

### Headlines from Policy Think Tank

## ***All change for social landlords: How radical reforms in social housing policy are affecting housing professionals***

21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2016, Trafford Hall

1. **Housing Plus is fundamental** to being a good landlord – not an optional extra. However, Housing Associations can't do everything and have to choose the most effective investments in order to be responsible landlords.
2. **Community Investment** should not be sacrificed under current financial pressures – it is a very small share of overall budgets. The knee jerk reaction to cut back on community investment will likely revert to supporting it again in the not too distant future.
3. **Housing Plus** helps make rented housing viable by investing in the communities where they work and responding to tenant's needs. Managing the people side of the business as well as the place and building side is crucial. Octavia Housing argues that their intensive management makes them attractive partners with developers in providing social rented units in mixed schemes.
4. There are some **efficiency savings social landlords can make** e.g. having better IT services so that tenants who work and need access to repairs out of hours can report/sort out problems via IT systems. **Face to face contact** is nonetheless very important for many vulnerable tenants and for community services more generally.
5. **Local authorities** need and want housing associations to be collaborative partners, working with them more closely. Some local authorities feel they were not consulted over crucial policy discussions e.g. around the new Right to Buy voluntary agreement, Pay to Stay, rent reduction and other changes.
6. **Housing Associations should work more directly with other partners that provide vital community services**, rather than "trying to do it all themselves" e.g. CABS, Credit Unions, Food Banks, Debt Advice.

7. **The size of Association does not determine quality.** However, size supports development and creates some economies of scale e.g. in IT. However it can be difficult to liaise with all the Local Authorities meaningfully, where a Housing Association operates in up to 100 or more local authority areas as several of the biggest ones do. More locally based, geographically concentrated Housing Associations, particularly the transfer associations work more closely with the local authority where they are based, focus more directly on local community support and offer more direct-links to local partnerships and services.
8. **Tenant Management Organisations** which are normally, off-shoots of the council housing structure (only rarely in Housing Associations), are badly affected by local authority funding cuts and by the budget impact of the rent reduction. Given their generally small size and very local structure, some might find it hard to remain viable, if their management allowance is cut, in spite of their generally positive performance. Special steps are needed to support them through this period.
9. **Employment, support and training** are among the most valuable areas of community investment. Most Housing Associations linked to the Housing Plus Academy offer employment, training, job links and direct hand-holding into work for their tenants. There is considerable evidence that getting into work helps tenants in many ways and also landlords. Several Housing Associations offer apprenticeships and recruit successful apprentices into permanent jobs from that pool.
10. **Measuring the impact of community investment and Housing Plus activities** is crucial to proving its value and sustaining the investment. The HACT Social Return on Investment model offers useful guidelines on how to measure the benefits in health, well-being and community stability of different investments. The Academy aims to collect evidence on the real measurable value of social investment and Housing Plus. It will do this by gathering examples and case studies that demonstrate its value.