



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Unconditional support or tough love? Social housing and the behaviour change agenda

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The project

- Five year study (2013-18) on 'Welfare Conditionality' in England and Scotland – both its '*efficacy*' and '*ethicality*' – being conducted by 6 UK universities
- 8 groups of 'welfare service users' including various sub-groups among unemployed, homeless people, individuals/families subject to antisocial behaviour interventions, and **social tenants**
- 12 national-level key informant interviews with **social housing policy-makers and other senior stakeholders**
- 4 focus groups with 33 **social housing managers/practitioners**
- Qualitative interviews with total sample of 480 welfare services users, of which 214 **social tenants** and 47 explicitly sampled as **on some form of non-permanent tenancy** (in England, FTT or PT) (wave 1 of 3)

Social housing and conditionality

- Are we seeing increased levels of conditionality in the social housing sphere? How is this manifesting?
- To what extent is intensifying conditionality intended to bring about behavioural change on the part of tenants?
- What are the prime motivating factors lying behind any such behavioural change agenda?

Behaviour change interventions in social housing

Mode of power	Examples
Force removal of the possibility of choosing not to comply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation policy • Eviction
Coercion compliance secured via threat of deprivation/sanctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed term, probationary and demoted/family intervention tenancies • Work-related requirements on tenants
<p>Influence compliance secured without threat of deprivation/sanctions</p> <p>-Persuasion use of speech/other symbols to influence people's beliefs, judgements or behaviour</p> <p>-Nudge framing context of action/choice in manner that alters behaviour in predictable ways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-tenancy programmes • Household Ambition Plans • Support-based interventions • 'Choice architecture'
Bargaining promise of gains or losses to control or influence behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentive/reward schemes • Allocations schemes • Fixed term and probationary tenancies
Tolerance little or no attempt to change behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security of tenure and no behavioural intervention... the traditional offer?

Conditionality and tenure security...

“the whole move away from lifetime tenancies is, to me, one of the most obvious examples of conditionality. I think that takes two forms. One is, there's just a sense of you get this house while you get yourself stable and on your feet [and] once you take away lifetime tenancy there must be an unspoken degree of conditionality that creeps in, that I've only got this for five years and if I don't keep my nose clean it might not be for as long as that.”

(National stakeholder)

Probationary and fixed term tenancies

- Probationary tenancies introduced in Housing Act 1996; Housing Act 2004 enabled extension
 - > 68% of HA and 63% of LA tenancies offered with probationary period in 2015/16
- Localism Act 2011 introduced 'flexibilities' enabling social landlords in England to offer fixed-term (renewable) tenancies (min 5 years, 2 in 'exceptional circs')
- Housing and Planning Act 2016 mandated all new council lettings to be on fixed term basis (usual max 5 years, longer for some groups)
- Fixed term tenancies remain optional for Housing Association, in light of reclassification as 'public bodies'
 - > Estimated 30% housing associations using FTTs, further 20% considering it (HACT, 2014)
 - > 18% new general needs HA tenancies were fixed term in 2015/16, 9% of LA lettings

Social Landlord Perspectives on FTTs

1. The 'Utility Maximisers'

Larger, southern, early adopters of FTTs, initially linked to affordable rent programme; FTTs not primarily (if at all) designed to pursue behavioural objectives; signs of disillusionment setting in

"it's a crazy assumption, isn't it... that we've somehow got to force them [tenants] to work by offering them less of a tenancy?" (Senior housing manager, London)

2. The 'Place Makers'

Smaller, geographically concentrated, lower demand, stock transfer; strong antipathy to FTTs; 'traditional' social landlords who see themselves as 'place makers' not 'people shapers' (aside from managing ASB and arrears)

3. The 'Interventionists'...

The ‘Interventionists’

- Well-publicised examples – Yarlington, Bromford, etc.
- FTTs part of broader attempt to recalibrate relationship between landlord and tenant
- Carving out broader role in pushing/pulling tenants towards healthier, more socially engaged and economically independent lives

“you're probably seeing ourselves and a small number of organisations occupying a ground... beyond the traditional landlord tenant relationship... that have revisited and recognised that, as part of their responsibilities for providing housing and... enabling sustaining of communities, that there are examples of where that hasn't worked by simply providing more housing and better housing” (Senior housing manager, South of England)

Motivated by paternalism?

Or responsabilisation...

"We're not having an adult-to-adult relationship with people; it's more of a parent/child relationship." (Senior housing manager, South of England)

Or contractualism...

"...it's harder nosed than paternalism... [its] about saying, 'We will do some things for you, in return we expect you to do some things for us.'... old fashioned paternalism was... oh these people just don't know any better... so we'll ... help them to do better... That's quite different from a system of behavioural incentives, large or small." (National stakeholder, England)

Or the bottom line...

