

# Strategic approaches to employment:

Responding to change in the sector

Lessons from an action-learning programme

**Mary-Kathryn Rallings**  
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July 2014



**This action-learning programme was developed and delivered in partnership by:**



Founded in 1960, but re-launched in 2012 with funding and support from a range of leading housing providers, HACT is a charity, social enterprise and industry-focused think/do tank established by the housing association sector.

Our aim is to work with the housing sector, government, civil society and communities to develop and share innovative approaches to meeting changing needs.



The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion is the UK's leading not-for-profit company dedicated to tackling disadvantage and promoting social inclusion in the labour market.

We deliver robust research and develop new approaches to policy. As experts in our field, we work to consistently challenge and support policy and decision makers.

### **Strategic approaches to employment: Responding to change in the sector**

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# Contents

Programme participants	4
Introduction and programme scope	6
The changing role of housing providers	7
Key learning from the programme	8
1. Ensuring service provision is strategic	10
2. Reaching those furthest from employment	12
3. Creating employment opportunities with external partners	14
4. Addressing silo working	15
5. Achieving greatest impact	15
Conclusion	17

## Acknowledgments

HACT would like to thank the eight housing providers that participated in the programme: Bolton at Home, Greensquare, Isos, Knightstone, Midland Heart, Riverside, Swan and Tower Hamlets Homes.

We would like to thank Midland Heart, for hosting one of the programme sessions and for a tour of its bakery, 'Frost and Snow.'

The report authors would also like to thank the guest speakers who contributed to the programme, including HACT and CESI staff, Gareth Morgan, Geraldine Clark from Richmond Housing Partnership, John Gleeson from Southern Housing Group and Keith Clancy from Family Mosaic.

## Programme participants

### Bolton at Home

#### Bolton at Home

Set up in 2002 as an Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO), we took ownership of the council's 18,000 homes in 2011. Over the next 5 years we will be delivering £124 million of improvements to homes and estates.

Strong and thriving neighbourhoods are key to the growth of all successful communities. They are at the core of tackling all forms of exclusion.

We're committed to building sustainable neighbourhoods and communities and to creating places where you and others want to live and work, both now and in the future.



#### GreenSquare Group

Formed in 2008, GreenSquare Group is a major provider of housing, regeneration, care and support and commercial services across Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. Our core business is building, managing and maintaining homes as well as supporting strong and stable communities.

We put residents at the heart of everything we do: looking to continually improve the quality of their homes; the services we offer; and the neighbourhoods in which they live.



#### ISOS

We have a growing reputation for delivering regeneration schemes in partnership with private sector housebuilders, including the multi award-winning Cleadon Park in South Tyneside.

Our supported housing teams are renowned for the quality of their services, in helping some of the most vulnerable people in society to live independent lives. The needs of our residents are always at the heart of our work. By listening and responding to what they want to see in their local area we are able to build real communities together.



#### Knightstone

We're a leading housing association in Somerset and the West of England, committed to building vibrant, stable and safe communities where people can make their homes. We provide services to over 23,000 people in 11,000 homes, and build around 300 homes a year.

We understand that houses are purely buildings with ambition, they want to be homes and for that to happen they must have life breathed into them. Home is at the very heart of what we do. Put simply - we house people, people make homes.



## Midland Heart



Midland Heart is one of the top ten housing and care organisations based in the UK. Our work involves supporting those who need help to live independently, assisting in regenerating communities and helping an individual to discover their own abilities, just as much as it involves providing and maintaining homes for more than 70,000 people with maximum customer involvement.

We own and manage more than 32,000 homes across 54 local authority areas and invest in excess of £100 million each year in our neighbourhoods. We transform lives and communities through housing care and opportunity!

## Riverside



Riverside is one of the leading social housing and regeneration organisations in the UK, owning or managing around 50,000 homes, from Irvine to Ipswich, with around 2,600 staff and a turnover of £257million. Our record of achievement dates back to our inception as Liverpool Improved Houses in 1928.

We provide sheltered and supported housing for elderly, homeless and vulnerable people, in addition to general needs affordable properties for rent and shared ownership. We also invest in community projects, from youth engagement schemes aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour, to credit union grants tackling financial exclusion.

