



The responsible tenant: housing governance and the politics of behaviour

John Flint

To cite this article: John Flint (2004) The responsible tenant: housing governance and the politics of behaviour, *Housing Studies*, 19:6, 893-909, DOI: [10.1080/0267303042000293991](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267303042000293991)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267303042000293991>



Published online: 22 Jan 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2028



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 13 View citing articles [↗](#)

The Responsible Tenant: Housing Governance and the Politics of Behaviour

JOHN FLINT

Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, UK

[Paper first received 29 October 2003; in final form 8 March 2004]

ABSTRACT Writers influenced by Foucault's work on governmentality have characterised emerging forms of governance in advanced liberal democracies as being based upon 'technologies of the self' in which power works through the self-regulation of subjects within constructed norms of responsible and ethical conduct. This 'politics of behaviour' has been particularly prominent in UK housing policy debates in relation to anti-social behaviour, benefit reform and tenant participation. This paper argues that recent reforms are premised upon the identification of the responsible (and responsive) tenant as a central organising mechanism in new processes of housing governance. Although tenant responsibility is not a new concept, the paper argues that the nature and scope of this responsibility is currently being broadened and deepened, and discusses how this reconfiguration of responsibility reflects a wider realignment of governing identities within housing policy and practice.

KEY WORDS: responsibility, governance, behaviour

Introduction

Increasingly the new politics is about moderating behaviour and re-establishing the social virtues of self-discipline coupled with an awareness of the needs of others ... the new politics centre on reinforcing what is good and acceptable behaviour. (Frank Field, 2003, p. 1)

Many commentators have, like Field, identified the recent emergence of a new politics of conduct whereby governance increasingly utilises 'technologies of the self' to ensure governmental aims are achieved through promoting the self-discipline of subjects (Foucault, 1991; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999; Smart, 1999). Such self-regulation is framed within what Rose terms 'grammars of living' in which a dominant discourse is constructed about what constitutes desirable and sanctioned behaviour (Rose, 2001). Central to current UK governance rationales is the conceptualisation of agency, autonomy and self-responsibility as inherent requirements of 'good' citizenship. This ethical conceptualisation of desirable conduct comprises a continuing focus on subjects as reflexive, rational consumers; in tandem with an increasing moral emphasis on subjects as duty-owing members of communities, as 'community' increasingly becomes the location and

mechanism of social housing governance (Rose, 2001; Flint, 2003; governmentality and responsibility are usefully discussed in King, 2003a).

This paper argues that the emergence of this new politics of behaviour has been particularly prominent in social housing governance in the UK, based upon the conceptualisation of the 'responsible' tenant. This promotion and facilitation of tenant responsibility is a central rationale in recent UK government housing and anti-social behaviour policy documents (DETR, 2000; Home Office, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003).

The significance of these rhetorical exhortations for tenants' self-responsibility within these documents may be disputed, and of course tenant responsibility is not a new concept. However, it is apparent that a growing number of social landlords in the UK are introducing a range of mechanisms that reshape the responsibilities of their tenants, including choice-based allocation initiatives, tenant reward schemes, good neighbour agreements and tenant inspection teams. The continuing focus on tenants' conduct in housing governance rationales is further symbolised in debates about housing benefit sanctions and greater regulation of tenants in the private rented sector.

This paper draws on policy documents, interviews with housing practitioners and case studies of housing management initiatives to explore how 'good and acceptable' behaviour is constructed within social housing governance rationales, and how attempts are made to reinforce this desired conduct, based upon a concept of the responsible tenant. It continues by discussing how various elements of tenant responsibility are conceptualised and explores how specific techniques of housing management are utilised to reconfigure this responsibility through reshaping the roles and relationships of tenants and housing practitioners. Finally, the paper concludes by discussing the implications of this realignment of governance for wider housing policy and studies.

Housing and the Politics of Behaviour

Social housing may be regarded as a vital site for the study of an emerging politics of behaviour, not least because it already offers a model, through the enshrining of rights and responsibilities within tenancy agreements, of the contractual society advocated by writers such as Field (2003). The focus upon the moral and ethical conduct of individuals which, according to Foucault (1991) and others, characterises how power is manifested through governance strategies in advanced liberal democracies has also been a prominent feature of UK housing discourse. Within this discourse, the defining of responsibility has become a fulcrum for a politics of housing based upon conflicting concepts of empowerment and the disputed causality of continuing problems in housing provision.

The social control function of social housing management, dating from Octavia Hill's early housing governance measures in the late 19th century, has been extensively explored (Clapham, 1997; Damer, 2000; Cowan *et al.*, 2001; Gurney, 1999). This social control, based upon the classification of tenants by housing practitioners, has sought to secure the conformity of individuals' behaviour to constructed social norms, principally through the mechanisms of tenancy agreements and allocation procedures (Cowan *et al.*, 2001; Cowan, 1999; Haworth & Manzi, 1999).

Recently there has been a particular emphasis on the social control function of social landlords in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour (Cowan *et al.*, 2001; Brown, 1999; Papps, 1998; Card, 2001; Hunter, 2003). Much of the discussion around tenant responsibility in this regard has centred on the increasing range of reactive, punitive sanctions deployed by social landlords. Such interventions reveal a more intensive disciplinary management of tenants' behaviour, framed within policy rationales of dependency and moral deficiency and negatively based on interventions to prevent or punish unacceptable conduct.

