

Newsletter

Conference Edition
Future of Social Housing



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UNIVERSITY OF
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Housing and Communities Research

Editorial

The Future of Social Housing



Anita Blessing

Well, even though it feels like the year just started, it's already late April and nearly half over! The

good news is Spring has arrived, so welcome to our Spring newsletter! The topic of the future of social housing has been on all of our minds (and probably in some of our nightmares) lately. Early in March, our whole research group came together for an afternoon to think about possible future scenarios given the negative policy turn. Despite being packed into a rather small space we had a lively session and debate chaired by Halima Sacranie and Jon Stevens, with just the right amount of shouting. Thanks to Maddy Bunker, Nic Bliss, Bruce Moore, Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes James Gregory and David Mullins for the great presentations!

In this issue we think some more about the future of social housing as a lead up to our big Spring Conference at Birmingham International Convention Centre with a great lineup of more than 30 speakers from across research, policy and practice. In this edition, Vanessa Pritchard Wilkes explains Housing and Care 21's motivations for partnering with the Housing and Communities Research Group to bring together this exciting event. David Mullins talks to Rudy De Jong, a leading figure and commentator within the Dutch social housing sector who will also be speaking at the conference. In his talk with David, Rudy delves into the world of organisational hybridity, taking us through the golden years of the Dutch sector, and some of its more recent, darker moments. Also in our Conference special, David reviews a recent book by Mark Winterburn for the Centre for Social Justice. This sets up perfectly our workshop on the PRS as the 'new social housing' at the upcoming conference, which stars PRS expert Bob Jordan from Threshold, Ireland and Ben Pattison, who shortly receives his PhD on the growth of the PRS including detailed work in Birmingham.

Over recent months, David Mullins and I have been busy with the Reinvest project, which addresses another challenge core to the future of social housing; sourcing finance for new supplies of affordable rental housing

for low and moderate income households in areas of high demand. We look at the role of state policy in motivating investment in affordable rental housing from large financial institutions, such as banks and pension funds. In March, I worked with our Brussels based industry partner Housing Europe on a submission to the European Commission's public consultation on long-term and sustainable investment. This meant thinking about how to encourage giant investors such as pension funds to incorporate ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) standards into their investment activity and to make long term and sustainable investments that benefit the real economy. We considered how EU and national policies could make affordable rental housing more

visible within this category of investments and how to develop specific investment instruments that could help channel debt and equity investment into affordable rental housing projects.

Financing affordable rental housing is yet another challenge that asks us to find productive ways to combine social and commercial logics. I look forward to joining Dutch expert Rudy de Jong, Steve Stride from Poplar Harca and Pete Redman from Traderisks in an exciting final plenary on this very topic at our conference on The Future of Social Housing. We hope to see you all at the ICC on June 6th! More information and registration details can be found here: [Future of Social Housing](#)

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David Mullins presents at the Housing and Communities Research Network meeting on the future of social housing

ined current trends and future directions in homeless policy and practice. Richard Lang and David Mullins review some recent reports and events and keep us up to date with the latest news.

We recently had the great news that Peter Shanks will be joining us in the Autumn, having competed successfully for a highly prized 1+3 ESRC award for his PhD on housing governance in Ireland. Peter's five years of experience in running the highly successful BA Housing Management programme at the University of Ulster will be a great asset to the group.

**Anita Blessing,
Marie Curie Research Fellow**

Also in this issue, and gracing our cover, we have Alex Robinson's student feature on the 2016 Youth Homeless Parliament, which brings 100 young people who have experienced homelessness and the chari-

ties supporting them together with ministers and MPs to inform policy development. Chris Watson reports on a recent visit to Birmingham of a delegation of nine academics and practitioners from Japan, that exam-

Student Feature

Alex Robinson on the National Youth Homeless Parliament



Alex Robinson

The Youth Homeless Parliament event (YHP) comprises 100 young individuals aged 16-25 who have experienced homelessness and are receiving support from one of eight charities; the National Youth Reference Group, Centre Point, Crisis, DePaul, Forum Housing, The Foyer, Homeless Link, St Mungo's Broad Way and YMCA.

- Increase the supply of starter homes and to be capped to 250k.
- Introduce a banning orders and a rogue landlord data base.
- Freeze Local Housing Allowance rates for under 35's.

The Department for Communities and Local Government have funded the YHP, which is primarily managed by St Basils. The mission of the YHP is to host an annual event at Westminster to consult with ministers and MPs to both support and challenge the development and implementation of public policy.

The YHP 2016 manifesto supported and challenged government plans to:

- Create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020.
- Force those unemployed for more than 6 months to undertake training, apprenticeships and work placements.
- Remove the automatic entitlement to housing benefit for those aged 19-21.

There are three factors that highlight the importance of the YHP; these are its 'empirical evidence to support and challenge the development and implementation of policy', ability to 'develop service users' skills and knowledge' and overall 'contribution to address the issue of youth homelessness'. Firstly, the YHP has provided a sounding board that has highlighted empirical first hand evidence to ministers and MPs that

demonstrates the effectiveness of policy and services for young people. This offers the ministers and MPs a unique perspective upon key evidence and an array of recommendations to improve service provision. Moreover, this group has also enhanced the development of service users' skills and knowledge. The members of the YHP are able to engage within the political sphere and gain valuable life skills through participating in workshops to carry through to adolescence. The YHP has provided insightful evidence to improve service provision; this generates better services and support for young individuals from the government.