## Swan



Swan Housing Association was first formed in 1992 and provides high-quality and affordable homes to rent and buy. Today, we operate in East London and Essex and locally manage over 10,000 homes, with plans in place to deliver more new homes over the coming years.

Swan's mission is to create homes and communities that people want to live in. We strive to provide excellent housing services that meet the challenging needs of the communities of East London and Essex, delivering neighbourhoods that are healthy, vibrant and sustainable.

## Tower Hamlets Homes



**Tower  
Hamlets  
Homes**

We are an ALMO (Arm's Length Management Organisation) – a not-for-profit company set up to deliver high quality housing services for residents living in Tower Hamlets Council homes.

We operate in one of the most vibrant, diverse, and exciting parts of the UK. We care for an extraordinary range of assets and resources – including 22,000 homes and a talented team of almost 500 staff.



## Introduction and programme scope

The 'Strategic Approaches to Employment' action-learning programme arose in response to housing providers' aspiration to work collaboratively to improve their work around supporting tenants into employment. It reflects the importance that many housing providers place on addressing employability and welfare reform in the context of their community investment strategies. It also follows on from a piece of work by HACT and Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (Inclusion), 'Housing providers' approaches to tackling worklessness: Assessing value and impact', which scoped the range of activities undertaken by housing providers around employment.

In comparison with other sectors, the social housing sector is unusually collaborative. It is this ethos of collaboration, the desire to share best practice, adopt and adapt models that work well, and to share experiences with other housing providers that enabled an action-learning programme to take place.

Collaboration, flexibility and responsiveness are hallmarks of action-learning as a method that empowers participants to be both reflective and reflexive, to support each other, and to disseminate learning back to their own organisations. These elements of learning worked particularly well for employability and welfare reform because participants were willing to share not only the shining examples of good practice, but also to speak frankly about those projects and initiatives that were challenging.

### **The ALP ran from January-November 2013 with the participation of eight organisations:**

- Bolton at Home
- GreenSquare
- Isos
- Knightstone
- Midland Heart
- Riverside
- Swan
- Tower Hamlets Homes

### **The programme endeavoured to explore key issues including:**

- The role of the housing providers in supporting residents into work;
- How the risk of household debt is reduced by increasing household income through paid employment;
- The direct and indirect impacts of welfare reforms (including under-occupation, universal credit, benefit cap, direct payments, eligibility changes, and new programmes for claimants) on individual households and on the wider community; and
- The cumulative impact of welfare reform on the housing provider and their strategies to address it.

### **Session topics:**

Throughout 2013, the housing providers met six times on a variety of topics:

#### **1. Introduction to the programme, knowledge-sharing and agreement of priorities.**

This session examined the initial research from HACT/Inclusion: 'Housing providers' approaches to tackling worklessness: Assessing value and impact'.

#### **2. Understanding the landscape and the operating context.**

The session reviewed the effects of welfare reform and the Work Programme and, as a consequence, what role housing providers could play in supporting employment activity.

### **3. Evidence-based approach to investment and understanding your role.**

This session explored the data collection/evidence needs for housing providers to enable them to target services more effectively.

### **4. Exploring ways to measure impact of employability activities.**

This session explored how housing providers were currently measuring the impacts of their programmes and the challenges associated with this, as well as the merits of new approaches such as HACT's Wellbeing Valuation Approach.

### **5. Supporting those furthest away from the job market.**

This session explored questions around barriers to employment, how to engage hard-to-reach groups, and successful approaches being taken in the sector.

### **6. Embedding a strategic approach to employability.**

This session brought together the key learning from the programme and identified ways in which housing providers could look to structure their employment activities.

## The changing role of housing providers

**Housing providers are now operating in increasingly complex political and economic environments, faced with the challenge of various welfare reforms introduced by the post-2010 Coalition government and a saturated job market making it even more difficult for people to obtain (and sustain) employment.**

Key statistics demonstrate the effects of this difficult climate specifically for social housing tenants.<sup>1</sup>

- There are 3.5 million social housing tenants who are not working – that's 56% of working age social housing tenants (25% in other tenures).
- Nearly half of these people have been unemployed for 12 months or more.
- 35% are claiming out of work benefits (8% in other tenures).
- Unemployed social-housing residents are four times more likely to have long-term health conditions or disabilities and six times more likely to be lone parents, compared to workless people in other tenures.
- 1.6 million social-housing residents are predicted to be on the Work Programme (27% of working age social-housing residents).
- Only 42% of housing providers have reliable data on the levels of employment among tenants.

