

# Newsletter



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UNIVERSITY OF  
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## Editorial



### Professor David Mullins, Housing and Communities Group Lead

The period since our last newsletter has confirmed major change for housing policy in this country with Government's

sights set firmly on restoring a dwindling home ownership sector in which outright purchasers now exceed those with mortgages. The favoured policies, described by Minister Brandon Lewis as a 'game changer', include Right to Buy for housing association tenants, starter homes and shared ownership, and an extended London Help to Buy scheme requiring mortgages of just 55%. These measures have been put in place over the Autumn with a degree of targeting evidenced by increased stamp duty for second homes and buy to let

investors and a reduction in mortgage tax relief for landlords. Meanwhile the pincer movement of rent reductions, Right to Buy, section 106 withdrawal and public body status for housing associations has seriously diminished their room for manoeuvre.

In November I spoke at a Salford University's Old Trafford conference on the future social housing where providers were mulling over what all this meant for them and it was clear that this is a time when new inspiration is badly needed in the social housing sector. In my presentation I invited delegates to draw inspiration from past heroes who saw the need to intervene to provide secure, affordable and good quality homes for people of limited means; an inspiration and social purpose desperately needed today as more and more people are

excluded from housing options that meet these basic criteria. Two of my colleagues in Housing and Communities are thinking through these issues in major pieces of research. Dr James Gregory (featured in Team Talk in this issue) is completing work on future of social housing and is advocating a positive form of hybridity to meet today's housing requirements. Dr Anita Blessing is exploring the role of institutional investment in three cities (Amsterdam, London and New York) at a time when these cities lack adequate supplies of affordable rental housing for low and middle-income households. Anita is exploring how opportunities for investment in affordable rental housing might connect to the internal logics and structures of institutional investors and how government policies could help to forge these connections.

### Granby Four Streets wins Turner Prize

Work by a Community Land Trust to bring Empty Homes into use in Granby Four Streets Toxteth, Liverpool, gained unusual media attention this week when the London based collective, Assemble, won the prestigious 2015 Turner Prize for a project using community engagement with a focus on art and design to tackle dereliction in the Liverpool neighbourhood. The Turner Prize is Britain's leading contemporary art award. Granby Four Streets was also part funded under the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme, being researched by HCRG, to bring empties back into residential use.



Inspiration for the future is also coming from our work with community-led housing organisations. Some of these organisations now occupy the street level niche long abandoned by housing associations and provide real opportunities for communities to influence change. Our impact acceleration work on the legacy of the empty homes community grants programme reported in this newsletter is revealing new hope from this sector. For example in Gresham, Middlesbrough the Community land Trust has provided the first new housing in the area since 'Housing Market Renewal'. In November we made three presentations to charitable trusts, social investors and policy makers to support the further growth of community-led empty homes work in England (see news item in this newsletter). A well-received presentation at Shelter Scotland Empty Homes Conference fed in to the evidence base for Shelter Scotland's election manifesto proposals for a community grants programme there. Dr Halima Sacranie is playing a key role in this work and in other HCRG research projects in her new role as Associate Research Fellow. We thank Halima for the enormous contribution she made to the establishment of the group during her previous Honorary Research Fellowship.



Congratulations to Ben Pattison who successfully defending his thesis on *'The Drivers for and policy responses to the rapid growth of private renting in England; has 'Generation Rent been priced out?'* at a viva on December 1st; , and after minor amendments are completed Ben will receive his Doctorate in the new year. The private rented sector is now crucial for housing in England, yet largely ignored by the above stream of recent housing policy. We will be living with the implications of its growth for many years, and Ben has highlighted the need to get beyond simple labels such as 'generation rent' if real understanding to be achieved and relevant policies developed for high proportion of low income households who now have no alternative to private renting. Ben has already shared his findings unpacking PRS niches in Birmingham with our undergraduate students and at the Housing and Communities Research Network (see Anita Blessing's report in this newsletter). At our seminar on December 7th Professor Peter Kemp continued our consideration of the role of the PRS for low income households by reviewing the impact of housing benefit cuts under the Coalition Government 2010-15.

Congratulations to Simone Hellenen who achieved a Distinction in her Masters Dissertation on the concept of prevention in relation to youth homelessness. A short version of her excellent literature review will appear shortly in our new Evidence Review series; which already includes a paper on the impacts of extra care sheltered housing on individual well-being. If you would like us to conduct a critical evidence review of a housing related topic for your organisation please contact me. Simone now looks forward to working with St Basil's on her collaborative PhD on youth homelessness. Congratulations also go to Bingzi He who achieved a Merit in her Masters in Social Research and has now been accepted for a PhD on *'Cooperative Security Housing Models in China'* to start in January 2016.

In November we were delighted to publish our report with Peter Shanks on *'Housing Association Governance in Northern Ireland'*. This was launched at the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) Conference in Cavan where NIFHA CEO, Cameron Watt commended the research and the 16 recommendations. We are now engaged in new research on tenant involvement in governance for the

Northern Ireland Housing Executive and in a governance audit for a Midlands based housing association.

Our leading article this time is a piece by Bruce Moore drawing on background work for his current PhD on housing association board member payment. We also feature a stimulating think piece from Emeritus Professor Alan Murie, reflecting on earlier impacts of Local Authority Right to Buy to contribute to the debate on housing association Right to Buy. Also in this newsletter we continue our student voice series with Natika Hamilton, second year Housing and Communities as she commences her placement with Midland Heart, and our Team Talk series where Halima interviews Dr James Gregory. We hear from Dr Richard Lang on recent work on his Marie Curie project and announce plans for three excellent seminars in the Spring and early news of our conference on future of social housing at the International Convention Centre on June 6th 2016.

**Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for 2016**

*David Mullins*



Professor Peter Kemp delivers December seminar

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## Housing and Communities Research Group Welcomes Two New Honorary Fellows

We are delighted to welcome two very experienced housing policy and practice experts as Honorary Fellows. Jon Fitzmaurice and Jon Stevens will add enormous expertise and knowledge and their extensive sector networks to enable our research on community-led housing to have greater potential for impact. Jon Fitzmaurice has worked with David Mullins for the past five years on the self-help housing sector that has brought nearly 4000 empty homes into use. In his fellowship he is *“aiming to support the work being undertaken by David Mullins and colleagues in highlighting and evaluating the changes that are currently taking place in the social housing landscape and in particular around community-led housing”*. Jon Stevens is already a familiar figure at Housing and Communities Network events and is now working with us on community-led approaches and devolved management in older people's housing. Jon's plans for his fellowship are *‘to write a Working Paper on the development of resident/user-led models of housing and care for older people, to advise on research projects in this field and to contribute to new approaches to urban renewal’*.

Here is a little more information about our new Honorary Fellows



Jon Fitzmaurice has worked in housing for more than 30 years. During this time he has been Head of the National Housing Federation's London Region, Director of Corporate Strategy and Communications at London & Quadrant Housing Trust and Chief Executive of National Homeless Alliance (now Homeless Link). In 2014 he received an OBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to housing. His interest in housing has always been informed by wanting to help people to secure housing for themselves. Seeing initiatives involving the use empty property in decline, in 2009, he set up a project aimed at addressing this issue. This led to the creation of Self-Help Housing. Org, which worked with Birmingham University from the outset to research and document self-help housing activity. This collaboration was instrumental in DCLG's decision to create a £50m Empty Homes Community Grants Programme, involving over 100 organisations engaged in a wide range of self-help housing initiatives.



Jon Stevens trained as an architect at Liverpool School of Architecture and then at Central London Polytechnic. In the 1970s and 80s he worked on the Birmingham Inner Area Study and then for Community Forum, a network of residents' associations established across parts of inner Birmingham included in the Urban Renewal Programme. His work on urban renewal continued in the Private Sector Division of Walsall Housing Department and then Birmingham as Neighbourhood Office Coordinator for Summerfield Neighbourhood Office in Winson Green. In 1989 he joined the Housing Corporation as Tenant and Association Support Manager, heading up a small team that worked on the Tenants' Choice programme before spending 16 years as Director of BCHS, a housing co-operative development agency based in the West Midlands. Since 2009 he has worked as a freelance consultant working on range of projects in the community-led housing field but with an increasing focus on his current passion; Co-operative and community based housing and care for older people. He has developed this work with CDS Coops,

HACT, the Mutual Housing Group, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network and the Building and Social Housing Foundation and the Community-led Housing Alliance. A number of these projects have brought Jon into close collaboration with the Housing and Communities Research Group.

# Participation vs self-determination in community-led housing in Austria



**Richard Lang**

As part of my **Marie Curie Fellowship Project**, I spent a week with fieldwork activities in Vienna, Austria,

in October 2015. In part of the week David Mullins joined me to visit the urban development areas of **Sonnwendviertel** and **Seestadt Aspern** where some pioneer community-led housing schemes have recently been finalised as part of a large-scale social housing programme. The goal of this stage of field research was to develop a better empirical understanding for different types of recent community-led housing activity in Austria and to explore its linkages to the housing policy context.

The project "**so.vie.so**" (an acronym for "**Sonnwendviertel Solidarity**") close to the Hauptbahnhof was completed in December 2013. It was one of the first projects to be finalised within the creation of an entirely new neighbourhood, mainly consisting of subsidised housing schemes (5,000 homes for about 13,000 residents) but also including commercial and shopping area, schools and nurseries.

The Passivhaus certified scheme "**so.vie.so**" consists of 111 subsidised rented apartments, communal facilities of different size, shared greenspace with the neighbouring housing schemes as well as premises. This project represents an emerging type of top-down collaborative housing in the non-profit sector where a larger developer – in this case a housing co-operative – provides participation opportunities for future residents that go well beyond mainstream non-profit housing management. Thus, potential residents engage in an externally facilitated process which kicks off as early as 2-3 years before the actual completion of the scheme.

In an interview and guided tour with Christian Richter who lives with his young family in an upper floor apartment, we learned more about the resident participation process. The idea of this



Hauptbahnhof Site- A new neighbourhood in the making with baugruppen project and top-down collaborative housing



soviesto 2 - The collaborative housing project "**so.vie.so**"

professional "**community coaching**" is to sharpen residents' awareness for their immediate social environment at regular meetings and workshops where they get to know their neighbours' needs and interests. Therefore, they might want to engage in mutual help activities (e.g. for reconciliation of work and family life), and in working groups on particular topics, such as (roof-top) gardening, handicraft work, nursery or fitness classes. In a democratic process, popular group activities are permanently assigned to particular community room within the estate (such as the gym and the library in this case) and residents are encouraged to take over self-responsibility for managing resident groups as well as designing and using communal space.



soviesto 3 - David and Christian in one of the community rooms of "**so.vie.so**"

Another important aspect of this form of moderated community building is the allocation of flats which was carried out as a negotiation process by the residents themselves, e.g. supported by scoring tools to prioritise individual and community interests, and to make these transparent.