This paper attempts to discuss another dimension of the new politics of behaviour, involving an understanding of responsibility being framed as a proactive and empowering mechanism within housing governance. This broadens the scope of social housing governance as attempts are made to encourage and facilitate tenants to positively engage in certain behaviours, rather than to merely desist from prohibited conduct. This involves the deepening and widening of tenant responsibility, in which the range of interventions aimed at reshaping tenants' conduct is expanded, both in terms of the aspects of individual behaviour governance seeks to influence, and in the number of techniques deployed to achieve this.

Since at least the 1980 Housing Act (and Tenants Right Act 1980 in Scotland), we have witnessed a reconfiguration of the identities of social housing tenants from passive welfare recipients to autonomous, empowered and responsible individuals (Le Grand, 1997; Carr *et al.*, 2001). The rationales underpinning this transformation of housing governance are based around the problematisation of social housing provision creating a dependency culture among tenants, characterised by a lack of agency and responsibility engendered by an over (and unconditional) reliance on archaic and outmoded bureaucratic welfarist forms of housing management. This is linked to an emerging managerialism in social housing governance, based upon the efficacy of market processes and the introduction of audit, accountability and performance measurement. The Best Value regime provides a consumerist framework for the regulation of housing management, based on promoting the efficacy and reflexivity of housing services through increasing the transparency and accountability of housing providers to central government, tenants and private financiers.

The government's advocacy of both stock transfer and increasing tenant participation reflects this consumerist approach in tandem with a communitarian emphasis on duty, responsibility and the importance of strengthened local communities to policy outcomes. It is important to note that these managerial and consumerist pressures are as influential on housing policy developments as the more morally defined focus on responsible conduct which this paper addresses.

These rationales and the policy responses arising from them construct desirable identities for tenants based around the dual functions of self-agency and self-responsibility. Self-agency is promoted through the identity of the tenant as a consumer, based around choice and active decision-making (DoE, 1995; Cairncross *et al.*, 1997; Housing Corporation, 1998). As consumption, including the consumption of housing, involves a proactive act of agency (Baudrillard, 1998) policy interventions have focused upon building the personal capacity of tenants to make rational proactive choices in order to reduce their dependency on state provision. As this dependency has become conceived as arising from the moral and psychological condition of individuals (Fraser & Gordon, 1994) an increasing policy focus has emphasised the ethical responsibility upon tenants to

behave in accordance with community and housing management values (Cowan, 1999; Haworth & Manzi, 1999; Flint, 2003). The capacity and opportunity for self-government become aligned with a new responsibility to actually undertake self-government. The term responsibility has been liberally used in housing policy document titles in recent years: *Our Future Homes: Opportunity, Choice and Responsibility*; *Building Choice and Responsibility, Respect and Responsibility, Stewardship and Responsibility* (DoE, 1995; DWP, 2002; Home Office, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003).

The UK Government's Housing Green Paper (2000), framed its aims as including:

Giving responsibility to individuals to provide for their own homes where they can. (p. 16)

The greater empowerment of tenants to enable them to exercise choice and take more responsibility for their housing where they wish to do so. (p. 17)

Extending tenants' personal responsibility for paying their rent ... [at present] there is little opportunity to exercise choice or personal responsibility. (p. 23)

As King (2003b) rightly points out, while responsibility has become central to housing and wider welfare policy, responsibility itself remains very poorly defined in policy documents in relation to what constitutes such responsibility and what processes and outcomes arise from this. 'Social responsibility' encompasses the actions of tenants, the wider citizenship and government. 'Community' responsibility may also refer to both individualised personal and communally collective notions of responsibility. This paper focuses primarily on the former. Any debate about responsibility also requires a distinction to be drawn between attributing causal responsibility for problems and designating responsibility for the resolution of these problems, which need not reside in the same parties. King (2003a) debates all of these issues in depth, and highlights that much of the policy discourse of responsibility in social housing centres on the notion of blame, rather than identifying appropriate actors to address complex problems.

It is further important to recognise that increasing the responsibility of tenants can be both empowering and disciplinary in its effects, potentially providing opportunities for the self-emancipation, as well as the greater circumscribing of individual conduct, and as such these two outcomes create tensions and ambiguities within tenant participation strategies.

Finally, it is essential to distinguish between desirability and obligation in the governance of behaviour. Legally enforceable contractual duties upon tenants have always existed, primarily through the provisions of tenancy agreements. These duties should be differentiated from a moral exhortation of tenants enacted through policy discourse or housing management techniques. The new politics of behaviour in housing is characterised by a reshaping or moral reinterpretation of existing contractual agreements as much as by new legal obligations.

The paper now turns to exploring various conceptualisations of aspects of responsibility that are utilised by housing policy-makers, and identifying emerging housing governance techniques that serve as mechanisms for facilitating

these various elements of responsibility. These aspects of responsibility and techniques arising from them give differing emphasis to the elements of consumerist, managerialist and communitarianism rationales, at times being complementary, but at others creating tensions and ambiguities.

The following sections are based upon UK national and local housing policy documents, a series of 15 semi-structured interviews with housing policy-makers and practitioners in Scotland (including the Scottish Executive, Communities Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing and local authority, housing association and tenant representative organisations). The paper also utilises data gathered through a series of case studies selected to highlight particular local housing initiatives. These studies focused on the views of practitioners rather than tenants.