The most valuable insight of my experience this academic year was witnessing this group's positive impact. I was lucky to be there on the day of the YHP event. On the coach to Westminster the atmosphere was remarkable. Despite the early start to the day, all of the young people were enthusiastic and determined to participate. It was evident that the whole experience of the day had enabled them to engage both socially and academically. This was demonstrated by the connections formed with partnership organisations and also the knowledge that was displayed at the event.

My participation with the YHP is a key part of my studies for the BA Social Policy (Housing Pathway at the University of Birmingham. I am currently studying on the Social Policy Pathway program; which includes a 40-hour observational placement to see the implementation of policy within organisational and professional practice. Though the YHP has not demonstrated how policy is implemented directly into organizational practice, this group has highlight an interest group that engages with both the development and implementation of policy in a bottom-up approach.

Alex Robinson is a second year undergraduate on the BA Social Policy (Housing Pathway) Programme



1 Arrival: Outside the House
 2 Alex in Centre row 2 with St Basils NYHP lead Tamzin Taylor-Rosser at front
 2 Ready to get going in the House
 3 NYHP in action in the House

Special Feature

Inaugural Conference *Future of Social Housing*



Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes

We're delighted to be working in partnership with the University of Birmingham's Housing and Communities Research Group to host the inaugural Future of Social Housing Conference, in Birmingham on June 6th.

The conference, which aims to attract 200 delegates, including international experts, academic researchers, policy makers and housing professionals, is all about bringing the professional and academic worlds closer together.

The housing sector still tends to be extremely inward-looking. Yet at a time of unprecedented challenge and pressure; when housing providers must do everything they can to be sure about the direction and value of the work, it is a frustration that the sector is not more in tune with the very valuable housing research being done by organisations like the University of Birmingham.

There is no doubt that we as a sector need fresh thinking informed by crucial data and this could have incredible value in deepening our understanding of the changing landscape and the work we will have to do to meet these challenges.

Research also has the potential to inform a joined up strategy on health, housing and social care; elements which must be brought much closer together. This is something we at Housing and Care 21, as a specialist provider of accommodation for older people, are particularly keen on.

There is also a vast amount of innovative practice and expertise contained within housing associations and other bodies within the West Midlands. This is an opportunity for that work to be presented and discussed within the context of a changing policy landscape.

In an ever-increasing ageing population, the right housing for older people; which supports their independence with the right level of care and support, is one of the starkest challenges society faces. It is becoming increasingly clear that social housing which supports people in the right way has the potential to dramatically reduce our nation's very hefty health and social care bills.

Against this backdrop it is a very happy coincidence that our head offices are on the doorstep of one of the leading institutions for housing research, to host an event which will offer alternative perspectives and bring together housing experts from a host of disciplines.

More than 30 experts from universities including Amsterdam, Herriot-Watt, Newcastle and Birmingham, Campbell Tickell, Centre for Social Justice, HousingLIN, Traderisks, West Midlands

National Housing Federation, Birmingham City Council, Poplar HARCA, Housing and Care 21 and the Housing and Communities Research Group will lead a series of talks and workshops examining everything from international perspectives on social housing to innovative alternatives and the future role of private rented housing.

The event is open to anyone with an interest in housing; professionals, academics, students or individuals with a general interest in the sector. It will be interactive and we want delegates to have the chance to take part in lively debates and workshops.

We are looking forward to hosting what we hope will be an extremely successful and innovative event with a key influence on future policy and practice.

Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes, Head of Strategic Engagement at Housing & Care 21

How to book your place:

Conference places cost only £50 per person and can be booked today: [Future of Social Housing](#).

Interview

Learning from the Dutch experience: David Mullins interviews Rudy de Jong



A key theme at our forthcoming conference on the future of social housing will be to explore the potential for combining commercial and social logics to build a new and more resilient social housing sector.

This seems to make a lot of sense as the Westminster government appears to be moving away from supporting the principles of social housing at the same time as withdrawing capital funding for low rent housing. Housing associations might respond by maintaining a strong social vision in the face of a retreating welfare state and using their assets and borrowing capacity to cross-subsidy these social purposes. But what exactly would this mean in practice? It's always worth learning from someone who has been there before.

Rudy de Jong has been a leading figure in the Dutch housing sector since the late 1970s; directing a major regional association, Wonen Limburg, and then advising AEDES (the trade body), serving on several supervisory boards and acting as an independent consultant. I met up with Rudy in Delft in March to discuss his perceptions of the Dutch sector's move away from state funding and regulation after 1996 to embrace a more independent 'social entrepreneurial' identity only to return to more state control and a narrower social purpose in more recent years (but still without state capital funding). What were the key lessons of that experience?

The 1996 deal with government gave associations the freedom to use their state funded assets as a platform for borrowing and investment on the understanding that

There seemed to be a lot of free cashflow and we needed to find ways to use it.

there would be no new state capital subsidies. For 10 years all went well; asset values increased, interest rates fell, refinancing was attractive and there was money to be made from new construction and selling empties and government took a back seat.

Describing that golden period Rudy comments *'there seemed to be a lot of free cashflow and we needed to find ways to use it. Encouraged by the Government, we enlarged our field of activities into social real estate, we purchased and developed land and began to fill gaps left by the state and we were encouraged to do this. Chief Executives were ambitious, it was easy to get money supported by the Guarantee Fund and the banks didn't ask too many questions because the Guarantee Fund provided a government stamp. New people entered the field, prestige architects, and people with a focus on commercial returns. Local government and others such as universities and health and social care organisations wanted to make new partnerships with us but funnily enough they never signed up to share the risks.'* In a rising market there seemed to be no brakes on the system.

