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Project 7: 'Housing through Social Enterprise': A summary of interim findings

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This briefing paper summarises some interim findings from Project 7, 'Housing through Social Enterprise'. The research aims to test out the basic CommonHealth hypothesis that social enterprises may deliver health and wellbeing impacts, with a specific focus on the housing sector. The project is still in the process of collecting data, so these findings are relatively tentative at this stage – a further briefing paper with the final results from the project will be published later in 2018. [A full literature review and detailed background to the project is available on our website.](#)

The project is working with three housing organisations, all of which can be characterised as social enterprises, but which work in quite different ways.



Homes for Good

Glasgow-based social enterprise set up in 2013 as a not-for-profit letting agency, with the aim of supporting vulnerable households to access quality rented accommodation and sustain their tenancies. The organisation also has an investment arm, which is using social investment finance to buy and renovate properties, which it then rents out to people on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness and/or have a variety of other social needs.



NG Homes

One of the largest community-based housing associations in Scotland, providing social housing for a substantial part of North Glasgow. As well as housing, NG Homes provides a range of regeneration and support services in partnership with other voluntary organisations, from money advice to community development. It also operates NG2, a subsidiary which provides training and employment for local people.



Y People

Charity operating two Rent Deposit Schemes in Glasgow and South Lanarkshire, enabling people who are at risk of homelessness to access housing in the private rented sector without the need for a deposit. The schemes provide support to tenants during the first year of their tenancy, helping them to maintain their tenancy and build up savings for the deposit.

Outline of the study

The Housing through Social Enterprise project aims to examine the varied roles of social enterprises in different parts of the housing sector and to address some of the evidence gaps by specifically exploring the different ways in which housing may act as a social determinant of health.

The research follows a cohort of new tenants from each organisation over the first year of their tenancy, interviewing them on three separate occasions – at the start of the tenancy (wave 1), after 2-4 months (wave 2) and finally after 9-12 months (wave 3). At each stage, tenants are asked a range of questions relating to:

- Health and wellbeing – including measures of wellbeing and perceived impacts on wellbeing/quality of life from the property and their housing service
- Housing – including satisfaction with property, maintenance, overall service, and additional support
- Community and social supports – including perceptions of the neighbourhood and a number of indicators of social support
- Finances – including basic data on tenants' financial situation (rent, income, etc.) and how they are coping financially
- Demographics – including age, gender, disability, and employment status

These interviews will not be complete until summer 2018, but it is possible to provide some tentative findings from an initial analysis of the data from Waves 1 and 2.

Impacts on health and wellbeing

Two main measures of health and wellbeing are used in every interview. The World Health Organisation 5-point mental wellbeing scale (WHO-5) is used as a direct measure of wellbeing, whilst tenants are also asked for their subjective assessment of whether their health and wellbeing has changed since moving in to their new property.

Health and wellbeing questions

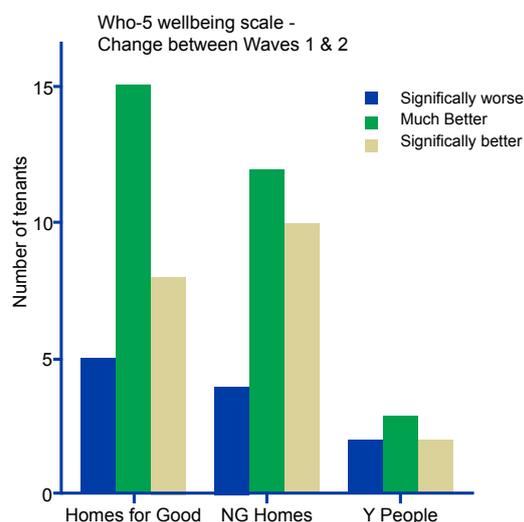
The WHO-5 mental wellbeing scale

- How much of the time have the following statements been true for you over the last two weeks?
 - I have felt cheerful and in good spirits
 - I have felt calm and relaxed
 - I have felt active and vigorous
 - I woke up feeling fresh and rested
 - My daily life has been filled with things that interest me

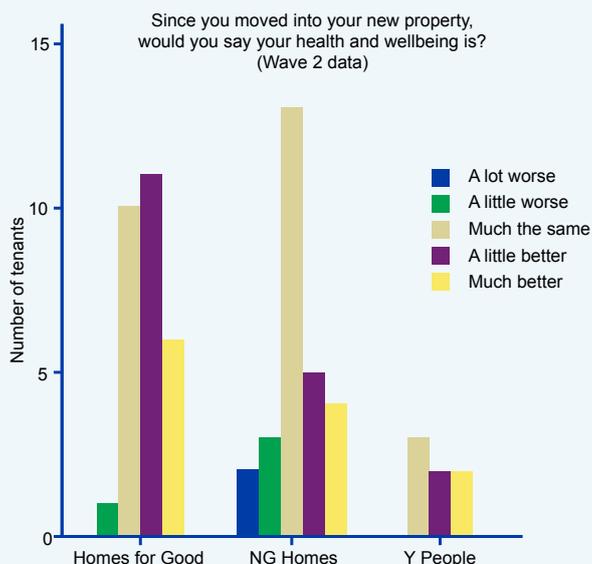
Subjective assessment of health change

- Since you moved into your new property, would you say your health and wellbeing is much better, a little better, the same, a little worse, or a lot worse?