Providing support to help people into work and/or to provide opportunities to improve their skills and qualifications has steadily become the remit of social housing providers. According to research conducted by Inclusion, 88% of housing providers are offering help, advice, services or work opportunities to residents. Most of these housing providers are delivering this support in partnership with other service providers and/or with a combination of core and external funding.

Digital inclusion and financial inclusion are also key areas where housing providers play a vital role; with the transition to universal credit, tenants will need to make applications online and will need a bank account to

<sup>1</sup> Data collated from Gardiner, L. and Simmonds, D. (2012) 'Housing providers' approaches to tackling worklessness: Assessing value and impact,' A report by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion for HACT.

receive direct deposits. If tenants are not ready for these changes, it will have adverse effects not only on tenants themselves in terms of receiving benefits, but also on housing providers in terms of rental income and capacity to borrow and build. Likewise, preparing tenants for the differences in the scheduling of benefits payments and the behaviours required to budget for these differences is a high priority.

Employment activities and digital and financial inclusion are now part of the core business for housing providers. Particularly in the context of welfare reform, these activities are recognised as important in managing risk and ensuring rental income is received. However, being in employment does not necessarily mean that a household is out of poverty. For housing providers, this means not only supporting people into work, but also enabling those on lower wages to increase their incomes. Tenants who are already in work may also need support to remain in work and/or for training to improve skills enabling them to progress.

## Key learning from the programme

**Any report will struggle to describe the breadth of work and activity undertaken by housing providers across the country. Instead, we provide some examples of successful, innovative work around getting tenants into employment and preparing them for the effects of welfare reform.**

We draw on the key learning across the areas of the programme that most interested participants, including a number of core areas:

- Within housing associations, the cultural change prompted by a greater focus on employment activities;
- How service provision is targeted, both geographically and thematically; and
- How to think creatively about engaging residents in employment.

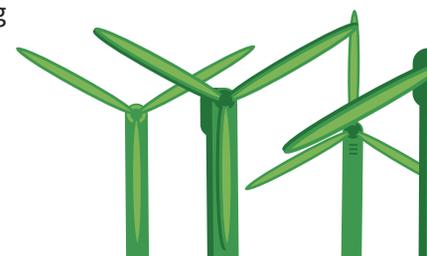
(Whilst the programme explored both employability and welfare reform, the focus gravitated more towards employability, due to the interest of participants.)

Bringing together the discussions throughout the programme and from our broader HACT 100 Club network, we can identify five key challenges for housing providers in addressing welfare reform and encouraging employment. Within each theme, examples are presented that offer a variety of innovative responses.<sup>2</sup>

### Five areas of key learning and challenges emerged:

1. Ensuring service provision is strategic
2. Reaching those furthest from employment
3. Creating employment opportunities with external partners
4. Addressing silo working
5. Achieving greatest impact

We can link these themes to HACT's Community Investment Framework (CIF), an interactive online document that provides practical advice and resources to help housing providers plan and organise their ideas.<sup>3</sup> The CIF guides housing providers through the process of producing an evidenced strategy for maximising the value of their work within communities. It offers good practice guidelines to inform an organisational strategy capable of guiding housing providers through the process of putting community investment at the centre of the way they operate and interact with their tenants and communities (see table).



Thematic area	Community Investment Framework corresponding sections
1. Ensuring service provision is strategic	CIF 1: Strategic vision CIF 2: Understanding external contexts
2. Reaching those furthest from employment	CIF 7: Working with all partners CIF 8: Working with tenants and communities
3. Creating employment opportunities with external partners	CIF 1: Strategic vision
4. Addressing silo working	CIF 3: Facilitating internal change
5. Achieving greatest impact	CIF 4: Your impact within communities CIF 10: Measuring and evaluating impacts

<sup>2</sup> The HACT 100 Club is a sounding board and networking group, with members across England and Wales, formed with the purpose of sharing good practice and knowledge across the sector.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.hact.org.uk/community-investment-framework>



# 1. Ensuring service provision is strategic

**Fundamental questions were raised during the programme that centred around the strategic approaches taken to service provision. How do we understand the needs of our tenants and communities? How do we deliver interventions that address these needs? Who are these interventions aimed at? How do these interventions link to broader programmes and activity? How do we link these activities both strategically and locally?**