David and I had the opportunity to see another interesting case of collaborative housing in a different location in Vienna. We were invited by Petra Hendrich to visit the Baugruppen project "**Seestern Aspern**". This intergenerational project consists of 27 apartments, different communal areas, including a large community kitchen and a coworking-space on the ground floor. Tenants moved into their apartments in August 2015.





Seestern 1 – Community dining room of “Seestern Aspern”

first time made available building plots directly to *Baugruppen* which resulted in the development of six pilot projects. During our visit, it turned out that the professional facilitation approach to community building in “Seestern Aspern” was similar to the top-down project “so.vie.so”. However, in *Baugruppen* like “Seestern Aspern”, the residents themselves define most of the project and lead the development process.

The case comparison suggests that top-down collaborative projects like “so.vie.so” focus on the participation of most residents in a pre-designed structure. However, these residents still live mainly as individual households. In contrast, *Baugruppen*, such as “Seestern Aspern”, are usually initiated

by an established community of interest who approaches a professional non-profit developer or the municipality with the idea for a community-led housing project. Within the field of collaborative housing, *Baugruppen* in Vienna can thus be described as real community-led approaches which are driven by the idea of self-determination of residents.

To further explore the linkages between collaborative projects and the housing policy context, we interviewed Dieter Groschopf, the deputy director of **Wohnfonds Wien**, the local government body overseeing subsidised housing construction in Vienna. He highlighted that only a wide-ranging strategic approach of the city administration

has enabled the realisation of both top-down collaborative housing and *Baugruppen* projects to be carried out within the framework of social housing. Key to this is Vienna’s strategic land-use planning which, in recent years, has focused on accessing and developing inner-city locations for new social housing, such as the area south of the new *Hauptbahnhof*, through mutually beneficial deals with the Austrian Federal Railways.

Furthermore, collaborative housing projects have benefited from the social sustainability criteria in housing developer competitions in Vienna since 2005. These criteria

strengthen the contribution to the goal of inclusive urban development. This has put pressure on larger non-profit developers to explicitly consider participatory approaches and community building in subsidised housing schemes. This has further opened up new spaces for collaborative approaches to inclusive neighbourhood development and assisted partnerships with community groups, such as *Baugruppen*. At the same time, the quality of housing management has improved with specialised external consultancies entering this field, supporting non-profit developers with their expertise in community building and resident participation.

In line with the transdisciplinary approach of the Marie Curie Project, the week of field research in Vienna ended with a research workshop hosted by **wohnbund:consult**, the consultancy which delivered the external project support and facilitation for “so.vie.so”. The workshop brought together a group of housing researchers, architects, planners and consultants who are actively engaged in the collaborative housing field in Austria. It served as a useful platform to discuss the research design and preliminary hypotheses; and led to a few important amendments!



Workshop 1 – Research workshop on collaborative housing in Vienna

These preliminary findings of our Marie Curie Project suggest that both the city administration and external housing consultants in Vienna see great potential in top-down approaches for collaborative housing, exemplified by the case of “so.vie.so”. Professional community building and external facilitation of resident participation in large-scale non-profit housing is less resource intensive than providing support for smaller scale *Baugruppen* projects which, for instance, require a much closer cooperation between residents, architects, planners and consultants. Nevertheless, the latter can be regarded as important pilot projects for social innovations in housing. However, with projects like “so.vie.so”, it might be possible to reach out to more residents with key values of co-operative housing, such as solidarity, self-responsibility and democracy.



Seestern 2 – Petra and Richard at Baugruppe “Seestern Aspern”

As an external consultant, Petra was responsible for facilitation and moderation of the planning and community building for this *Baugruppe*. She took us on an extended tour around the house and explained in great detail the planning and project development process for the *Baugruppe* and how it is embedded in the creation of an entirely new neighbourhood.

*Seestadt Aspern* is actually one of the largest urban development areas presently in Europe. Over a period of 20 years, 10,500 homes for about 20,000 residents will be realised mainly by large non-profit providers. Here, the city administration has for the

# Impact Acceleration of Research on Community-Led Empty Homes Work



## Halima Sacranie and Professor David Mullins

In mid-November, David attended the Scottish Empty Homes Conference in Edinburgh. It was a positive and well attended event, with guest speaker TV's empty homes man George Clarke. The conference marked the fifth year of the Scottish



empty homes partnership which has seen 1200 empty homes brought into use and employment of empty homes officers in a number of local authorities. However, there are still 27,000 long term empties in Scotland and Shelter Scotland and its partners continue to look for new ideas to boost activity. There was therefore great interest in our presentation on the achievements of the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme in England and plans are afoot to include proposals for a similar programme for Scotland in Shelter's 2016 election manifesto.

On the 9th of November, Halima and Jon Fitzmaurice attended the Empty Homes Roundtable convened and hosted by Nationwide at their London offices. The Roundtable attracted a diverse range of attendees including the Chief Executives of the Nationwide Foundation, HACT and Empty Homes; and representatives from Respublica, IPPR, Shelter and London borough councils.