The seeds of the later reversal of the sector's fortunes which only became apparent after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis were sown much earlier during this period of freedom and apparent success. *'We saw our sector as autonomous social enterprises and we began to organise ourselves to be as independent as possible of other actors; we turned our backs on national policy which turned out to be a big mistake'*. There were some symbolic incidents - the case of the association who purchased a cruise ship and rigged it out in dry dock as a training venue for hotel and catering skills. If it hadn't been for the asbestos and the costs of remedying this, this could have been a successful community investment project but instead it has become a symbol of a sector that had lost its way through an excess of spare cash and over-ambition. Then there was the case of the association who experimented with interest rate hedging instruments¹, betting against future rate rises and came unstuck. These incidents also focused attention on the high executive remuneration (although

lower than in UK) that had become the norm in the sector.

Gradually politicians who had once been content to withdraw from the housing field became increasingly antagonised by the antics of a sector apparently out of control; and had their own ideas on how the apparent wealth of the sector should be used more effectively. As early as 2005 there was bargaining over how much associations should contribute from their own resources to the Government's neighbourhood regeneration strategy. Over the following years the ground shifted from voluntary contributions by associations to tax subventions and the scope of such taxes shifted from associations' commercial to social activities to contributing to broader public costs of housing allowances.

For Rudy the key mistake made during this period was that 'we didn't listen to the tenants'.

But for Rudy the key mistake made during this period was that *'we didn't listen to the tenants'*. He explains that *'Associations have to see tenants' interests as their highest priority and give them a position to express this interest. They were not asked about big investments and risks'*. Under the Dutch housing association governance system management decisions were taken by executive-only boards, and even the backstop supervisory boards rarely had direct tenant representation but did include some members nominated by tenants. Although the sector had put much effort into articulating its social purpose and cultivating a social entrepreneurial identity over those years, it seems that some of the key potential allies of the sector namely its tenants and local authority partners were not sufficiently involved in defining their social purpose.

But the immediate triggers for a move back from the earlier freedom were financial. After the 2008 global crisis the magic cycle of rising asset values and low interest loans was broken at a stroke. It was no longer easy to raise cash by building for sale or selling empty properties, moreover the value of association's portfolios went into reverse, requiring reassessments of borrowing capacity and cover. This is what in Rudy's view led to the disastrous experiments with



Vestia – between state and market

interest rate hedging in a falling market in which associations needed cash.

The perfect storm that hit the sector after 2010 saw new state intervention reinforcing these market pressures dramatically reversing the earlier expansionism into what has for the last three years been a rapidly retreating sector. Challenges from the European Union under competition policy, initiated by the Dutch government and partly based on a complaint of institutional investors, led to restrictions on the market niche for housing association new tenants to those on below average incomes. Associations were required to separate their commercial and social activities so that the former did not benefit from state aid in the form of loan guarantees and lower land prices for social housing. Further new taxes were imposed on the sector. A parliamentary enquiry saw grillings of leading sector figures on TV. New legislation in 2015 requires tripartite annual agreements between associations, local authorities and tenant representatives. There is now an 180,000 Euro salary cap for chief executives and a 1.7 billion Euro levy

on landlords with more than ten dwellings providing housing at rents below 700 Euros associations contributing to the costs of housing allowances.

These changes, too many to detail here, seem to represent a new expansion of state control and re-regulation of the sector – something which had seemed to have been made impossible after the 1996 agreement. Having heard some of the underlying events that had brought it about I asked Rudy how it had been possible for government to act in this way. In answering he distinguished between the very different paths taken by Germany and the Netherlands in deregulating social housing after the 1990s. Whereas Germany repealed regulations that were specific to social housing organisations preferring to treat private and non-profit investors in social housing on an equal basis; the Netherlands retained the basis for treating social housing providers in a distinct way. Legislation specific to social housing remained there as a backstop, while during the golden years this was only lightly used (although significantly rent increases

continued to be determined by government throughout the period discussed)². Nevertheless, the Government had retained the ability to treat housing associations as a special case and was easily able to re-establish control.

I have personally been impressed over the years with the advantages of Dutch social housing in providing a more universal response to housing need, avoiding the extent of stigma and residualisation found in English social housing. I have therefore often espoused the case for a hybrid sector, using cross-subsidy through commercial projects while maintaining social purposes through organisational ethos. I therefore wanted to understand the extent to which we should continue to draw inspiration from the Dutch model given the experiences of the last few years. The key lesson I gained from the interview was the need for a stronger anchor for social purposes – *'it's best to listen to the tenants and those in housing need, and I'm afraid that too few Dutch associations did that – it's no good playing Robin Hood and expecting them to take the risks'*. As in England, greater tenant influence on decisions is required to avoid social housing being simply a plaything of governments, ambitious executives and outside interests. So I still believe there is potential for the English housing sector to combine social and commercial logics to address our current crisis of social housing. However, I am increasingly convinced that the social purpose needs to be anchored through accountability to tenants, housing applicants and local communities rather than leaving it to the organisations themselves to define. Such anchorage seems the most likely recipe for avoiding mission drift as the imperatives of commercial projects take on a life of their own, easily diluting weakly anchored social purposes.