Responsibility as Agency

One conceptualisation of responsibility in housing governance links it to the ability of tenants to both undertake rational and proactive decisions in their housing choices and the requirement for tenants to work on their own capacities for taking such decisions.

We wish to establish a sector ... where tenants are empowered in the decision-making processes that affect their homes. (DETR, 2000, p. 56)

This empowerment of tenants in decision-making processes is linked, within policy discourse, to the advocacy of self-agency as a means of promoting 'well being and self-dependence' (DETR, 2000, p. 7).

The promotion of self-agency in such an approach is based upon a rejection of tenants as passive recipients of bureaucratic structures, challenging both the primary decision-making role of housing officers and the culture of dependency among tenants arising from this. The identification of the desirability of tenants as active agents in housing consumption and management necessitates a continual working on the capacity of tenants to regulate themselves. A tenancy becomes defined as a continuous and dynamic project, requiring acquired skills and reflexive decision-making to sustain it successfully. As one policy officer for the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations put it in an interview: 'There is a change [in housing management] from policing people to managing a premises.'

Such a change in housing management highlights two key elements of the politics of behaviour in housing governance.

First, the recognition that successful housing management requires housing agencies to govern *through* the conduct of their tenants. Although this has always been a feature of housing management, tenants are increasingly identified as *active* agents whose *individual capacities* should be developed, harnessed and utilised to collectively further the aims of the housing organisation. Thus, the empowerment and increased autonomy of individual tenants is a method for further empowering the ability of housing agencies to govern successfully. This dualism represents an important shift from previous understandings of an either/or bilateral struggle for power between tenants and housing managers.

The second element is that of the need for a continuing, but realigned, management identified in the above quote. While increased agency and auton-

omy may increase the responsibilities of tenants, they do not simplistically equate to a reduction in social landlord interventions. The processes and outcomes of greater tenant agency actually create new and intensive regulatory roles for housing managers, an issue returned to later.

Recent research has demonstrated that both national housing policy-makers and individual landlords have identified the need to encourage the agency and self-regulation of their tenants (Flint, 2004). The extent to which new approaches to housing governance have arisen in response to an explicit focus on tenants' responsibility should not be overstated. Although communitarian and moral responsibility are key elements of current UK housing (and wider social) policy, managerialist rationales are also central and influence the emphasis upon tenant agency as much as a focus on eroding a dependency culture. In the words of one senior policy officer in Communities Scotland (the Scottish Executive's housing agency): 'There is no market mechanism, so we are trying to find a way to get round this, to help make landlords more responsive in the absence of this mechanism.' Therefore promoting tenant agency is as much about central government restating the responsibilities and regulation of landlords as it is about controlling tenants.

The focus upon increasing tenants' agency was evident in case studies of recent initiatives including a choice-based letting scheme recently established by a housing association in the Scottish Borders. It is clear that the successful operation of the scheme requires a degree of proactive agency on the part of its users. Applicants are required to complete registration forms and to make individual judgements about the likely success of particular applications. The scheme's guidebook notes that it is partly up to the applicant to decide what is important in this process. To successfully acquire a house through this scheme requires a degree of acquired knowledge about the workings of the system. This knowledge is to be generated through the provision of information to potential users about previously allocated properties in order to build the self-capacity of users to pursue their interests effectively within the allocation process through learning from previous decisions, as the scheme handbook suggests:

Information gives everyone some idea for the demand for different properties and can help you make reasonable decisions about where you want to live.

Thus the scheme depends upon the proactive agency of users, making 'reasonable' decisions based upon the transparency of the system and the provision of adequate information to applicants.

The housing manager with responsibility for the scheme believed that the proactive agency the system required was both beneficial to individual tenants and provided an important mechanism for determining the likely sustainability of long-term and dynamic tenancies:

You are asking people to support a tenancy, there is a lot of responsibility in this. If they can't cope with basic decisions at the beginning, how can they cope with all the other decisions they will face? ... If you actually do something about getting your house you will benefit from it.

The promotion of proactive agency was also a central rationale in a Glasgow housing association's decision to introduce a Gold Service scheme. The associ-

ation, in the words of its Director, 'wanted to encourage activity in citizenship.' The scheme provides financial and other rewards to tenants who meet the membership criteria (requiring them to pay rent on time and not to engage in anti-social behaviour). The scheme is framed as promoting a change of 'culture' or 'behaviour' among particular tenants. Tenants are required to instigate their own application for membership of the scheme, and this promotion of agency was a deliberate attempt to promote self-responsibility, as the Director describes:

People have been saying why do they have to fill a form in? But you've got to start at the beginning, they've got to make the effort, they've got to opt in, or it's just dependency, it just happens, it's 'I've got fifty pounds and I don't know why.'

This need for self-agency is extended to housing benefit claimants, who are eligible for membership of the scheme but must assume responsibility for the maintenance of their own benefit forms.

A final element of the scheme provides an illustration of how certain housing management techniques may be closely related to the wider policy promotion of active citizens, involving individuals improving their own employability and skills as employment becomes increasingly equated with the achievement of full citizenship (Walters, 1997; Levitas, 1998). The Gold Service scheme encourages tenants to 'work upon themselves' through providing education and training grants for themselves and their children to build their capacities in the labour and education markets.