Across waves 1 and 2 these measures clearly show that there is an improvement in tenants' health and wellbeing in the first few months of their tenancy. Although a substantial proportion of tenants show no change in terms of the WHO-5 measure, this is to be expected as there are a wide range of factors beyond housing which affect health and wellbeing, so it would be very surprising if the majority of tenants were either feeling much better or much worse. However, there are notably more tenants feeling significantly better (an increase of at least 10 percentage points) than report feeling significantly worse.



Much the same pattern is evident in tenants' subjective assessment of changes in their health and wellbeing, although the numbers of tenants suggesting that things have got worse for them are much smaller by this measure.



Unpicking the possible causes

This initial analysis suggests that something is improving for a majority of tenants of the three participating organisations. However, such correlations do not imply causation – further evidence and analysis is necessary to identify the factors that may be generating these changes in health and wellbeing:

- Are they caused by the change in housing situation, rather than other factors in tenants' lives?
- If so, which particular aspects of the ways in which each organisation provides housing and works with tenants are most important?

Whilst we have lots more data to attempt to answer these questions, we are only in the early stages of analysing the interviews. At this stage we are looking at four tentative hypotheses about the different factors that may be important.



Tenancy support and sustainment

Each of the organisations provides services which aim to support tenants to maintain their tenancy. Whilst there are differences in how these supports are delivered, there seems to be a common feeling from a range of tenants that a degree of support to stay in their tenancy makes a significant difference to their sense of security and their confidence:

“It’s just as if someone’s looking, kind of, out for you ... so it makes you feel confident that if you had an issue, if you had a problem, that you could phone them ...they are really supportive when you phone them.”

Quality housing

Previous research evidence highlights the direct ways in which poor quality housing can impact on tenants' health, but provides little indication of the ways which tenants may be affected by the appearance of their property or the standards of maintenance. For some tenants in our study the starting point appears to be important, inasmuch as they begin a tenancy with a good feeling about the property:

“Aye, top notch standard...basically everything in here apart from this and that was all here – couch, table, chair, fridge, everything you see was all here, very, very nicely furnished when I moved in so I didn’t have to do anything to it, just move my stuff in and find a space for it, that’s it.”

But for others, the experience of maintenance problems and how they are addressed by the landlord can be more problematic:

“And I ended up having to deal with it when I was in my work, and I was crying down the phone. I was like, I’m so stressed out at repeating myself; and different people telling you different stories all the time.”

Affordability

The connection between housing affordability and wellbeing is clear, since unaffordable housing can exacerbate the effects of poverty, or lead to homelessness. Beyond this, however, the initial analysis of Wave 2 interviews suggests that there is a particular impact of financial stress, which can in some circumstances be mitigated by housing services:

“I’ve just had a big problem with benefits and they’ve actually stepped in, cause I actually thought I was going to lose my flat cause my housing benefit stops, so I had to tell them could they ask the landlord and they came back with fantastic news that the landlord said it’s fine, he’ll wait for me to get my claim all up and running again and it’s not a problem.”

Community and social supports

Whilst the participating organisations approach the issue of community support differently, there is a strong recognition from all three organisations that a supportive neighbourhood can make a substantial difference to tenants’ wellbeing and their commitment to the tenancy. For some of the tenants in the research, the experience of their new tenancy and new neighbourhood can feel like a massive relief after previous experiences:

“Yeah, 100% happier. I’m basically not depressed anymore, as soon as I moved out of that flat in [previous area] and moved here it was such a huge change, it was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I don’t need to deal with all the idiots and the polis at the weekends chapping your door ‘did you see anything?’ ‘no I didn’t see anything, I was too busy playing my Xbox and trying to ignore the noise outside’, here is just a far cry from how I felt before, I mean, I can actually go outside, I want to go outside and meet people and stuff like that, whereas back there it was ‘I don’t want to go out, I just want to curl up in a ball, I’m dying for this to all go away’. So now it’s just like aye, bring on life!”

Relevance to the CommonHealth programme

At this stage of the research, it is not possible to provide concrete conclusions – watch this space for a further briefing later in 2018. However, these tentative findings do suggest that tenants’ health and wellbeing are being significantly affected by their experiences in the first months of their new tenancy and that these impacts are largely positive. Further examination of the data about tenancy support and sustainment, housing quality, affordability, and community and social supports will hopefully provide a clearer picture about the factors that are helping to improve tenants’ health and wellbeing and, in particular, what it is about social enterprises that enables them to deliver such benefits for tenants.



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