bottom-up**. Training in self-help generates ideas and action.

4. Direct benefits of Housing Plus

One example of how doing more to help tenants helps landlords, is in energy saving. High energy bills and inadequate insulation combine in social housing to make tenants poorer and less able to manage rising rents and other costs. One consequence is greater pressure on rents; one solution is to invest in better insulation, draught proofing, training in temperature controls, controlled ventilation, and energy saving more generally. Although funding is tight, this investment pays off for landlords and tenants in many ways as it upgrades property, picks up repairs, reduces costs if done carefully.

The think tank model, developed by LSE Housing and Communities and used for Housing Plus, will be the basic model for the Housing Plus Academy. We will also offer workshops and training sessions on particular topics.

5. What the Housing Plus Academy will do

The Housing Plus Academy will offer think tank style events, including training at different levels for different levels of staff and tenants, covering four main strands of activity:

- a) financial skills and welfare reform;
- b) energy saving;
- c) work-related skills development;
- d) community empowerment and self-help.

How will each think tank run?

The events will be action-orientated, practical and hands-on with qualified trainers from Trafford Hall's experienced trainer network. The courses will use participatory learning techniques, and showcase live examples of innovation, best practice and problem solving. The courses will be accredited where relevant. Participants will be grouped café-style at tables of around eight, with a mix of regions, ages, and landlords. Special efforts will be made to include ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, younger tenants. As far as possible, all events will draw from all regions, including Wales and Scotland, London, South East and South West. There will be a support/recorder on each table. Five tables will allow 40 participants. There will be a strong practice focus to each think tank and participants will get opportunities to share their experiences and learning.

Housing Plus Academy suggested topics

Think Tanks	Thinking into Action Workshops	Accredited Training	Local Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit • Work & welfare reform • Retrofitting estates • Community resilience in the face of debt Financial resilience • Private renting • Accessing work • Estate regeneration & renewal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing food / attacking the "food bank" challenge • Meeting bills • Making debt advice work for vulnerable tenants • Saving energy & cutting bills • Self-help projects we can all learn from • Getting a handle on welfare reform • Community enterprise • Young tenants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy saving • Community energy projects • Organic gardening • Repairing & recycling • Sewing & knitting from re-used clothes • Money management • DIY repairs & maintenance • Community enterprise • Retrofitting social housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare Reform • Financial management • Turning spare land into useful spaces • How to get the most out of local building • Energy & energy saving • Community organising & enterprise • "Making & doing"

For more information visit <http://www.traffordhall.com/housing-plus-academy/> or contact Philippa Meehan at p.meehan@traffordhall.com

The Housing Plus Academy aims to reflect the diversity of social housing, its staff, tenants and customers. We particularly welcome representatives from ethnic minority backgrounds, those with disabilities, all ages and particularly younger working age tenants. We encourage Tenant Management Organisations, Community-Based Housing Associations, Community Land Trusts, tenant co-operatives and smaller housing associations to join.