## 1.1 Ensuring provision of the best services that meet the needs of tenants

Using limited resources to best effect requires housing providers to consider how to understand tenant and community needs. Many housing associations use data and customer insights to inform service provision. For example, some are engaging in customer profiling (looking at working age, geographic location, etc.) and how to best collect and make best use of this data. Other organisations are looking at the profile of those tenants not in work and their skills and qualification levels. Housing providers are also working to understand who will be impacted by welfare reform. As well as listening to tenants and gathering information, housing providers are also proactively looking at what HACT's Community Insight tool<sup>4</sup> tells them about their local communities, rather than working reactively by waiting for tenants to raise issues. These insights help inform evidence-based service provision that is tailored to tenant needs.

## 1.2 Understanding local partners and how to engage with them

Many of the programme participants work with service delivery partners. Knightstone noted that it is beneficial to deliver services with a number of organisations with different specialisms, which helps to avoid duplication of services and allows each organisation to focus on a particular area. As an organisation working across a wide geographic area, how they identified and worked with partners is critical.

Tower Hamlets Homes has developed a strategic partnership with a small number of service delivery partners. The partnership operates on the basis that 'neither pays either' (neither Tower Hamlets Homes, nor their strategic partners, pay each other for referrals or for services delivered). Whilst the ultimate success of the partnership is partially due to the commitment of staff and key individuals, it was also made possible by the relatively concentrated geography of THH stock and the concentration of established and reputable service delivery partners in the area, delivering different services in order to deliver services that are in high demand.

## 1.3 Addressing the gaps in service provision

Housing providers are increasingly faced with the question of whether to try and fill broader gaps in funding and/or failures in other programmes by using their own resources to meet need. Bolton at Home has responded to this challenge by developing Urban Care and Neighbourhood (UCAN) centres that draw together local facilities and services in one place to address a range of issues, including providing a community space, internet access, employment support and volunteering opportunities.

At Riverside, the Springboard service has been providing employment and training support to tenants and residents for the past three years and has helped more than 100 people per year into employment through direct, face-to-face support for tenants in job searches, applications, interview preparation and accessing any required training. Springboard was initially funded by Liverpool City Council and when this funding came to an end, the Riverside Foundation (an independent charitable trust which operates in Riverside neighbourhoods) took over funding for the project.

Partnership working amongst housing providers has been vital to delivering services. For example, the Give us a Chance consortium includes social housing providers in England that work together and develop new ideas, particularly on employment and skills.

## Discussion

In light of drastic cuts in public expenditure, many local authorities are cutting back on the services they provide and other publically-funded programmes that have been unsuccessful. Housing providers can be tempted to step in to fill these gaps in service provision. With housing providers also under pressure to demonstrate value for money, how can they offer services most efficiently and effectively in order to stretch budgets that are under increasing pressure?

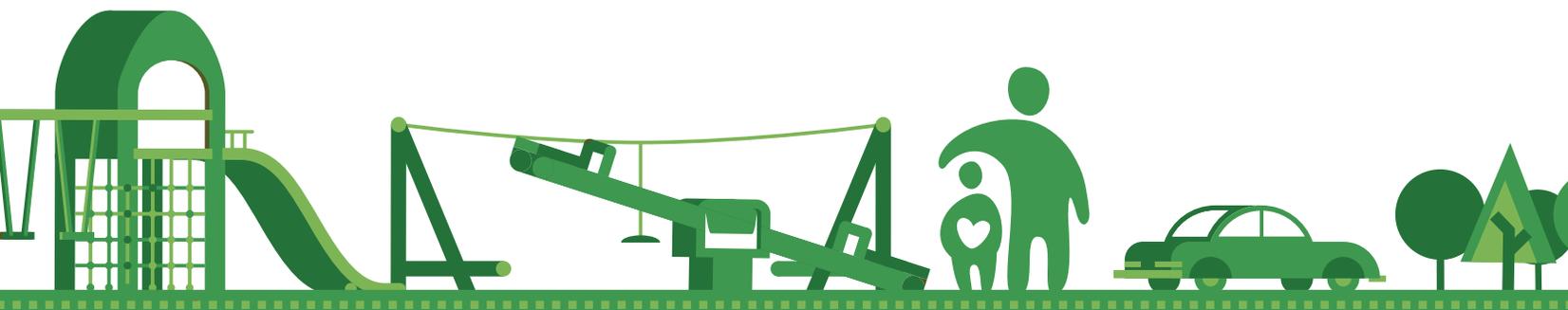
Addressing this challenge was about unravelling what housing providers decided to do in engaging tenants in employment and providing services, as well as what housing providers decided not to do. In some instances, housing providers decided to continue projects initially supported by Council funding and have done so successfully. However, other providers have opted to collect and use insights about tenants to use core funding to support services in a targeted and strategic way, whilst others have engaged in strategic partnerships.