Some of the topics up for discussion were about the contribution empty homes can make to increase the overall supply of affordable homes, how to maximise the effectiveness of Government funding to transform empty properties into affordable homes, the progress local authorities were making with empty properties and regional constraints and barriers to this progress.

These topics provoked an enthusiastic discussion with an emphasis on how the sector moves forward after the end of Empty Homes Community Grants Programme



Jon Fitzmaurice (centre) with delegates at the Empty Homes Roundtable hosted by Nationwide in London



Delegates from Land Aid and Association of Charitable Foundations at Live: Work Sandwell

(EHCGP) in a new policy context with a shift towards affordable home ownership.

Feedback on recent funding bids from the Empty Homes Network and the Nationwide Foundation confirmed the findings of our case study evaluation of the EHCGP that there is a strong appetite from small and medium sized community led organisations to undertake more empty homes work as a way of growing the self-help housing sector and responding to the local housing needs of their communities.

It was suggested at the roundtable that moving forward a nuanced approach would be needed, local funding rather the national grant finding will be increasingly important



NHS Accommodation empty for 7 years at Sandwell Hospital has been converted into Live: Work Housing for young former homeless apprentices by St Basils



as well as leveraging assets to raise more private funds, and that local authorities would continue to play a critical partnership role in helping to bring empty properties back into use as affordable housing.

Later in the month David visited St Basils Live-Work scheme in former staff accommodation at Sandwell General Hospital that had been empty for 7 years.

The visit was organised for the Association of Charitable Foundations and Land Aid who are interested in co-funding innovative schemes of this sort that not only avoid the waste of empties but also provide the opportunity for formerly homeless young people to get apprenticeships.







Delegates network at the Big Society Capital event on Social Investment and Empty Homes

The growing interest of charitable foundations and social investors in 'self-help housing' initiatives was evident at a seminar convened by Big Society Capital in London on December 1st.

This event brought together six leading self-help schemes who had taken part in the successful Empty Homes Community Grants Programme (EHCGP) with five charitable foundations and eight social investors and banks, together with umbrella and support bodies and public agencies to discuss how the momentum achieved under EHCGP can be maintained. This was another enthusiastic event with many of the positive networking features of the 2010 Windsor event that led to £50million of public investment into the sector through EHCGP, that has since leveraged at least a further £26million into 110 successful local projects. The scope for new and productive partnerships to enable the winning formula of self-help housing was evident.



Presentation by case study organisation Phases with key partner Big Issue Invest at Big Society Capital Seminar



'HCRG research informs Unity Bank presentation

It has been a great experience for Halima and David to be able to harness the findings of our research on self-help housing and EHCGP to inform future focused events such as the above. These 'research impact' activities have been made possible by an ESRC Impact Acceleration Grant matched by funding from the Nationwide Foundation, Tudor Trust and Unity Bank.



# Ten Years Later – How Have Housing Associations Responded to the Power to Pay Their Boards?



**Bruce Moore**

In 2003 the Housing Corporation granted the power for Housing Associations to pay their boards.

After a slow start the impression is that most large housing associations have now left the voluntary sector and are paying their boards. To find out if that is really the case I accessed the accounts for the financial year ending in 2014 (i.e. ten years after payment for boards was introduced) for the largest 210 housing association groups as identified from the data in the 2014 Global Accounts of Housing Providers (Homes and Communities Agency, 2015).

*The 210 organisations studied represents only 13% of the total of 1,584 registered housing associations, but between them they account for more than 85% of all housing association stock with revenues of over £16 billion and more than 2.7 million properties (Homes and Communities Agency, 2014).*

## Range of Size and Scale

*But even amongst the top 210 housing associations there is a considerable spread in terms of size and scale. They range from a turnover of £592 million to £14 million and from 98,000 to 1,700 in terms of properties owned or managed.*

## Incidence of Pay

It is true that most boards of large housing associations are now paid, but even amongst the very large housing associations some boards are still not paid. As might be anticipated the incidence of non-payment tends to increase as turnover decreases and the average level of board pay also decreases as turnover decreases. Amongst the largest 70 housing associations 86% of boards are paid and average total board pay is £77,000 (see Figure 1). But for the 71st to the 210th largest housing associations only 69% of boards are paid and average total board pay is £31,000.

## Board Pay and Charity Status

The proportion of non-executive board members who are non-paid or paid also varies according to the charitable status of the organisation (see Figure 2). For the not-for-profit but non-charity housing associations the ratio of paid to non-paid is highest with 80% paid and 20% non-paid. The majority of the 210 housing associations are exempt charities of which 67% are paid and 33% non-paid. Others are registered charities there the proportions are 43% paid and 57% non-paid. This suggests that charity status may still be having an impact on the incidence of pay; perhaps reflecting the underlying mission and purpose of these organisations.

## Pay and Performance

It doesn't appear that board pay necessarily results in improved financial performance. There is no clear relationship between the percentage surplus (i.e. profitability) of the organisation and the take up or level of board payment. Some of the highest % surplus figures are recorded by organisations at lower end of the turnover range that do not pay their board members. Whereas one large housing association, with one of the highest levels of board pay, actually incurred a loss.

## Executives on Boards

Even though almost 75% of large housing associations now pay their non-executives the majority of boards still do not include any executives. 61% didn't have any executives on the board; 26% had just the chief executive as a board member; 9% had two executives; and 4% had more than two executives on the board (see Figure 3). 8 of the 9 housing associations with more than two executives on the board were in the largest 70 by turnover.