"you've got the FTTs as an incentive to try and change tenants' behaviour by making them more responsible... [so] they don't have to rely on us to do everything for them. The Universal Credit, obviously not being too far away with all the housing costs lumped in to the rest of their benefits..." (Senior housing manager, South of England)

Tenant Perspectives

1. The unaware

“As far as I know, I'm on a year's probation and then after that I can rent it for as long as I want to stay there.”

2. The unconcerned

“they said they'll come back and view you in another 5 years... or another year... I think they just sort of like keep an eye... like parents” (Young lone parent)

“I've never known anything different... it's the first time I've moved out of home, it doesn't bother me too much... I know I'll be a good tenant... pay my rent on time... things like that” (Young lone parent)

“I didn't really take that much notice... I was so grateful to have a roof over my head... I just accepted... what was on the plate” (Older ex-homeless woman)

“5 years is a long time... my life will change. I won't be on benefit... by the time I start working, I have a choice then” (Lone parent, experience of domestic violence)

3. The anxious

“you're always apprehensive because you don't know what is going to happen... you always feel like you're on borrowed time, so you're always on edge... those who initially had the lifetime, they can relax and see it as their home.”

“not that we actually wanted to move but we felt as though we were slightly pushed...by the bedroom tax yes... for 17 years we were secure tenants.... and suddenly we're [on] a five year contract... I don't think it's fair at all... what will be will be, but my husband is living on his nerves now...? He doesn't need the stress or the pressure.” (Older couple with serious health problems)

“I've taken a big chance giving up my assured tenancy... there was nothing I could do about it, just have to hope after five years they extend it...I didn't feel good about it... I needed to move from where I was, my children needed space, we were... suffocated in there. So I had to take the risk and I just have to hope it pays off because sometimes you have to take risks in life” (Large family)

3. The anxious

“my question was, 'Can a fixed-period tenancy be changed into an open-ended tenancy?' ... So that I'm at a par with the other tenants.... They said ...most probably it would be another 6 years, if there were no problems ...but... I'm already a pensioner; so is my husband... Mum is disabled... you can see at what point we are going to be when this one is coming at an end... it's psychologically, emotionally... I'm looking at it as having a bank balance, and you're not able to credit anything, but you're just minusing and in the end it comes to a zero, when you have nowhere” (Older couple living with elderly mother)

“It always sits in the back of your mind that... if you ruffle their feathers basically they might say you have to go” (Couple with health problems and disabled child)

“I did feel really... patronised or like someone talking to me [about] how to behave towards my neighbours. I thought if you were buying a house someone wouldn't come and say, 'And you must behave properly towards your neighbours'... it does grate.” (Lone parent with one child)

The position in Scotland

- Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced Short Scottish Secure Tenancies in limited circumstances (1-2% of new tenancies)
- Some debate on probationary tenancies, but not introduced in Housing (Scotland) Act 2014
- No appetite for FTTs... *“just not on the agenda”* (National stakeholder, Scotland)

“Because it is a home... it's not a mechanism for a sanction... You're talking about somebody's home and I don't think that that equates for a house being used as a sanction.” (Housing manager, West of Scotland)

Whereas ‘home for life’ increasingly questioned in England...

“I’m not convinced that it makes sense to say to someone, ‘Because you were in pretty acute need when you were 23, you’re entitled to a social-rented home for the rest of your life... private-rented tenants don’t have a home for life” (National stakeholder)

“it does seem odd to me that you might have a challenge at one point in your life that means you need some sort of support with your housing and then 30 years later... you’ve still got that house... our view is we provide housing for people who need it as effectively as possible and... surely a FTT would be consistent with that world view” (Senior housing manager)

“I think if we’d been trying to have this conversation in the 1960s and ‘70s people would have looked at us a bit confused and said, ‘But I thought the purpose of social housing was a long-term investment in the stability of a household that they live in.’ ... Now, typically, there’s much more engagement with a discussion that is about, ‘But is that really what social housing is for, or is it about short-term, time limited targeted intervention of people’s lives, that they’re then floated off the minute that they don’t need it?’ So I think there’s a competing vision out there now” (National stakeholder)

Conclusions

- Shift away from a vision of social housing as providing 'home for life' for lower income households, towards more minimalist 'welfare' model of social housing in England
- The 'behaviour change agenda' is core to that shift for some, though not all, social landlords
- FTTs one of array of 'social control mechanisms' at potential disposal of landlords to shift tenant behaviour
- Practical arguments against FTTs – expressed by some early adopters and 'anxious' tenants – highly germane to this debate
- Rationale and impact of behaviour change interventions needs careful consideration, as does legitimacy of using home as a sanction/site for such interventions
- How do these developments fit with social landlords' 'core values and 'social mission'?