



Headlines from Policy Think Tank *Working Together: A win-win for local authorities and housing associations*

Held at Trafford Hall on 18-19th October 2016

1. Local authorities and housing associations have **shared interests** and depend on each other to a great extent. However, they have **different priorities** as there are many different types of landlords.
2. **National housing associations are very big** and have a foot in up to 100 or more local authorities. It is impossible for them to have close relations with all councils. Large scale can make relationships more difficult as they are more remote.
3. Many **urban local authorities several** or more housing associations operating in their boundaries. Greater Manchester have 15 while Glasgow have just under 60.
4. **Housing associations are often in competition** with each other for land, or to win bids for particular projects. Locally, it can prove difficult for local authorities to liaise with multiple stakeholders. The biggest challenge is for housing associations to work collaboratively despite being in competition with each other.
5. **Coordination at the strategic level**, around the development of local action plans, is crucial to minimise the effect of competition and narrow parochial politics.
6. It is easier for local authorities to work with housing associations **if housing associations cooperate with each other** and agree to work together. G15 in London is a good example of this 'constructive competition' model, whereby housing providers compete on bids but collaborate at the strategic level.
7. There is a **need for a high-level, strategic agreement and a forum** for developing overarching plans with all parties round the table. Glasgow, with just under 60 community-based housing associations, have organised a forum as a conduit for partnership working, likewise Greater Manchester.

8. Collaboration requires **leadership from the local authorities**, a level of **trust** between different parties, and **transparency** over what is happening and what plans are. Solid partnerships are one way to achieve this.
9. **Devolution** from central government to **city regions** presents new opportunities and challenges. Combined authorities, where they are up to 10 local authorities working together, have responsibility for housing, and must work with all local housing associations in all their **combined** areas. In Manchester, Sheffield and Midlands city regions, housing associations are forming co-ordinated groups to work together and liaise jointly with the City Region Combined Authority. This is truly complex.
10. **Local authorities have been much harder hit by cuts** since 2010 than housing associations. Both are badly affected by welfare reform and cuts in support. So both types of social landlords are under significant financial pressure, just to balance their books. Meanwhile, the Housing and Planning Act hits local authorities much harder e.g. forced sales to fund Housing Association Right to Buy. As a result, the **potential for conflict of interest** has grown yet local authorities and housing associations need each other more in order to meet housing need at modest cost for low income households. There is **need for more collaborative working and combining resources**, although making this happen is very difficult and time consuming.