## Conclusion

The data provides a useful snapshot of the position amongst the largest housing associations ten years after board payment became a possibility, but does not provide any answers about why housing associations pay the sums that they do or the implications of these payment arrangements.

This analysis has been undertaken to provide some background context for my doctoral research that goes on to discover the attitudes and opinions that people hold about board pay in housing associations using Q methodology.

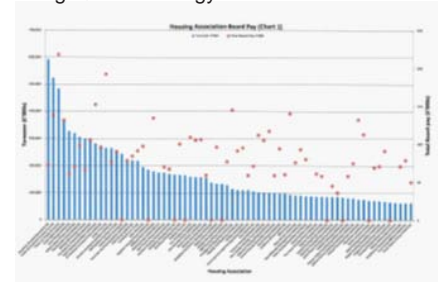


Figure 1: Board Pay by Turnover (largest 70 HAs by turnover)

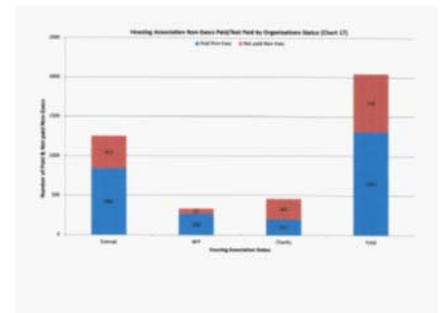


Figure 2: Board Payment by Type of Housing Association

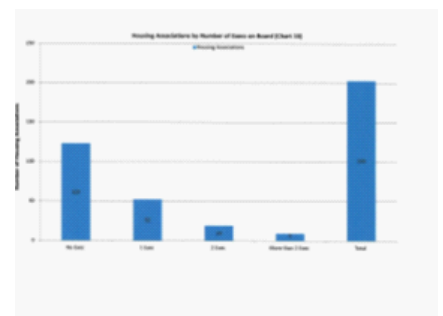


Figure 3: Number of Executive Directors on Housing Association Boards

## References

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# Think Piece: Reviewing the Right to Buy



## Alan Murie

**Alan Murie is Emeritus Professor in the Housing and Communities Research Group and the Centre**

**for Urban and Regional Studies. He has written extensively on the Right to Buy and is now completing a new short work for Policy Press to make the lessons of history available to the current debate around housing association right to buy. In this think piece he draws out some of these lessons.**

The Conservative Party Manifesto for the general election campaign earlier this year included a proposal to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants and following the election it proposed legislation to do this. The new proposals were not simply an extension of previous policies but involved selling high value council housing to finance housing association sales and replacement dwellings. These proposals had not been widely anticipated and did not grow out of any evaluation of the RTB or any process of consultation with local authorities, housing associations, tenants or residents. They followed a period in which policy on the RTB had diverged between England, where the Coalition government after 2010 had increased discounts and sought to revitalise the RTB, and Scotland and Wales, where governments had moved to abolish the RTB in order to protect a much diminished social rented sector in a period when there were few additions to this stock and increased need for it.

The new proposals for England were greeted with alarm by housing associations concerned with their charitable status and position as part of the private sector: but under a subsequent agreement with government, housing associations undertook to participate in a voluntary (but closely monitored) sales scheme as the least bad of the options available to them. This scheme would still be financed through sales of high value council properties. While the interests of housing associations may have been protected to some extent by this deal, other interests were not. There are differences in the package proposed

in 2015 and the commitment to replacing dwellings sold under the new RTB, on a one for one basis, represents an improvement on previous practice if it is achieved. But the mechanism for financing this involves further dismantling the council sector, an immediate loss of relets and damages the social rented sector as a whole and the opportunities it offers. The extension of the RTB also seems likely to destabilise many housing associations and reduce their contribution to housing investment. The prospect is of a new phase of RTB policy in England and further dismantling of both council and housing association provision.

All of this has focussed new attention on the RTB. Has it been a runaway success such that governments would seek to extend it? Who has gained and lost as a result of it? What have its long term consequences been? These and other questions have received attention in the past but with 2015 marking 35 years since the introduction of the Right to Buy it should be possible to answer them with some certainty and based on evidence.

The RTB was a flagship policy of Margaret Thatcher's government elected in 1979 and gave almost all tenants of public sector landlords the Right to Buy their dwelling. Some 2 million dwellings were sold under the policy in the largest privatisation carried out between 1980 and 2015. As part of a wider housing policy package it reversed 60 years of growth of public and social rented housing in the UK. While undoubtedly beneficial to most of the tenants who bought their houses the policy has contributed to the current housing crisis, acknowledged across the political spectrum.

After 35 years of the RTB there is shortage of housing, a shortage of social rented housing, problems of access to home ownership, debates about a generation for whom private renting is the norm and evidence of increasing overcrowding, sharing and living in sub-standard accommodation. The RTB has formed a key element in a policy approach that has singularly failed to maintain or improve housing opportunities for a large section of the population. There has been too little building, there is too little social housing to meet need or demand, and there is too

little local capacity to address problems of access, affordability and housing stress. Having failed to reinvest capital receipts to sustain a cost rent public or social rented sector government has incurred increasing housing benefit costs for tenants paying market rents in the private sector - because there is too little public and social rented housing available. Local authorities have insufficient housing to meet the demands from homeless and vulnerable households and export problems to the private sector and to other districts. From a strategic and long term perspective the policy package has been a failure.