Ensuring the provision of high quality services that meet tenants' needs is partially about investing resources in profiling tenants in order to understand different levels and areas of need. However, profiling communities and other local service providers is equally as important as profiling tenants. Whilst each of these approaches have been deployed according to the particular circumstances of each project, the demography of the tenants involved and/or the profile of the housing provider itself, the common element is that housing providers are beginning to target service provision and focus on delivering a few key areas of activity themselves. There are an array of approaches within the sector and there is no one 'right answer.'

## Key Learning

Housing providers may be tempted to fill the void left by other streams of funding. Using limited resource wisely can be challenging in determining how to target service provision both geographically and thematically.

**It is important for housing providers to ask questions, understand how services are targeted, and understand how they can work with other organisations as partners; the same offer in every area is unlikely to meet diverse needs and housing associations will want to target resources effectively.**



## 2. Reaching those furthest from employment

**Housing providers recognise that those furthest away from the job market can face a myriad of challenges, including (but not limited to) significant periods of unemployment, a lack of skills or qualifications, a lack of experience, a lack of confidence, language barriers, a lack of reliable transportation and/or issues with childcare. Understanding how these barriers affect tenants and, where possible, addressing them, is increasingly a focus for housing providers.**

### 2.1 Thinking creatively about employment opportunities for residents

One way that housing providers are reaching those furthest from employment is by creating or expanding in-house opportunities, where residents can build skills, gain valuable training and add these experiences to their CVs. Some housing associations provide apprenticeships in particular strands of the business, whilst others look to convert short-term contracts into permanent positions for those residents committed to developing their skills further.

Midland Heart has set a target for themselves, aiming to have residents make up 10% of their workforce. Similarly, Sanctuary tends to create employment opportunities within the business, with in-house maintenance teams and apprenticeships. Origin also recently reviewed estate services and brought cleaning services in-house, with recruitment targeted at residents. Croydon Churches Housing Association advertises entry-level vacancies to residents, with 15-20% of staff as residents (currently, 16% of staff are residents, according to most recent figures).

Although providing in-house opportunities is a popular way to get more residents into work, some housing providers are taking a more radical approach. Trafford Housing Trust runs a social enterprise with prolific ex-offenders providing a house clearing and environmental clean-up service. Twenty-two ex-offenders completed a six-month placement, with 54% moving into permanent employment.

### 2.2 Encouraging those furthest from employment to take up opportunities that are offered

Many housing providers have noted that they have huge success in advertising programmes and services around digital inclusion, financial inclusion and employment. However, whilst large numbers of tenants express interest, this does not ultimately translate into high rates of attendance. One of the central findings from programme participants was that advertising qualifications or skills can sometimes serve as a deterrent and it can be more beneficial to focus on the broader offer in order to get tenants through the door.

At Isos, football was used as the 'hook' to engage harder to reach groups with their Sunderland FC project. They also have a boxing programme that uses half the time for work skills development and half for physical fitness. Similarly, Liverpool Mutual Homes (LMH) have explored new ways of engaging with residents. They now have DIANE (Digital Inclusion and Neighbourhood Engagement), an IT bus that tours LMH estates delivering digital inclusion services in a more agile way, removing barriers to getting online, and tying in to other services, like helping tenants set up bank accounts and email addresses. (Whilst wireless signals are usually strong in urban areas, they can be weak or unpredictable in rural environments, so organisations considering this type of solution may require satellite technology rather than a wireless solution.)

GreenSquare has recognised that tenants in rural areas can face transport barriers that keep them from taking up offers and now has a fleet of mopeds to get residents to and from interviews. Yarlinton raised questions about how transport links can be improved in rural areas with better information about services, including community car schemes and demand-response transport.