David and Rudy talked in the Hotel Plataan, Delft on March 6th 2016

¹ Vestia HA developed highly professional skills in the use of derivatives and was seen, also by financial institutions, as an example of successful cross-subsidising: earning money on the financial markets to invest in social housing. The final price the sector had to pay was 2 billion euro.

² Initially Government allowed high rent increases giving associations the earning capacity they needed to pay the price of exchanging government loans against future subsidies. Immediately after the end of the agreed period the government reduced maximum rent increases to inflation level.

New Publication Review

Home Improvements. A Social Justice Approach to Housing Policy



David Mullins

At our Conference in June, a workshop on 'the new social housing' will assess the ability of the private rented sector to deliver secure, affordable, decent homes for low income households. David Mullins has been looking at a new report from a leading right wing think tank which provides essential preparatory reading for the workshop.

Home Improvements

Winterburn M (2016) *Home Improvements. A Social Justice Approach to Housing Policy.* Centre for Social Justice
London ISBN 978 0 9930570 8 3

This report by a leading right wing think tank that has previously informed the Conservative Government's approach to welfare provides a devastating critique of its current approach to housing policy. As the Director's preface boldly states *'the Right has very little to say for those for whom home ownership is out of reach'* (p.3).

This is backed by the report's analysis that: *'more and more families are finding that they*

Over the last decade the number of low income households renting privately has doubled from one to two million.

have nowhere to go but the private rented sector ...over the last decade the number of low income households renting privately has doubled from one to two million. This presents major new difficulties, notably the lack of stability which the tenure brings and the barriers to entry ...we are seeking to end the blight of insecurity which undermines child development schooling and the ability of adults to work their way out of poverty'. (P.3) The report acknowledges the weakness of the current government's approach of treating private renting as 'the new social housing' by default as it has become the *'new norm for low income families'*. It recognises that as it currently operates the lower end of the PRS is *'less likely than social housing to provide the suitable, secure base that families need to thrive'* (p.10).

Winterburn makes a number of positive proposals towards a policy for renting which

he argues will help to address poverty. However, it also appears to accept the Government's absence of plans to invest in socially rented homes (apart from a recent 'out of the blue' announcement on 'the worst 100 social housing estates' which is reviewed in the final chapter). Instead, the report focuses mainly on measures to make the best of a bad job by ameliorating some of the failings of private rental.

This is a well-researched report that makes good use of secondary sources and case studies from its working group members to support proposals to tackle some of the deficiencies of private renting. The most welcome measures concern **stability and suitability** of private rentals for low income households. **Instability** is to be tackled through extending tenancy terms for example through voluntary agreements secured with landlords by Social Lettings Agencies (SLAs) and placing homeless families direct into long term accommodation. **Suitability** is to be improved by making membership of a 'landlord association' a condition for buy to let mortgages. The report proposes a £40million **'Social Lettings Agencies Capital Fund'** (p.65) to support the spread of SLAs and lever in social investment drawing on some of the funds being transferred from DWP to DCLG for homeless temporary accommodation. Later it proposes that the same (£1.1billion) pot be used to fund renovation of empty homes with possibilities for local authorities to fund up to 30% of refurbishment costs in return for five-year nomination agreements managed through Social Lettings Agencies. The report also recognises the value of empty homes work by non-registered community-led groups and proposes new measures to enable such groups to access HCA funds for this purpose.

Welcome as these measures are it seems unlikely that the problem of security will be effectively addressed without changing the existing assured shorthold regime to something more like the German social lettings term of 5-10 years. While Social Lettings Agencies can help to secure higher standards of suitability for some renters, they are essentially voluntary agreements only with participating landlords. Meanwhile peer pressure from 'landlord associations' seems even less likely to persuade rogue landlords to change their ways. Arguably the

Arguably the only way to ensure improved standards will be to reverse the erosion of local authorities' regulatory resources

only way to ensure improved standards will be to reverse the erosion of local authorities' regulatory resources to enforce standards across the sector and to link receipt of housing benefit to provision of accommodation that is of a decent standard. In the main body of the report there is some support for



stronger enforcement through 'rent repayment orders' to deny housing benefit to landlords who fail to ensure that properties are of a good standard and for selective licencing schemes; but at the same time the report eschews authority wide licencing schemes as *'burdensome to landlords...costs of £500 per property are often passed on to tenants'* (p.77).

Measures proposed to promote flexibility and affordability include the implausible proposal of *'ensuring that there is no net loss of homes that are truly affordable to those on low incomes as a result of the right to buy in housing associations'* (p.15). The report also proposes to address the high costs of moving through providing for deposits within Universal Credit, and establishing a new form of funding for supported housing enabling the Government to deliver its controversial plans to limit supported housing allowances to the bottom one third of local market rents).

Some proposals do not appear to follow the logic of the report's analysis that the PRS is *'less likely than social housing to provide the suitable, secure base that families need to thrive'* (p.10). If this is the case why does the report *'not expect the Government to embark on a new programme of social house building'* (p.15), and to accept that even affordable rented housing funding is to be significantly reduced *'we urge the Government to target remaining funding at building homes for affordable rent in London and other areas where job opportunities coincide with high rents in the PRS'* (p.80). There is also support for the removal of lifetime tenancies in the social housing sector.

