



Headlines from Tenant Think Tank 2: Changes and Challenges

Held at Trafford Hall, 3-4 March 2016

Positive Findings from Tenant's Feedback

1. Most staff in social housing really care about helping people and meeting their needs.
2. Most tenants want to live in stable, peaceful communities, and be responsible citizens.
3. Despite 30 years of high discount Right to Buy, the UK still has a very large stock of social rented homes, comprising over 4 million homes. Social landlords still play a big role and are here for the long term.
4. Social landlords must first and foremost be good landlords – they need to offer a model to government and private landlords of how to run rented homes.
5. Housing associations and local authorities can help working age, able bodied tenants into work through apprenticeships and training.
6. Social housing tenants can be trained in community roles, so they are qualified to offer advice and help people get the advice and support they need.
7. Social landlords could have a stronger voice on social and community issues, working closely with local councils, MPs, voluntary agencies etc.

Rental income offers many advantages, including targeted resources for community investment. Using assets (homes, buildings, land) wisely can enhance community capacity e.g. promoting self-help; helping tenants of working age into jobs; offering financial advice and support to keep arrears and debt down. Social landlords also have the resources to invest in energy efficiency measures, to improve people's quality of life in their homes and keep their bills down.

8. Landlords should prioritise their landlord and community role over profit making development.
9. Trafford Hall can promote community self-help in disadvantaged areas through skillbuilding, rewards and recognition

Big changes and challenges

1. There has been a constant chipping away at benefits, making working people on low incomes poorer. The elderly are not protected and the under 35s are particularly hard hit.
2. The lack of grant funding from the Government hands over greater development control to developers. This makes the provision of social housing difficult to afford and scarce, particularly in whole estate demolition schemes.
3. The Government is undermining council housing through Right to Buy, forced sales of high value voids, Pay to Stay, and overall funding cuts. These changes threaten the viability of Tenant Management Organisations and many community-based initiatives. Housing associations are forced to review their business plans, and many community investment activities could be cut. Local authorities are particularly hard hit. Devolution also poses some challenges.
4. The focus on business viability forces landlords to develop stronger relations with their tenants with money management, debt avoidance, access to work etc, to ensure that their tenancies remain viable and they can pay their rent.
5. The need to survive the cuts is forcing many housing associations to consider merges with stronger and bigger social landlords. Some social landlords are getting into private renting to diversify their business and subsidise their social housing stock.
6. There is growing insecurity in the 'public/social' world about jobs and funding. Some social landlords are even concerned that they will not be able to survive. This widespread fear can lead to a kind of paralysis.

Overall

1. There are many creative ideas and initiatives emerging from within communities and among staff.
2. There are signs that the Government is listening to the social housing sector and is willing to review some aspects of the implementation. For example, the scale of sanctions has reduced, and some new policy measures have become voluntary.
3. Tenants show great understanding of problems and possible ways forward. They also have clear views on the value of social housing and what helps their communities, which they want to communicate to the government and the wider public.