It also can be difficult to convince residents (particularly those with needs around childcare) that going into work is the right decision. Swan has implemented better-off calculations in order to demonstrate to tenants the benefits of going into work. Similarly, Shepherds Bush HA offers childcare at an affordable or free rate to tenants on work schemes and provide NVQs in childcare.

## 2.3 Self-employment as an alternative option for residents

Many housing association residents have great ideas for new businesses but often lack the confidence and belief to make it happen. A number of housing providers are seeing these opportunities for tenants and are working with enterprise support organisations such as Enterprise Cube and the Pop-Up Business School, whose staff have had first-hand experience of setting up successful businesses. Indeed, self-employment is often an easier option than a contracted role with an employer for those who have been out of the labour market for a long time.

Tenants face barriers in accessing start-up finance, as they are often unable to obtain business loans from high street banks. In response to this challenge, HACT has teamed up with the Community Development Finance Association (CDFA), to establish the Start-up Micro-Enterprise project. It will bring together resources from housing associations, Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) and social investors to create a ring-fenced loan fund to support residents looking to start up their own businesses.

### Discussion

One of the most significant ways that housing providers can engage tenants in employment opportunities is by providing opportunities for residents within the housing association itself. Even offering shorter-term opportunities can provide tenants with the skills, experience and confidence to move on and gain permanent employment; this tactic has proved successful at a number of organisations.

Housing providers have recognised that the way opportunities for training are advertised has a big impact on take up. Some tenants seek help and advice with employment themselves, asking about relevant services. However, in order to reach others, organisations are thinking creatively about how to engage and build rapport. It may prove beneficial to focus on a 'hook' that draws people in, reserving the focus on skills development for the stage at which people are already engaged.

Some housing providers are trying to engage residents in employment opportunities from the start of their tenancies. Both Bromford and Yarlinton have adopted support-based models of tenancy management, wherein additional support is discussed at the time new tenants sign up, and followed up at points throughout the tenancy. Similarly, several organisations, including North Hertfordshire Homes, are piloting programmes of pre-tenancy training, offering residents more in depth advice and support around financial inclusion, including budgeting, prioritising debts and preparing for a tenancy.

Presenting this information in a structured way prior to tenants receiving the keys might prove particularly useful for first time tenants, rather than waiting for them to encounter financial difficulties and approach the landlord for support or advice at a later date.<sup>5</sup>

### Key Learning

There are significant structural barriers to employment and engaging with harder to reach tenants can be challenging.

**Housing providers are thinking creatively about how to address and remove barriers, using resources available and providing additional support for tenants.**

<sup>5</sup> An in-depth report focusing on different models of tenancy management through case studies with eight housing providers is due for publication soon. Details forthcoming at <http://www.hact.org.uk/research>. See the HACT blog for an introduction to the project at <http://www.hact.org.uk/blog/2014/05/13/fixed-term-way-forward>

## 3. Creating employment opportunities with external partners

**A key question for housing providers is about how to create opportunities for residents wherever possible. One significant area of activity for housing providers centres on capitalising on opportunities with local employers. This raises questions about creating these frameworks: how housing providers can ensure they are aware of local opportunities and how to build relationships with local businesses to ensure these relationships benefit tenants. Likewise, housing providers are also turning to their own supply chains to secure jobs or apprenticeship opportunities for tenants.**

### 3.1 Building relationships with local businesses to ensure tenants benefit from the creation of new jobs

At Affinity Sutton, the Ready2Work programme connects the housing provider to local employers. This model ensures that local employers come to Affinity Sutton with a list of criteria for positions. Affinity Sutton's Ready2Work staff can then provide the local employer a 'shortlist' of Affinity Sutton residents who meet the criteria. This model benefits both the employer, who saves time and money in advertising, and Affinity Sutton tenants. The use of specialist Employer Engagement Officers has paid off with a record 881 people supported into work in 2013/14, including 85 apprenticeships, many provided through Affinity Sutton's supply chain.

Likewise, Riverside's Springboard project provides employment and training support to tenants and includes a team leader, who is responsible for the strategic work, including developing partnerships and making links to local employers and to the supply chain.