Responsibility to Community

The new politics of behaviour in housing is based upon a realignment of the identities of tenants from the focus upon their rights as consumers in the 1980s and early 1990s to a re-emergence of their duties as citizens. This new identity retains a substantial element of desirable conduct defined through consumer characteristics of proactive agency and rational choice, but incorporates an additional element of responsibility and moral obligation. However, this additional aspect of 'correct' behaviour does not mark a return to a welfarist citizen/state relationship. Rather, it conceives subjects, including tenants, as members of communities: both requiring to regulate their own behaviour in accordance with the 'norms' and values of these communities and owing duties to promote the wider well-being of these communities (Rose, 2001; Flint, 2003).

The growth of community as the context for managing tenants' conduct represents a very important widening of tenants' responsibilities beyond their own self-regulation and the sustaining of their individual tenancies, to the promotion of communitarian endeavour on behalf of local communities. This new identity for tenants is evident in housing management discourse:

The move towards community is evident in tenant handbooks, examples and the tone reflect a cultural change, a change in the way people are referred to ... more a community in the sense of 'do your bit'.
(Policy Officer: Scottish Federation of Housing Associations)

This new identity is tied to a wider reconstruction of communities as both the territories and processes through which policy will be delivered:

Many projects and initiatives have enabled communities to change themselves, there is an understanding now that it's not just your house, you live in a community. (Director: Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland)

This can be seen as a dual process, in which the roles of both social housing agencies and individual tenants are reframed in a wider community context. For social landlords, policy has promoted their expanded wider role in community development strategies, through initiatives such as Housing Plus in England (and Wider Action in Scotland) in which landlords are encouraged to move beyond core housing management to contribute to other aspects of community well-being such as health, employment and community safety.

For tenants, two aspects of this politics of behaviour emerge. First, at a basic level, they should not behave in ways detrimental to community. Second, however, they are increasingly encouraged to actively participate in wider community activities. Gold Service schemes represent a technology for promoting both these aspects. The rewards offered by these schemes represent a public recognition of meeting accepted standards of behaviour (these are often defined as the expectations of the community, rather than the landlords themselves).

The Gold Service scheme in Glasgow discussed earlier seeks to further promote positive communitarian behaviour.

First, tenants have the option of contributing their individual bonus bonds to a tenants' association or community group. In this instance, the housing association doubles the financial entitlement, and, according to the scheme guidelines 'the money will be used for the benefit of the community'.

Second, the scheme promotes active duty to community through the public rewarding of tenants (both adults and children) with Golden Neighbour Awards 'where they can demonstrate they have helped their local community and/or residents'. Third, the housing association contributes to wider community development through, for example, providing education grants to local primary schools.

This official sanctioning of active citizenship is also reflected in the use of Good Neighbour Agreements by North Lanarkshire Council. Such agreements are an example of a new moral exhortation using a reinterpretation of existing contractual duties, rather than the creation of additional and enforceable legal obligations upon tenants. The agreement, which all Council tenants are asked, but not required, to sign, is an explicit reiteration of existing tenancy agreements, contained in a two page document setting out a list of 14 itemised expectations on residents, with a corresponding list of Council responsibilities. These expectations include showing consideration for neighbours and taking turns to clean common stairs and landings. Tenants sign a declaration to abide by the terms of the agreement and to 'be a good tenant/resident of North Lanarkshire'. The Council officer leading this initiative regarded duty to community as a central concept within the initiative:

Responsibility to community is very important. It's our whole philosophy in dealing with these incidents, the wider culture of anti-social behaviour ... to fill community gaps.

Tackling anti-social behaviour is the most explicit example of attempts to widen tenant responsibilities beyond self-regulation to their involvement in ensuring the desirable conduct of others. As the Council officer says in relation to low level anti-social behaviour:

We are saying 'you are the tenant, you can sort it out', in some ways we are pushing it back on to them to resolve ... we don't want to be seen to do everything for them.

This rationalisation of the need to widen community as well as individual responsibilities is evident in the UK government's recent policy document *Respect and Responsibility: Taking a Stand Against Anti-social Behaviour* (Home Office, 2003). In it the problem of anti-social behaviour is framed around the deficiency of social processes in deprived areas (usually of social housing). The importance of the community in mediating conduct is apparent throughout the document: 'The community sets clear standards of behaviour' (p. 7), alongside the understanding that there needs to be 'a cultural shift' (p. 6), in which 'it is time for the community to take a stand' (p. 13). The clear inference here is that this moral engagement in regulating the conduct of others is not occurring in such communities.

Again, an implicit distinction is constructed between the behaviour of social tenants and the owner-occupied sector in which active citizenship is represented as normalised conduct. As with Gold Service schemes, the government has launched 'Taking A Stand' rewards to symbolically endorse acts of desirable conduct, in this case the intervention of individuals against anti-social behaviour in their local communities. Again, the provision of opportunities for individuals to engage in local policy-making structures relating to anti-social behaviour becomes blurred with the ethically sanctioned desirability of actually doing so.

Responsibility beyond Tenure?