So I would give two cheers for CSJ's brave challenge to the current single tenure home

ownership policy. Let's hope that their proposals on **stability and suitability** enjoy as much influence as their welfare reform proposals did in the last decade. It is clear that we urgently need a credible policy for renting, and measures to support Social Lettings Agencies, extend tenancy terms, bring empty private sector properties into use and ensure that there is better value for money for tax payer subsidy of private landlordism are all to be welcomed. What we also need is an honest analysis of the impact of private

We need an honest analysis of the impact of private renting on household well-being compared to social housing.

renting on household well-being compared to social housing. This could begin to challenge the legacy of flawed research that *'social housing is bad for you'* which appears to inform some of the report's final chapter on neighbourhoods. To do this we need to compare well-being and labour force participation of cohorts of social housing tenants on a like for like basis with the only realistic alternative available to these households – the bottom end of the private rented sector. While referring to the adverse effects of concentrations of poverty in social housing the final chapter fails to make any reference

to *'benefits street'* clusters of poverty at the bottom end of the PRS, beyond the reach of housing association worklessness initiatives that the report earlier praises. May be the CSJ's focus on poor families, children in poverty and work incentives will stimulate new Conservative policies to provide decent, secure and affordable rented homes for low income groups – I seem to remember that this was once seen as a key achievement of social housing!

David Mullins



Seminar Report

Richard Lang on Nick Crowson's *How to launch a Housing campaign: Shelter and the Definition of Homelessness 1966-1977*



Richard Lang

On March 7, the Housing and Communities Research Group welcomed Professor Nick Crowson as a speaker in our seminar series. Nick is Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Birmingham and undertakes research on the history of homelessness in modern Britain from the 1880s to the modern day.

Furthermore, he is currently acting as a historical advisor to the Cardboard Citizens Theatre Company for its Home Truths cycle of plays. For us housing researchers present at the seminar, it was a rare but valuable opportunity to revisit one of our research group's key themes from a historian's perspective and based on this, engage in an interdisciplinary discussion. In his well-attended seminar presentation, Nick traced the history of Shelter, one of today's most recognised housing charities in the UK. The charity provides advice and practical assistance for people in housing need and engages in lobbying government for policy reforms to improve housing conditions.

Nick's analysis of Shelter's first decade of activities was not limited to the organisational sphere but highlighted the links to broader societal discussions around homelessness at that time, as reflected in main-

His research suggests that Shelter's foundation in 1966 aimed at filling a gap in the homelessness system in England by articulating and tackling the issue of "hidden" homelessness.

stream media and political discourses. Thus, his research suggests that Shelter's foundation in St Martins-in-the-Fields in December 1966, aimed at filling a gap in the homelessness system in England by articulating and tackling the issue of "hidden" homelessness. However, at the same time, the charity's early success was very much based on a clever national campaign which fundamentally challenged our understanding of what constituted homeless. The mastermind behind the campaign was Des Wilson – the founding director of Shelter – who managed

to build on the huge public outcry following the transmission of the BBC television play "Cathy Come Home" in November 1966. Another key factor behind Shelter's success was the support of local housing associations such as the Notting Hill Housing Trust under the leadership of Reverend Bruce Kenrick.

Shelter launched its promotion campaign in different mainstream media in an effort to build up momentum for its cause. To highlight this, Nick showed an excerpt of the "ITN Shelter Report" in the seminar which was originally broadcast in 1969 and could be considered as a promotional film for Shelter. As the charity grew in size, the organisational structure had to adjust which caused problems given the charity's focus on grassroots volunteer action. Furthermore, leadership disputes broke out between Des Wilson and Bruce Kenrick with the latter leaving Shelter. This historical analysis of micro-organisational behaviour underlined the relevance of Nick's research not only in the context of housing research but also for third sector studies more broadly.

In the final part of his presentation, Nick raised the crucial question whether Shelter had successfully managed to change homelessness and housing legislation through its early years' activities and campaigns. He comes to the conclusion that The 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act was indeed a success for the homelessness lobby, including Shelter among other campaigning groups. The Act can be seen as a significant landmark, as for the first time, a legal definition and priority needs of homelessness were introduced, moving the issue from the welfare to the housing policy sphere. Nevertheless, Nick's study also shows the limitations of Shelter's actual lobbying capacities and of lobbying groups

in the field in general. Thus, for instance, Shelter failed to block key amendments to the 1977 landmark legislation which highlighted the "temporary" character of homelessness and described the homeless as a "marginal group", although empirical evidence had already pointed to the opposite phenomenon.

Nick's seminar presentation and the subsequent discussion were highly stimulating, as he added enjoyable anecdotes from the organisational life of Shelter which came out of his archival research. As usual, a small group of us continued the seminar discussion in an informal setting at the University's Staff House bar.

Further reading

Crowson, N. J. (2012): *Revisiting the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act: Westminster, Whitehall, and the Homelessness Lobby*. In: *Twentieth Century British History*. 24 (3), S. 424-447, DOI: 10.1093/tcbh/hws027.

A flavour of some of Nick's current research can be found with this blog <https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/2015/12/07/vagrant-life-stories/>



Convicted Beggar Leicester Gaol Prisoner Photograph DE3831 142 Courtesy of Leicestershire Record Office

New Research Report Review

The barriers and prospects for community-led housing: reviewing two recent studies



Richard Lang

In recent years, England has witnessed a small-scale re-emergence of community-led housing initiatives as a response to the lack of affordable homes and spaces for self-determination in mainstream housing.

