

Housing Benefits

Eamon McGoldrick – NFA Managing Director

Over the last couple of years, views about issues such as migration and welfare benefits have become much more polarised.

The portrayal of welfare benefits claimants in TV programmes such as Benefits Street has fuelled negative perceptions and started debates around the country about the amounts of money that should be made available to individual households. As we know politicians will always respond to strong public opinion and it is no surprise to see the new Government proposing to reduce the cap on benefits still further. What we don't want to see is radical policies being introduced just to satisfy the wishes of the general public, without proper analysis of the facts and evidence.

Similarly, many people believe that there is a shortage of jobs and housing in this country simply because of the current levels of migration. Life is never that straight forward and there is a fine line between myth and reality in the minds of many people. Negative media portrayals can also have a corrosive impact on community cohesion and by association, stigmatise social housing tenants.

It is absolutely vital that we challenge negative perceptions and myths that have no foundation. For this reason, I wholeheartedly support Inside Housing's Housing Benefits campaign which has already started the process of myth busting and is helping to balance the media coverage we see every day.

The Housing Benefits campaign has been pulling together facts, figures and case studies from social housing providers across the country which Inside Housing has collated and published to help all of us in the task of challenging negative perceptions. For example, the reality around housing benefits is that a significant proportion of claimants are working and simply claiming to pay rapidly increasing rent levels.

If politicians, professionals and commentators are given these alternative views backed by real evidence, they will be in a better position to challenge the myths when they are put to them. If debates and discussions about critical issues such as welfare support and access to housing, are to be balanced and honest, we must present case studies, facts and figures to evidence what is actually happening on the ground. The National Federation of ALMOs has supported the Housing Benefits campaign from the start and I would urge all housing professionals to support the campaign and promote the benefits that housing brings to individual households and the wider community.