RHP is part of the Give us a Chance consortium, a national consortium of housing providers, that developed 'Proving Talent,' a paid jobs model for young people. The consortium members who adopted the model then worked closely with local prime contractors delivering the Work Programme to create temporary job opportunities (six months) for young people.

### 3.2 Writing procurement of apprenticeships into contracts

Writing apprenticeships and other training programmes into contracts is becoming common practice within the social housing sector. Hexagon engages in one-to-one negotiation with contractors about apprenticeships to add a social value clause into contracts wherever possible. Great Places works with contractors to maximise employment and training opportunities by getting tenants and other local people involved to take up training and gain NVQs. Great Places is looking for continuity for trainees and apprentices to ensure they get experience on-site to make them marketable for employment.

### Discussion

These challenges centre on how employability as a community investment priority can be connected with the core business of housing providers. This is about recognising the synergies between working from within to help residents develop skills to move them closer to employment and identifying those residents with skillsets appropriate to vacancies advertised with local employers. By improving connections with local employers and being aware of vacancies that will be advertised ahead of time, housing providers can engage proactively and put their own residents forward for these vacancies.

### Key Learning

Housing providers are major businesses in the local economy, working with a variety of other businesses

**Housing providers can use their position in the market, to guarantee that residents benefit from a range of opportunities through business-based partnerships and networks to utilise existing supply chains.**

## 4. Addressing silo working

**Multiple housing providers noted that there can be a disconnect between core housing management/housing officers/income recovery teams and community investment/employment teams. This can signal a tension between the housing management and development arms of a housing provider and the community investment arm. Throughout the programme, various discussions centred on how to challenge the notion of silo working. Should housing officers be responsible for both tenancy enforcement and tenancy support? How are frontline staff engaged with community investment? How can employment be made a task for everyone?**

### **4.1 Engaging the whole organisation in employment: the cultural environment for housing officers and frontline staff**

The role of housing officers at many organisations has, by necessity, shifted in response to welfare reform. Housing officers need to be more aware of changes and able to deliver key messages to residents, as well as signposting to key services around financial inclusion and employability. Swan has taken an approach to signposting to key services as a responsibility of all staff members, with frontline staff including Estates Management aware of key issues and willing to take on signposting as part of their everyday contact with tenants.

### **4.2 Ensuring employment work and associated community investment activities are embedded across the business**

At Trafford Housing Trust, an organisational restructure has resulted in a focus on social value and community investment as the core of the business. Southern Housing Group has an Economic Inclusion Team composed of Financial Skills Officers and Employment Skills Officers who work together with SHG residents to offer a holistic package of support.

Family Mosaic focuses on making employment a task for everyone across the organisation, from the Chief Executive and the Board to the frontline. This is made possible by highlighting contributions and is a major part of ensuring community investment works effectively and efficiently: that all staff see the benefits of these activities to their individual roles by making activities and services relevant.

At Tower Hamlets Homes, community investment has been made relevant through publicising success stories, including their 'Bling My Hood' project, which has prompted Neighbourhood Officers to engage with the community investment team.

### **Discussion**

These examples highlight the challenges of including everyone in work that is regarded as community investment and transforming the notion of community investment as an area on the margins of the mainstream business to an area that can have significant implications for the core business. As welfare reform has impacted businesses in so many different ways and with employment seen as a mitigating factor for many of the reforms, community investment activity centred on employment is arguably one of the most relevant areas to rent collection and therefore an area for which support can be galvanised.

### **Key Learning**

Within housing associations, the roles of housing officers vary and employment activities can be the responsibility of different staff members, all of which can lead to silo working and dilute the overall impact of initiatives.

**A strategic approach to employment activities will recognise how all parts of the business contribute to these activities and work collaboratively towards holistic goals.**

## 5. Achieving greatest impact

Following on from the challenge of strategic service provision is the question of achieving the greatest impact for the services that are offered. There are a multitude of factors to explore, from implementing a measurement framework, to considerations about how services are being paid for (e.g. from tenants' rents) and whether this should determine who is eligible to use the service. Determining whether service provision should be targeted at tenants who are job ready, or those furthest from employment presents a further challenge.

### 5.1 Determining how to target interventions: residents only versus whole-community approaches

A report from Inclusion/HACT ('Housing providers' approaches to worklessness: Assessing value and impact') recommended that one way to use funding wisely is by limiting the services offered to tenants only. However, is there greater value in opening up opportunities to the broader resident base? Are there knock-on effects to implementing services targeted in communities, rather than just at residents? How can funding be limited to tenants in areas where housing associations have dispersed stock?