The proposed expansion of the RTB is likely to generate a short term growth in home ownership, advantages for tenants who buy and immediate take up, celebrated as evidence of policy success and popularity. But in the long term the effects are likely to further the decline in the availability of social rented housing and result in greater dependence on private renting with higher rents and housing benefit costs and more households exposed to unhealthy and inappropriate housing.

The determination of government not only to revive the existing Right to Buy but to extend it goes against the evidence about its long term effects and the nature of the housing crisis. It raises questions about the inclusion of housing associations but also about the level of discounts and the numbers and pattern of sale of high value council houses to finance the policy. What is being proposed is a complex and expensive reorganisation and shrinking of social housing when what is needed is a change in the general direction of housing policy to increase social housing provision.

A brief outline and commentary on the origins and operation of the RTB is available through History and Policy:

[www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/the-right-to-buy-history-and-prospect](http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/the-right-to-buy-history-and-prospect)



## Student Voice – Natika Hamilton, 2nd Year Housing and Communities Pathway



Natika Hamilton with Placement Mentor Katherine Haynes at Midland Heart at the start of her 40 hour observational placement in which she will be assessing how Midland Heart is responding to the challenges of welfare reform for its 33,000 tenants. Other Housing and Communities students this year have placements with St Basils, and Birmingham City Council private sector team, and we will review their findings in future newsletters.

The moment I joined the Housing and Communities Pathway was one filled with excitement, anticipation and wonder. Here I was, able to study two areas I was completely passionate about, especially at a time of huge political change. Amazingly, I found that a placement, where I could see theory put into practice, would accompany my academic journey.

I am interested in policy implementation in the current climate, where welfare reforms and reducing the budgets appear to dominate the political agenda. When my placement with Midland Heart housing association was confirmed, my excitement heightened, not least because I had a personal history with them - I was a tenant of theirs myself as a teenager prior to buying my first home!

Interestingly, my placement commenced just a day before the chancellor's Autumn Statement and Comprehensive Spending Review. The Policy Team's office was a hive of activity in anticipation of what was to be announced and the impact it would have on the housing industry as a whole. The expectation that the Chancellor planned to reform more areas of the welfare budget, particularly housing benefit, revealed that, despite the levels of support already offered to tenants by housing associations, more would still have to be done in light of what was to come from the Chancellor's speech.

As a student, it was fascinating to watch the various departments liaising with one another, to plan their responses ahead of the Autumn Statement speech. It was interesting to witness and be at the forefront of implementation of new policies, to serve the needs of the tenants and protect the future of the housing association as a business. It can be difficult to remember that institutions such as Midland Heart are just that at the end of the day; a business that must survive and continue to grow from in order to meet the rising demand of the needs of its customer base. In these politically challenging times, to be given the opportunity to observe change in motion will be an interesting one and I look forward to seeing the developments unfold and gaining a better understanding of just what this involves over the course of my placement.

## Team Talk with James Gregory



### Dr James Gregory

**Research Fellow  
– Housing and  
Communities  
Research Group**

**Q:** *Hi James,  
and thank you*

*for featuring in our winter 2015 team talk!  
To start off with can you tell us a bit more  
about your background and your role at the  
university?*

**A:** Well, I started off doing a PhD in political theory at the London School of Economics, but came to the view that it was a bit too abstract and didn't really connect with the world. So I was lucky enough to then go and work at the Fabian Society on a project about the future of the welfare state. My then boss asked me to think of an example of how things can go wrong when welfare is very strictly means-tested and rationed, and I immediately thought of social housing, and went on to do my first housing research. I've stuck with the same interest for eight years now, and the politics of 'desert' and 'dependency' – blaming social housing as part of a 'problem' – have become ever more salient.

**Q:** *Thanks James, we'd love to hear more  
about your current research projects...*

**A:** I am just finishing a large project for the Webb Memorial Trust. We were asked to look at the role of housing – and particular social housing – in a good society, more equal and free of poverty. We decided that we needed to approach this issue by thinking about how different political and policy positions interpret the purpose of social housing. We want to think about what social housing is for before we think about policy and development. So we've been contrasting different interpretations; for example, social housing as a home for life versus as a temporary leg-up. We've then gone on to develop a 'hybrid' view of social housing – bringing together traditional social housing with, for example, a more secure and flexible private rental offer. The idea is that this will create a more universal system, less prone to attack and the language of desert and stigma.

**Q:** *What has been your favourite conference  
or seminar that you have attended in 2015,  
and why?*

**A:** It's hard to pick one. What I like about the HCRG seminars is the range on offer. Each time I learn something new.

**Q:** *You have an active role in lecturing on  
the Housing and Communities module.  
What do you enjoy most about teaching/  
what advice do you most often give to  
students?*

**A:** Oddly I actually most like the essay feedback, which I know is unusual for a lecturer. It is in essays that you can really see thinking and development, and I get a lot out of working with a student to improve the way they make a structure an argument. I think this is not really just about essays though. It is about structured thinking more generally, which is a core skill in most career choices students will take.

I would advise students to pursue what really interests them rather than following the line of least resistance. You may not get the chance to do this again!