Commentators like Field (2003) overstate the extent to which the new politics of behaviour sweep away an 'old' Left/Right politics of production and ownership. They do this in part because they miss a crucial link between the consumption and ownership of particular goods and the aesthetic and moral norms and judgements ascribed to ownership of these goods (Rose, 2001). Housing is one of the most explicit examples of this branding (Klein, 2000) of goods, in which distinctions are drawn between 'normalised' consumption choices (in this case owner-occupation) and the reliance of marginalised 'flawed consumers' (Bauman, 1998) upon collective, state-allocated provision. In housing, tenure marks the fault line of this differentiation. UK housing policy is characterised by a strong promotion of owner-occupation as the natural and desirable form of housing consumption (Saunders, 1990; Gurney, 1999; Flint and Rowlands, 2003). Through this process, social housing is rationalised and portrayed as an inherently flawed and problematic housing product, framed within a language of dependency and residualisation (Card, 2001). The dominant housing discourse inherently links owner-occupation with desirable self-conduct:

We want to establish a [social rented] sector in which tenants have a real choice over their housing, where they can take responsibility for

their homes in the same way that owner-occupiers can. (DETR, 2000, p. 56)

This statement contains an underlying distinction between the conduct and attitudes of owner-occupiers and tenants about the degree to which they are disposed to exercising self-responsibility. An obvious example of this constructed distinction is the extent to which policy rhetoric and interventions relating to anti-social behaviour have focused upon the social housing tenure (Brown, 1999; Burney, 1999; Home Office, 2000; Flint & Rowlands, 2003). The politics of anti-social behaviour is characterised by the problematisation of social housing, fuelled by portrayals of 'neighbours from hell' (Field, 2003), involving the identification of deficiencies in the behaviour of both individuals and communities, contrasted with the conduct and imagery of other tenures. Thus policy envisages 'successful' social housing as:

Social housing that looks much like private housing and blends into the area, with a good reputation. (DETR, 1999a, p. 23)

There is no doubt that the stigmatisation of social housing is increasingly recognised by social landlords (Dean and Hastings, 2000), resulting in attempts to blur the lines of distinction between tenures by realigning the reputation of social housing. The increasing use of choice-based letting schemes is a clear example of such measures. These involve changing the imagery and processes of allocations, through replicating private-sector features such as the advertising of properties, the provision of details about the properties, the establishment of pseudo-estate agent premises and instigating individualised application procedures similar to the private sector.

These measures are utilised to reduce the stigma attached to the bureaucratic dependency identity of social housing provision. As the manager of one Housing Association scheme put it 'We should treat people as if they are normal. Everyone is being treated as normal people, like you and I.' Here private sector mechanisms are identified as the means to promote normal and desirable behaviour in the consumption of housing.

A further example of this may be found in elements of many Gold Service initiatives, which imitate the 'loyalty card' schemes used by large private retailers, including the provision of a membership card, magazine, competitions and various financial offers and discounts in order, in the words of one Scottish Housing Association's scheme 'to thank and reward our many responsible tenants'. The Director of this Housing Association explicitly linked these elements of the scheme to the wider marketing of social housing in competition with other tenures: 'It's about restoring pride in renting your home. ... Our tenants are bombarded by private developers and builders ... stressing the positives of owner-occupation.' Similarly the manager of a decorating voucher scheme for tenants in one Scottish local authority reported that such vouchers included: '... an element of selling properties, those that are difficult to let, there's a bit of estate agency going on'.

It is apparent here that the politics of behaviour in housing work is to ascribe differential levels of self-conduct and responsibility to different housing tenures. This results in attempts to realign the conduct of tenants with the conceptualised 'normal' behaviour of owner-occupiers. The outcomes of such processes not only intensify the focus on increasing the responsibility of tenants, but also create

imperatives for social landlords to counter the wider stigmatisation of social housing itself through blurring distinctions between tenures by replicating market processes.

However, a further element of the politics of housing behaviour suggests that the realignment of tenure distinctions is also operating from the opposite direction. For example, there is growing evidence that attempts are being made to widen responsibility strategies to other tenures. Presently, this is primarily limited to the private rented sector. These rationales are explicit in the title of a recent Scottish Executive policy document, *Stewardship and Responsibility: A Policy Framework for Private Housing in Scotland*. This new framework, based on an increasing focus on the required conduct and self-regulation of private landlords and tenants, is most explicit in relation to anti-social behaviour, where new legislation in England and Scotland increases the responsibilities of private landlords to address the behaviour of anti-social tenants in their premises. This legislation is still notable for the absence of rhetoric and measures requiring greater responsibility and self-regulation in the owner-occupied sector.

However, individual local initiatives may begin to push the governance of conduct further into this tenure. When North Lanarkshire Council introduced its good neighbour agreements it made an explicit and concerted attempt to secure owner-occupiers as signatories to these agreements as well as its own tenants. This both reflects the understanding of anti-social behaviour as a cross-tenure issue, but also represents an effort to apply methods for shaping self-conduct to all local citizens.

Responsibility as Self-regulation?

Though responsibility is often framed within a definition of desirable conduct as behaviour through which the self-regulation of subjects aligns itself with government aims, two elements of self-regulation within housing governance require further examination. The first of these is the extent to which strategies of self-governance actually equate to less intensive and interventionist forms of governance. The second element is the blurring of the self-regulation of tenants with a wider realignment of the roles of tenants and housing officers as the governed or the governing.

The case studies suggest that new rationales of responsibility and new management mechanisms are bringing about some change in the conduct of individual tenants. A Director of a housing association described this process in relation to a recently introduced Gold Service scheme:

We've had people informing us they are going to miss a rent payment, telling us the reasons and saying they don't want to get taken off the scheme.