Furthermore, changes in the policy environment for housing and planning – following the Localism Act 2011 and its related governance reforms – have created new opportunities to promote and establish more community-led forms of housing.

Not surprisingly, the phenomenon of community-led housing has also started to receive more attention in the academic literature while at the same time, housing practitioners have begun to commission their own evidence-based research to develop a better understanding for this emerging sector.

Adding to those already existing studies on community-led housing, two research reports have recently been published. The first study was undertaken by the left-wing think tank Smith Institute and funded by the Nationwide Foundation.

Study 1 by the Smith Institute

Local housing, community living: prospects for scaling up and scaling out community-led housing

Based on best practice case studies and stakeholder interviews, the study looks at the viability of different community-led housing models and their growth potential. Overall, the report paints a rather positive picture of previous achievements in the community-led sector – at least at the local project level. According to the study author, the current attractiveness of the sector refers to its innovative and affordable responses to local housing need. Moreover, projects consider environmental sustainability, the concerns of local residents, and can also have wider neighbourhood benefits, such as training and job creation for local people and strengthening community cohesion.

However, when it comes to the prospects for growth of the sector, the authors identify

serious challenges ahead. Given its relatively small size (around 173,000 homes and still mainly co-operatives), public awareness of community-led housing needs to be increased about its core principles and potential benefits. Thus, the authors recommend setting up a strong national support network with a sector-wide communications and PR strategy. Furthermore, the report highlights the crucial role of government funding and support as well as partnerships with housing associations to mainstream community-led housing models. In this respect, the Smith Institute's report recommends existing grant schemes (such as the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme) to be renewed, and more seed-corn funding schemes and low-interest loan funding to help expanding community-led housing.

The urgent need for external facilitation and support is in line with the results of our own William Plowden Fellowship report on the prospects for community-led housing in England, which was published as a HCRG Working Paper last year. It also discusses the foundation of the Mutual Housing Group (MHG) as an attempt to create a new umbrella over rather diverse sub-sectors to meet resource needs of individual initiatives as well as promote and communicate interests jointly. Although the MHG has so far remained a rather loose group of actors, the recent project-based engagement of the Building & Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) – with the aim to facilitate the growth of community-led housing – has created a new momentum towards establishing a sector-wide brand and communications strategy.

An interesting finding of the Smith Institute's report is that sector representatives value the organisational diversity within the community-led housing movement as well as its focus on "scaling out", i.e. an expansion through new small-scale local groups rather

than growth of existing organisation ("scaling up"). The Plowden Fellowship report helps to put these particular features of the English sector into an international perspective. Such a comparative approach suggests that scaling up strategies, driven by strong external (government) facilitation and central umbrella bodies, can indeed roll out the core principles of co-operative and community-led housing sectors.



William Plowden Fellowship

Pragmatic partnerships between citizens and the state to achieve the common good.

Study 2 by Stephen Hill

Strengthening civil society institutions through new forms of land ownership

The second report briefly reviewed here is by Stephen Hill who has been working in housing development and neighbourhood regeneration since the early 1970's. Stephen has a longstanding interest in community-led housing and is a board member of the National CLT (Community Land Trust) Network and the UK Cohousing Network.

In his recently published Churchill Fellowship report, he provides an in-depth analysis of the relationship between citizens and the state based on field observations of Community Land Trusts and other forms of “citizen inspired housing” in North American cities.

Within community-led forms of housing, the report highlights the important role of CLTs, as their agenda focuses on housing needs that meet the concern of local communities, but at the same time also addressing the underlying issue of land market speculation with concrete actions. According to the author, such agency of community-led organisations can effectively complement state agency, when the latter is not able (or not willing) to initiate land reforms aiming at a better balance of public and private interests. For his fellowship study, Stephen interviewed over 60 representatives of community organisations, politicians and public officials in different North American cities in 2014. In the same year, he already gave a presentation in our HCR seminar series where he spoke about his study visits to community land trusts in the US. Against the backdrop of these empirical insights, the Churchill Fellowship report reflects on the current situation of citizen participation in political life in the UK. This robust analysis leads Stephen to recommendations for institutional reforms (“the ‘people’s land’ campaign”) which should guarantee that housing and land markets in this country serve the common good.

The report, for instance, suggests initiating community-based “commissions” and “local panels” that would strengthen the public interest perspective in land-use and planning processes for major development projects. Another recommendation refers to “public interest sounding boards” which should increase public accountability of professional institutions in the field of planning and housing. According to the author, these institutional reforms help to re-establish trust

among citizens in public authorities and professionals to represent their interests.

From an international perspective, Stephen’s comparative approach between the US and the UK – including recommendations for policy transfer – makes sense, given similarities of the institutional and political environment as well as the nature of social movements between both countries. The CLT model, for instance, was originated in the US. From the report it appears that the author is particularly impressed by the more pragmatic and less ideological attitude of public authorities in US case studies which enables productive partnerships with community organisations for local housing development.