**Q:** *On June 6th 2016, we will be hosting an  
exciting conference on the Future of Social  
housing at the University of Birmingham.  
What is the motivation behind this event and  
why is it crucial topic now, more than ever?*

**A:** The idea behind the event is to move away from the way which such conferences tend to be either academic or practitioner focussed. There is obviously an important role for such events, but I wanted to fill in the gaps that both often miss. My sense is that there is too little debate about values and politics and that, given the extraordinary changes the sector is now going through, this is the time to have that debate on what it is we actually want to achieve with social housing. Hopefully the mix of academics and practitioners will bring together different types of knowledge and expertise, and also provide an experience that is a little bit different from we are all used to.

**Q:** *Who will benefit from attending this  
conference?*

**A:** The idea is that a wide range of people will get something out of it. There will be great experts there – but it is not meant to be an 'experts only' debate. We want a lot of the day to be accessible to someone who just happens to be interested in housing. Other sessions will be quite technical – and give people new knowledge from the cutting edge of housing research and practice – but this a debate for all, not an expert elite. Another great idea introduced by our conference partner, Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes at Housing and Care 21, was to make space for newer researchers in policy and practice to share their work and thinking with one another. We would like to hear now from people who would like to contribute to the newer researchers' stream.

**Q:** *And finally, what are you reading/ what  
book have you last read and would you  
recommend it?*

**A:** I am reading *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace. It is a novel – with no housing policy involved – and I recommend it to all!



## November seminar: Unpacking the Growth of the Private Rented Sector in Birmingham - a niche analysis, with Dr Ben Pattison



### Anita Blessing

On the 16th November, the Housing and Communities Group hosted another well attended

seminar that brought together students, housing policy professionals and academic researchers. This month, Dr Ben Pattison drew on his recently completed PhD research to explore the diversity of the private rented sector. While England's private rental sector doubled in size between 2001 and 2011 and is increasingly relied upon long-term, the diverse submarkets within the sector may be overlooked or poorly understood by researchers and policymakers alike.

In his talk, Dr Pattison first provided an overview of the history of the English rental sector, highlighting recent trends impacting on rental housing supply market, such as the decline of homeownership, the reorientation of government financial support towards prospective buyers, the removal of developer planning obligations to contribute to affordable rental supply, and the promotion of right-to buy amongst social housing tenants. He then used a niche analysis of Birmingham's private rental sector to uncover diversity that can be used to challenge commonly held assumptions

about rental and renters. Enabled by geo-demographic analysis, his more nuanced picture of rental housing revealed spatially varied yet distinct submarkets characterized by differing needs and power positions within the broader housing market. Niche groups such as students living near university campus, city centre apartment renters, low-income long term renters and tenants relying on Housing Benefit, for example, are characterized by different levels of growth, with almost half the recent growth in private renting coming from Housing Benefit claimants. Having identified different groups, Dr Pattison then drew on research by Boterman and Hochstenbach, to conceptualise their different and sometimes 'chaotic' pathways through the rental market, wherein they draw on different types of capital to access housing. His analysis also highlighted important differences in the type of rental stock available to various niche groups.

Findings from Dr Pattison's work have implications for a range of policy areas, including housing and environmental health, welfare and urban planning. Uncovering diversity amongst tenant groups also highlights the need for further enquiry to better understand other players in the rental sector. A key issue that emerged during the seminar and provoked a lively discussion, was the extent to which the identity of

landlords remains a 'black box', rendering governing private rental a complex task. While groups such as student renters may be more likely to be housed by institutional investors, a lack of awareness regarding the different types of landlords operating in the private rental sector makes it difficult to achieve a coordinated policy response to emerging issues facing renters. Given that private rental supply is to a large extent driven by the dynamics of the buy to let market, a greater awareness of the types of landlords involved is also needed for policy targeting supply. However, as several participants pointed out during the discussion the capacity for local authorities to obtain this knowledge and to develop strategic policy is increasingly limited, leading Dr Pattison and several audience members to stress the importance of proposed landlord registration schemes. The discussion also highlighted the need for more research into the decision making mechanism that might help direct important sources of finance, such as occupational pension savings, into the rental market.

Dr Pattison's PhD thesis is entitled ***The Drivers for and policy responses to the rapid growth of private renting in England; has 'Generation Rent' been priced out?***



Dr Pattison's well attended seminar attracted students, academics and practitioners



Dr Ben Pattison delivering his seminar on the growth of the private rented seminar

## New Working Paper Series

### HCRG launches new Working Paper Series

The **Housing and Communities Research Group** are delighted to launch our new Working Paper Series presenting the latest research from the group. The first three papers launched in October 2015 showcase our work exploring 'community- led housing' which now offers an alternative to the mainstream housing sectors such as volume housebuilding and social housing.

In the first Working Paper - **'Bringing real localism into practice through co-operative governance: The role and prospects for community-led housing in England'** - Richard Lang and David Mullins explore the potential of co-operative housing governance and recent community-led forms of housing. The paper shows the crucial role that committed external partners can play in supporting local community leadership. International comparison with Austria reveals different ways in which similar challenges can be met by mechanisms such as public promotion and developer competitions at local site level. However, both systems require careful balancing of local innovation with supportive alliances with local government and the large scale housing sector.

The second and third papers by David Mullins and Halima Sacranie present results from two regional studies of community-led projects to bring empty homes into use drawing on a unique funding programme. The Empty Homes Community Grants Programme (EHCGP) provided nearly £50

million grant between 2011 and 2015 to 110 self-help housing providers.