This example illustrates how these new initiatives, while seeking to promote the self-regulation of tenants, also reshape the conduct of housing practitioners. This process may not diminish the governance of tenants, but rather, recasts and in some cases actually extends the nature of that governance, as self-regulation creates new governance imperatives (in the case of the example above, responding to changing tenant behaviour through working more intensively with individuals to manage their rent payments).

Similarly, the case study of a local authority's good neighbour agreement initiative showed that although these agreements are framed within rationales aimed at strengthening tenants' self-regulation, they do not coincide with a reduction in the acts of governance, as a local authority officer explained:

We know we are creating a bigger job for ourselves. We are finding more of a problem ... we hear about more incidents, we gather more evidence, we control people more often.

Likewise, the same officer commented on how facilitating tenants' self-regulation required more housing staff involvement at the outset of a tenancy:

Staff spend a lot more time at the signings [of tenancy agreements] now ... some people do not know what responsibility means.

It is apparent that creating arenas in which tenants may exercise greater agency, choice and responsibility requires a greater investment in constructing the framework and boundaries within which this self-regulation is to be exercised, alongside developing structures that support the capacities of tenants to fulfil these behavioural obligations. Thus these new technologies of governance generate a series of new mechanisms and responsibilities for housing officers in defining and managing the self-regulation of tenants.

The outcomes of self-regulation rationales are not confined to mediating relationships between housing officers and tenants, but are equally applicable to the framework that central government utilises to govern the behaviour of social landlords themselves, as the Head of Regulation and Inspection for Communities Scotland describes:

It's about self-regulation and responsibility for organisations, such as self-assessment and regulation [of landlords] and not just for tenants.

Several directors of housing associations pointed out that the self-regulation of housing organisations did not mean less regulation, given the constraints imposed on the agency of these organisations by central government requirements. A similar argument could be made for the same process occurring in the self-regulation of tenants.

A second element of regulation involves a realignment of governing identities in housing governance, in which the examination and assessment of tenants' conduct is reshaped through strengthening the parallel (and long-standing) role for tenants in auditing and mediating the conduct of housing officers.

The long-standing promotion of tenant participation is the most obvious example of how the self-regulation of tenants is expanded beyond their own self-conduct, into a role for tenants in the wider processes of housing management. This development is based upon the desirability, rather than obligatory requirement, of tenants participating but such a development is not divorced from ethical assessments of individual behaviour. Opportunity for engagement may shift incrementally into moral (if not legal) obligations to undertake such engagement, which becomes identified as a desired norm of behaviour.

Social housing landlords are required to implement and adequately resource tenant participation strategies that facilitate tenant involvement in the strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of almost all aspects of housing management, including undertaking regular tenant satisfaction surveys. In England and Wales, tenant compacts have been introduced between social landlords and tenants in order to 'enable tenants to make an informed view of their housing

services' (DETR, 1999b, p. 2). The rationales and mechanisms of tenant participation reflect many of the processes discussed in this paper.

First, the use of compacts, like tenancy agreements, enshrines the contractual rights and responsibilities' conceptualisation of conduct that forms the basis of current policy understandings about the relationship between subjects and government.

Second, although many of the mechanisms of tenant participation have arisen from consumerist and managerial rationales relating to market processes, audits, responsiveness and performance indicators, tenant participation is also envisaged as shaping the conduct of tenants within moral rationales of desirable behaviour based upon civic engagement and communitarian endeavour:

Tenant participation may help to revitalise the wider community, lead to a reduction in anti-social behaviour and encourage wider involvement in voluntary activities. (DETR, 1999b, p. 50)

Here again we see the shift from the acceptability of merely creating opportunities for participation towards the desirability and responsibility of tenants participating in wider governance structures. These processes have fundamental consequences for the relationships between tenants and housing officers. Much of the politics of behaviour within housing arises from competing concepts about how responsibilities should be demarcated between these groups. Policy has focused on changing the roles of tenants, without exploring the necessary corollary of what these changes actually mean for the roles of housing officers. Although evidence about the extent to which housing officers are supportive of measures that increase tenants' agency and responsibility is ambiguous (Flint, 2004), it is clear that tenant participation may result in power shifting from housing officers to tenants to some extent, although this should not be regarded as a zero sum game, as both officers and tenants may potentially be further emancipated by such a process.

A radical example of such processes is the all-tenant inspection schemes established by West Lothian Council, in which tenants carry out an evaluation of officer practice, including interviews and site visits and make recommendations to the local authority based on their findings. A further example may be found in South Ayrshire Council's recent initiative enabling existing tenants to interview and 'vet' prospective neighbours, in order, in the words of the housing operations manager 'to stop the wrong people from applying'. The tenants' role is consultative and the final decision on tenancy offers remains with the Council (Inside Housing, 2003).

It is apparent that both these schemes, in common with several aspects of other tenant participation mechanisms, cause considerable concern among housing professionals about how power, responsibility and accountability are realigned and demarcated within housing governance structures (Flint, 2004).

Housing and Responsibility

This returns us to the 'politics' of behaviour and the understanding that a policy focus on the moral conduct of tenants is political in itself.

First, it legitimises the arenas of government intervention by classifying and distinguishing between the attributes of various citizens, in this case tenants and owner-occupiers.