Stephen’s reflections on the relationship between citizens and the state are relevant to my own Marie Curie Fellowship research on the role of “linking social capital” in community-led housing in England and Austria. This vertical type of social capital refers to ties between residents or local community members and “powerful” resource holders, such as public authorities, large housing associations, or private investors. The recommendations in Stephen’s fellowship report on implementing “public interest panels” and “sounding boards” make me wonder about accountability practices in major urban housing development in other European contexts. In Vienna, for instance, we still find a rather top-down policy approach to facilitating collaborative housing projects through favourable strategic land-use planning and developer competitions. In this process, interdisciplinary expert panels evaluate the “social sustainability” of housing projects that apply for public funding. However, the actual level of resident participation still depends on the individual housing provider. Nevertheless, the introduction of social sustainability criteria in housing developer competitions puts increasing pressure on larger non-profit developers to explicitly consider participatory approaches and community building in subsidised housing schemes.

**Richard Lang,
Marie Curie Research Fellow**

Further information:

- Heywood, A. (2016). Local housing, community living: prospects for scaling up and scaling out community-led housing. London: The Smith Institute. <https://smithinstitutethinktank.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/local-housing-community-living.pdf>
- Hill, S (2015). Property, Justice and Reason - Reconnecting the Citizen and State through Community Land Trusts and land reform in nine narratives. Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. <http://www.wcmt.org.uk/fellows/reports/strengthening-civil-society-institutions-through-new-forms-land-ownership>
- Lang R., Mullins D. (2015). Bringing real localism into practice through co-operative housing governance. The role and prospects for community-led housing in England. Housing and Communities Research Group WP1-2015. University of Birmingham. Available at <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/IASS/housing/2015/working-paper-series/HCR-WP-1-2015.pdf>

Stephen Hill is one of the speakers at our conference on June 6th in a workshop on innovative approaches to housing.

News



HousingLIN Conference:

Jon Stevens and David Mullins present

Over 300 people attended the 2016 Housing LIN conference: 'People powered change: a festival of ideas' at the Oval cricket ground on 11 March.

Jon Stevens and David Mullins from HCRG presented key findings from new research at the conference. Jon's overview 'Growing Old Together: An Overview of Collaborative Forms of Housing for Older People' formed the basis of his contribution to a plenary panel on People Powered Change with leading figures in the sector.

Meanwhile David presented current research being undertaken with Jon and Housing and Care 21 on an innovative project at Ashfields, Shropshire where a Resident Management Company has taken over services to leaseholders from their landlord. The workshop presentation 'they were a square peg and we only had round holes' stimulated active discussion with other older people who have taken on management of their homes from private development companies and housing association after similar struggles to Ashfields. Further details of both projects can be found on HCRG research webpages.

HLIN Growing Older Together Report (PDF)
Jon Stevens joins panel in opening plenary

Links Across the Water

David Mullins speaks at two conferences in Northern Ireland and Peter Shanks Secures ESRC Studentship for research on housing governance in Northern Ireland

David spoke at conferences in Belfast either side of Easter. On March 24th he joined speakers including the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Social Development, and the Chief Executives of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and two of the largest housing associations in Northern Ireland at a conference organised by final year students at the University of Ulster's Housing Management Programme.

His topic was '**Social Housing Where Next? – A View from Across the Water**'.

On April 11th he convened a workshop on **Models of Tenant Involvement in Governance** at a Conference of Housing Rights and Supporting Communities Northern Ireland on Delivering on Tenant Participation – From Strategy to Implementation. The workshop presented and discussed early results from a project David is undertaking with Peter Shanks for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Peter, who was a Course Director on the University of Ulster's Housing Management Degree for five years, has recently been successful in securing ESRC/DTC funding for his PhD on housing governance in the Housing and Communities Research Group starting in September 2016.



World Habitat Awards 2016

Self-Help Housing In The North Of England Joint Winner

The value of self-help housing organisations that bring empty homes into use; providing training and employment opportunities and low cost housing for local people has been evidenced in a series of research reports and working papers by Housing and Communities Research Group. <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/publications/working-paper-series.aspx>

Self-help housing has now received international recognition in the UN Habitat Awards 2016 in which two projects providing self-help housing in the North of England came equal first with a community land trust in Puerto Rico:

<https://www.bshf.org/world-habitat-awards/winners-and-finalists/self-help-housing-in-the-north-of-england/>
To mark the award BSHF have produced an excellent short video that captures the nature and impact of these two projects; Canopy in Leeds and Giroscope in Hull. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NFIOWFbC6Y>

We are currently completing research on the legacy of a funding programme (2012-15) which supported 110 such projects across the country: impact briefings on the role of local authority support and *future possibilities for asset based development will be launched at events in Middlesbrough on June 9th and Leeds on June 16th.*

Enquiries to David Mullins or Halima Sacranie

News

Visitors from Japan: homelessness in Birmingham and Japan



Christopher Watson

A group of nine academics and practitioners from Japan, led by Professor Yoshihiro Okamoto of the School of Business and Public Policies, Chukyo University, Nagoya, visited Birmingham on 20 and 21 March 2016 as part of a short study tour of the UK, to examine current trends and future directions in homeless policy and practice.

The visit to Birmingham was organised by Chris Watson, honorary staff member in Housing and Communities Research and the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, with contributions from HCR colleagues and associates. The visitors were joined by Sumi Lee, an MSc student in Social Policy from Seoul Metropolitan Government, Korea, who worked until recently in the homelessness division of SMG Welfare and Health Department.