In Working Paper 2 - **'Evaluation of the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme - Midlands Baseline Case Study Report'** - we show how the programme led to a significant expansion of the sector in the Midlands as existing charities and social enterprises got involved in housing refurbishment work to provide good quality homes for their clients. It profiles six projects in the Region and assesses their impacts which include employment, training and volunteering opportunities as well as tackling blight and bringing empty homes into use. It highlights the key played by external partners in enabling the success of these organisations and the benefits of the programme to local authority empty homes strategies and to empty property owners themselves.

In Working Paper 3 - **'Building a Legacy: The Impact of Empty Homes Community Grants Programme in the North East and Yorkshire and Humberside'** - we map

the remarkable achievements of the sector in the North East and Yorkshire where 30 locally based organisations brought 750 empty properties back into use for over 1,500 residents. This contributed to the viability of construction teams through enhanced workflow, and enabled richer and longer-term training experience to be offered to trainees and apprentices. Benefits to tenants, volunteers, the wider community and third parties have been estimated in one case to deliver between £3.24 and £5 of social value for every £ invested. By acquiring assets for themselves, a number of self-help organisations in this region have enhanced their sustainability through cash flow and balance sheet security.

We hope that you will find these research based contributions useful in mapping the recent growth in community-led housing organisations and their potential longer term contribution in providing real alternatives to mainstream housing models.

#### More information on our Working Paper Series

[www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/publications/working-paper-series.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/publications/working-paper-series.aspx)

### ISA Housing and the Built Environment Conference in Chicago, USA



#### Richard Lang

Richard Lang presented the paper "Community-led housing in England - The emergence of a field?" at the ISA RC 43 Conference "Housing in an Unequal World", which took place in Chicago, IL, USA, from September 17 to 19, 2015. This international conference brought together academics from around the world to discuss housing policy in both developed and developing countries. The paper, co-authored by David Mullins, builds on empirical findings of Richard's Marie Curie project on co-operative and community-led housing in England and insights from institutional theories of fields.



## New Publications

Blessing, A. (2015). Repackaging the poor? Conceptualising neoliberal reforms of social rental housing. *Housing Studies*, 1-24.

Blessing, A. (2015). Public, Private, or In-Between? The Legitimacy of Social Enterprises in the Housing Market. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 26(1), 198-221.

Hatak, Isabella; Lang, Richard; Roessler, Dietmar (2015) Trust, Social Capital, and the Coordination of Relationships Between the Members of Cooperatives: A Comparison Between Member-Focused Cooperatives and Third-Party-Focused Cooperatives, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, DOI: 10.1007/s11266-015-9663-2.

Mullins, D. (2015) Extra-care Housing: Impacts on Individual Well-Being. Evidence Review 1, Housing and Communities Research Group. [www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/publications/evidence-review-series.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/publications/evidence-review-series.aspx)

Mullins, D. and Jones, T. (2015) From 'contractors to the state' to 'protectors of public value'? Relations between non-profit housing hybrids and the state in England. *Voluntary Sector Review*. Now available as fast tracked article at [www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/vsr/pre-prints;content-pp\\_VSR-D-15-00020R2](http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/vsr/pre-prints;content-pp_VSR-D-15-00020R2)

Muir, J. and Mullins, D. (2015) The Governance of Mandated Partnerships: The Case of Social Housing Procurement. *Housing Studies*

Shanks, P. and Mullins, D. (2015) A Review of the Corporate Governance Arrangements of Housing Associations in Northern Ireland. University of Ulster and Housing and Communities Research Group, University of Birmingham.

## Upcoming Events

### Seminar Series

The aims of our research network and seminar series are to improve links and build an active research community; improve awareness of interests of researchers on housing and communities across the University and partners in West Midlands, and provide a stimulus for new research partnerships, collaborative writing and joint funding proposals.

We had a number of excellent and popular seminars already this term as we kicked off our Housing and Communities Research Network 15/16 Seminar Series, and the line-up for the next term looks equally promising:

**18 January 2016** - Line Algoed: "Learning from Informality- Community-led housing in a Global context"

**8 February 2016** - Anita Blessing: "Financing Affordable Housing Under Localism"

**7 March 2016** - Nick Crawson: "Making Life Worth Living – Nick Hedges and the Shelter Photographs 1968-72"

All seminars take place on Mondays from 4-15 to 6pm at the Muirhead Tower, University of Birmingham. For more information and to book your place online please see our events page:

[www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/events/index.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/events/index.aspx)

Alternatively you can e-mail Helen Harris ( [h.m.a.harris@bham.ac.uk](mailto:h.m.a.harris@bham.ac.uk)) to confirm your place at any of the above seminars.

## SAVE THE DATE

HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES RESEARCH GROUP WITH HOUSING AND CARE 21

# FUTURE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

International Convention Centre Birmingham

**6 June 2016**

Topics include: 'Baby Boomers Versus Generation Rent?'; 'On the Critical List: is social housing in mortal danger?'; 'Fair Conditions or Creeping Coercion? The place of conditionality in social housing' and 'Looking for Inspiration: innovations in and around social housing'.

Speakers already signed up include Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick (Heriot-Watt University), Jon Fitzmaurice, Self-Help Housing.Org, and Rudy de Jong (Dutch Housing Association expert)

Special slots on older people's housing and for newer researchers in policy and practice and academia to present and discuss their work.

See our website for further details of the programme and booking arrangements

[www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/events/index.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/events/index.aspx)