Second, it sets the parameters of this distinction within individualised pathological explanations of ethical self-conduct and frames policy solutions within re-shaping these behaviours in line with a normalised set of values attributed to wider society. This narrows the political focus, and restricts the scope of the policy gaze. Thus, within the problematisation of housing governance, a distinction is conceptualised between the ethical and reflexive standards of tenants and owner-occupiers, rather than say, primarily the differential economic resources available to these groups. So individual moral deficiency, rather than the poor noise insulation levels in social housing are predominant in policy discourse on neighbour disputes.

Similarly rent arrears are attributed to individual irresponsibility, despite evidence that a very small proportion of rent arrears are caused by wilful non-payment (Ford and Seavers, 1998). Alternatively, addressing rent arrears is framed within building the capacity of tenants to manage their finances in a more proactive, efficient and 'responsible' manner, rather than a wider issue of the actual total financial resources available to tenants. However, this apparent divorcing of political economy from assessment of conduct is inconsistent. That government rationales are confused in this regard is demonstrated in the proposal to cut housing benefit payments to problematic individuals, which simultaneously promotes the effectiveness of financial incentives in reshaping conduct, while divorcing anti-social behaviour from any economic causes.

As social landlords' responsibilities are realigned to include wider contributions to local social capital, their role in holistic, multi-agency community development is largely internalised within local neighbourhoods and organisations, restricting the policy focus upon wider economic and social forces impacting upon those individuals and neighbourhoods. We have focused on what the new politics of behaviour means for the responsibilities of tenants and practitioners. What is urgently needed is a reframing of the debate to incorporate the political responsibilities of central government and the wider citizenship (in all housing tenures).

A new politics of behaviour does not displace the centrality of empowerment, resources and responsibilities within governance processes. Rather it represents a manifestation of how power works through the symbolic attribution of distinct moral and ethical values to differentiated and classified sections of society (Bourdieu, 1986). In Elias and Scotson's classic study (1994), powerful groups sought to maintain their advantage through distinguishing themselves from another group by ascribing, merely through membership, the most positive attributes of the most worthy citizens to the majority of the 'established', while simultaneously assigning the most negative deficiencies of the most problematic individuals to all of the minority 'outsiders'.

If we think of owner-occupiers and tenants, the dynamics of residualisation and stigmatisation, and the assumptions about the conduct of these groups made within housing policy, we see similar processes occurring. (Hunter (2003) describes how the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour are constructed as 'other'.) For Elias and Bourdieu, the classifying of individuals' conduct in relation to dominant constructed norms reveals power differentials between social groups. The 'new' politics of behaviour, though realigning identities within housing governance and shifting emphases, is still intrinsically about how this power is channelled.

Future work should both embed housing studies within wider governance processes in advanced liberal democracies, but also recognise that housing is in many ways at the forefront of these processes of rights and responsibilities. Although governmentality theories provide a useful framework for this future work, the danger that housing policy processes are conceptualised as seamless, logical and strategic needs to be countered through studies of the actualities of implementation and resistance (Franklin, 2000).

Also, as King (2003) suggests, we need to move beyond government rationales of promoting responsibility being a simple matter of stimulus and response, through evaluating new housing initiatives on their own criteria, but also by examining their impact on all aspects of tenants' lives. In so doing, we will learn more about how new processes of governance actually influence the behaviour of subjects, but also about the wider outcomes of this reconfiguration of responsibility.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to show that an emerging politics of behaviour is increasingly determining the rationales and processes of housing governance in the UK. This reflects such developments in other areas of social policy, but housing has been particularly prominent in this regard, not least because the contractual basis of this new politics of conduct parallels the rights and responsibilities that have always been enshrined in tenancy agreements.

The responsible and responsive tenant becomes an increasingly central figure in the organising mechanisms of housing governance. In this process we are witnessing a deepening of tenant responsibility, through increasing individual agency and accountability in relation to housing allocation, rent payments and maintenance of properties. We are also seeing a widening of tenants' responsibility including engagement in community activities, greater participation in strategic housing management decisions and undertaking more active responses to anti-social behaviour.

As rationales based upon increasing tenant responsibility, combining active agency and moral communitarian duty, become more prominent in housing governance, a growing number of social landlords are introducing new mechanisms which share the aims of, in the words of Edinburgh City Council:

Helping our tenants to meet their obligations, form positive relationships within the community, and sustain their tenancies.

The field of housing studies provides an opportunity for a wider examination of how this emerging politics of behaviour impacts on the configuration of power and responsibility in advanced liberal governance.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful for the insightful comments of three anonymous referees on an earlier version of this paper.

Correspondence

John Flint, Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, 25 Bute Gardens, Glasgow G12 8RS, UK. Email: J.Flint@socsci.gla.ac.uk