Until the collapse of the 'bubble economy' in the early 1990s, homelessness was not seen as a problem in Japan: in fact, according to Okamoto (2007: 526) 'there used to be no word for "homeless" in the Japanese language'. However, in the past twenty-five years, although one of the world's leading economies, Japan has faced major difficulties through events such as the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the worldwide financial crisis that began in 2007, and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Economic and political uncertainties, job insecurity, changes in employment practices and in working conditions have contributed to a 'new housing poverty' (Okamoto, 2015) caused not by housing shortage but by an inability to afford contemporary housing costs, despite high vacancy rates (13.5% nationally) and an oversupply of housing in some areas. The problem is exacerbated by the tradition of housing being regarded as an individual responsibility, by the very limited provision of public housing and by a decline in the availability of low-rent private housing. Compared with the UK's broader definitions, the law on homelessness in Japan refers to people who are rough sleepers. Others, including homeless families and the often younger 'invisible homeless' who sleep in internet cafes, fast food restaurants or cars,

are excluded. The objective of policy has been to return the rough sleeper population to the labour market, through a work-focused homeless support programme which may include short-term housing provision in temporary shelters (Iwata, 2010). The policy emphasis is on 'return to work' rather than access to secure, affordable housing. Non-profit organisations in some of the larger cities have prioritised secure housing as the key to the restoration of stable living. This approach, however, is constrained by factors including a weak financial base, the lack of a housing allowance that broadly covers low income groups and the lack of public housing available to single people (Iwata, 2010).

In response to the long-standing interest of Dr Okamoto and his colleagues in the comparative study of homeless policies and practice in the UK and Japan, a one-day seminar was held on 20 March in Park House, University of Birmingham, with presentations on housing and homelessness policy in Birmingham by Rashid Ikram, Senior Intelligence Officer, Strategy & Research Team, Directorate for People, Birmingham City Council; by David Mullins on the research and teaching programmes of Housing and Communities Research; by doctoral researcher Simone Hellenen of HCR on client involvement and peer research in the homeless sector, drawing on her experience with Groundswell, a London-based housing charity that works with homeless and vulnerable people; and by Richard Turkington of Housing Vision, on the affordability of housing for young people in Birmingham, a project undertaken for St Basil's as part of the 'Positive Transitions Pathway Study' to prevent youth homelessness in Birmingham and more widely.



Housing and homelessness policy in Birmingham



At The Big Issue



Lunch at Frost & Snow

The second day began with a visit to St Basil's, for presentations by the Chief Executive, Jean Templeton, focussing on the Positive Pathway Model and on the Youth Hub, the single gateway for young people who are homeless or at risk in the city; and by Tamaan Wilkinson, Learning, Skills and Work Manager, on St Basil's Schools' Training and Mentoring Project, and on the Learning, Skills and Work service available to all St Basil's young residents.

Following lunch at Frost & Snow, Midland Heart Housing Association's Bakery and Café in The Snow Hill, the visit concluded with a presentation and discussion at the offices of The Big Issue West Midlands and North Wales, led by Susannah Wilson, Service Broker, The Big Issue. Discussion considered the work of the Foundation in the UK but referred also to Japan, where The Big Issue was launched in and has been sold successfully since September 2003.

Christopher Watson
Housing and Communities Research

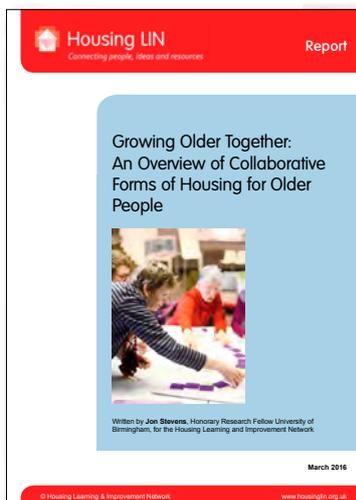
References

- **Iwata, M. (2010)** 'New landscape of homelessness in Japan: the role of NPOs and landscape of the problem', *City, Culture and Society* 1(2010) pp 127-34
- **Okamoto, Y. (2007)** 'A comparative study of homelessness in the United Kingdom and Japan', *Journal of Social Issues* 63:3 pp 525-42
- **Okamoto, Y. (2015)** 'A study on housing poverty in the Nagoya Metropolitan Area, Japan', *Journal of the Korean Housing Association* 26:6 pp 9-16

New Publications

Lang, R., Fink, M. (2016). Social entrepreneurs as change agents in regional development: The role of linking social capital. Regional Studies Association (RSA) Annual Conference, Graz, Austria, 03.-06.04.
http://www.regionalstudies.org/uploads/RSA_2016_Lang_Fink.pdf

Stevens J (2016) Growing Older Together: An Overview of Collaborative Forms of Housing for Older People. Housing LIN.
http://www.housinglin.org.uk/library/Resources/Housing/Support_materials/Reports/HLIN_Growing_Older_Together_Report.pdf



Forthcoming Events

Conference: Future of Social Housing

Monday 6th June 2016, 09:00-17:30

at Birmingham, International Convention Centre

More information and registration details can be found here:

[Future of Social Housing.](#)

The Empty Homes Conference Birmingham

24 May 2016, 10:00-16:45

at Maple House in Birmingham

www.ehnetwork.org.uk/2016Conference

As part of our ESRC, Nationwide and Tudor Trust funded legacy project we are holding the following free seminars with self-help housing.

www.housing.org

- Asset Based Development Among Community Housing Organisations
In Teesside, 9th June 2016, 12.30-5.00
- Local Authority Support For Community Led Empty Homes Projects
Leeds City Council, 14th June 2016, 12.30-5.00

For booking details for both events please email Sarah.tanfield@hact.org.uk