References

- Baudrillard, J. (1998) *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London, Sage).
- Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital, in: J.G. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research in Education* (New York, Greenwood).
- Brown, P. (1999) Redefining acceptable conduct: using social landlords to control behaviour, *Local Government Studies*, 25(1), pp. 75–83.
- Burney, E. (1999) *Crime and Banishment: Nuisance and Exclusion in Social Housing* (Winchester, Waterside Press).
- Cairncross, L., Clapham, D. & Goodlad, R. (1997) *Housing Management: Consumers and Citizens* (London, Routledge).
- Card, P. (2001) Managing anti-social behaviour—inclusion or exclusion?, in: D. Cowan & A. Marsh (Eds) *Two Steps Forward: Housing Policy into the Next Millennium* (Bristol, Policy Press).
- Carr, H., Sefton-Green, D. & Tissier, D. (2001) Two steps forward for tenants?, in D. Cowan & A. Marsh (Eds) *Two Steps Forward: Housing Policy into the Next Millennium* (Bristol, Policy Press).
- City of Edinburgh Council (2003) *Neighbourhood Support Team Leaflet* (Edinburgh, City of Edinburgh Council).
- Clapham, D. (1997) A woman of her time, in: J. Goodwin & C. Grant (Eds) *Built to Last?* (London, ROOF).
- Cowan, D. (1999) *Housing Law and Policy* (Basingstoke, Macmillan).
- Cowan, D., Pantazis, C. & Gilroy, R. (2001) Social housing as crime control: an examination of the role of housing management in policing sex offenders, *Social and Legal Studies*, 10(4), pp. 435–457.
- Damer, S. (2000) 'Engineers of the human machine': the social practice of council housing management in Glasgow, 1895–1939, *Urban Studies*, 37(11), pp. 2007–2026.
- Dean, J. & Hastings, A. (2000) *Challenging Images: Housing Estates, Stigma and Reputation* (Bristol, Policy Press).
- Dean, M. (1999) *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London, Sage).
- Department of the Environment (1995) *Our Future Homes: Opportunity, Choice and Responsibility* (London, DoE).
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1999a) *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, Report of Action Team 5: Housing Management: Effective Housing Management in the Most Deprived Areas* (London, DETR).
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1999b) *Developing Good Practice in Tenant Participation* (London, DETR).
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (2000) *Quality and Choice: A Decent House for All, The Housing Green Paper* (London, DETR).
- Department of Work and Pensions (2002) *Building Choice and Responsibility: A Radical Agenda for Housing Benefit* (London, DWP).
- Elias, N. & Scotson, J.L. (1994) *The Established and the Outsiders* (London, Sage).
- Field, F. (2003) *Neighbours from Hell: The Politics of Behaviour* (London, Politico's).
- Flint, J. (2003) Housing and ethopolitics: constructing identities of active consumption and responsible community, *Economy and Society*, 32(4), pp. 611–629.
- Flint, J. (2004) Reconfiguring agency and responsibility in social housing governance in Scotland, *Urban Studies*, 41(1), pp. 151–172.
- Flint, J. & Rowlands, R. (2003) Commodification, normalisation and intervention: cultural, social and symbolic capital in housing consumption and governance, *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 18(2), pp. 213–232.
- Ford, J. & Seavers, J. (1998) *Housing Associations and Rent Arrears: Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviours* (Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing).
- Foucault, M. (1991) Governmentality, in: G. Burchell (Ed.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf).
- Franklin, B. (2000) Demands, expectations and responses: the shaping of housing management, *Housing Studies*, 15(6), pp. 907–927.
- Fraser, N. & Gordon, L. (1994) A genealogy of dependency: tracing a key word of the US welfare state, *Signs*, 19(2), pp. 309–336.
- Gurney, C. (1999) Pride and prejudice: discourses of normalisation in private and public accounts of home ownership, *Housing Studies*, 14(2), pp. 163–183.
- Haworth, A. & Manzi, T. (1999) Managing the underclass: interpreting the moral discourse of housing management, *Housing Studies*, 14(1), pp. 153–165.

- Home Office (2000) *Report of Policy Action Team 8: Anti-social Behaviour* (London, HMSO).
- Home Office (2003) *Respect and Responsibility: Taking a Stand Against Anti-social Behaviour* (London, Home Office).
- Housing Corporation (1998) *Making Consumers Count* (London, Housing Corporation).
- Hunter, C. (2003) Looking two ways at once: anti-social behaviour, law and social inclusion. Paper presented at the Autumn Conference of the Housing Studies Association, University of Bristol, 9–10 September 2003.
- Inside Housing (2003) Residents given power to vet potential neighbours, *Inside Housing*, 11 July.
- King, P. (2003a) *A Social Philosophy of Housing* (London, Ashgate).
- King, P. (2003b) What do we mean by responsibility? The case of housing benefit. Paper presented at the Autumn Conference of the Housing Studies Association, University of Bristol, 9–10 September 2003.
- Klein, N. (2000) *No Logo* (London, Flamingo).
- LeGrand, J. (1997) Knights, knaves or pawns? Human behaviour and social policy, *Journal of Social Policy*, 26, pp. 149–169.
- Levitas, R. (1998) *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour* (Basingstoke, Macmillan).
- Papps, P. (1998) Anti-social behaviour strategies—individualistic or holistic? *Housing Studies*, 13(5), pp. 639–656.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Rose, N. (2001) Community, citizenship and the Third Way, in: D. Merydyth & J. Minson (Eds) *Citizenship and Cultural Policy* (London, Sage).
- Saunders, P. (1990) *A Nation of Homeowners* (London, Allen and Unwin).
- Scottish Executive (2003) *Stewardship and Responsibility: A Policy Framework for Private Housing in Scotland: Report of the Housing Improvement Task Force* (Edinburgh, Scottish Executive).
- Smart, B. (1999) *Facing Modernity: Ambivalence, Reflexivity and Morality* (London, Sage).
- Walters, W. (1997) The active society: new designs for social policy, *Policy and Politics*, 25(3), pp. 221–234.