Poplar HARCA's community investment programme is focused on neighbourhoods, rather than solely on tenants, operating on the ethos that this contributes to sustainable communities where people want to live. Similarly, Bolton at Home's work clubs have an open-access policy and are not restricted to tenants.

Those housing providers working across multiple local authority areas and/or with less concentrated estates face further challenges about how to target service provision. One way some housing providers are addressing this challenge, along with ensuring they are reaching the most residents as possible, is by making services more mobile.

### 5.2 Measuring employment activity

Capturing both the quantitative and qualitative elements of employment activity is difficult, particularly with pressure from funders on demonstrating impact purely in terms of the numbers of people in employment. Trafford Housing Trust's 'Clean Start' project with ex-offenders has been measured according to its impact in reducing crime. Greater Manchester Police estimates a £3 million reduction in costs of crime as a result. Using exchequer values is one way of demonstrating impact quantitatively.

Swan has introduced a new impact form to enable the tracking of projects from the outset, but along with other providers, has recognised the inherent difficulty in separating and categorising resource when it is often borrowed from different areas of the business.

### 5.3 Targeting the job ready versus focusing on those further from employment

Tower Hamlets Homes and its work with strategic partners recognises that people who come to them for help are often those with complex needs: people who do not speak English, those without skills, who are over fifty, who have been away from the job market, and/or who have never worked before. As most funders assess success by quantitative outcomes, the comparatively high amount of time necessary to prepare someone with more complex needs or facing significant barriers to employment is a substantive concern. With budgets tight and targets to hit, some organisations may be responding to those considered to be 'quick wins' – the people who are job ready and who would likely secure employment anyway. There is also an element of competition: generally, organisations are not keen to refer those people that are job ready to other services, as they fear they will 'lose' that outcome for their own organisation.

However, the informal outcomes are just as important – helping those who are not job ready has a substantial impact in terms of providing the support that can change lives. In response to this, a new project for Poplar

HARCA is 'Raising Aspirations' (a project delivered in partnership with Skills Match, the Family Intervention Service and the Job Centre), which is instead looking at incorporating more qualitative measures and journeys into work. Similarly, Riverside has recognised that the value is as much in the process as in the outcome; however, measurement frameworks may not always reflect this.

These interventions and activities – including training and education, providing apprenticeships, and providing volunteering opportunities – all serve to increase both new and continued employment prospects for tenants. The ultimate outcomes of the range of services, advice and support offered by housing providers can produce substantive effects, measured and valued according to levels of wellbeing:

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Value<sup>6</sup></b>
Full-time employment	£10,767
Self-employment	£11,588
Part-time employment	£1,229
Government training scheme	£9,447
Secure job	£12,034
Apprenticeship	£1,747
Vocational training	£1,124
Regular volunteering	£2,357
Regular attendance at voluntary or local organisation	£1,773
General training for job	£1,567
Employment training	£807
Employed parent for children (11-15)	£1,700

These values have been derived from HACT's Wellbeing Valuation methodology and are contained in the Social Value Bank, with accompanying guidance.<sup>7</sup> These values represent the monetary intervention that would be required to facilitate a shift in wellbeing signified by the particular outcome (e.g. full-time employment signifies a shift in wellbeing equal to a financial intervention of £10,767).

## Discussion

Questions about measuring employment and welfare reform activities present an issue that pits strategy, resource and the business case for supporting people into employment against the social ethos of housing providers and the moral case for supporting people into employment. Activities that support people into employment are crucial not only to programmes of community investment, but also to core business goals.

Firstly, in attempting to ensure value for money, organisations may opt to focus activities only on their own tenants. Indeed, some tenants may argue that if it is their rent money being used to fund activities, those activities should be reserved for tenants only. However, some housing providers also recognise that there are significant benefits to opening up service provision beyond the immediate tenant pool, including the knock-on effects within the broader community, which can translate into more sustainable communities.

Secondly, if organisations are purely measuring the quantity of people who have moved into employment, this has implications for service delivery and may result in organisations focusing on those who are job ready. On the other hand, if organisations are measuring both the quantity of people into employment and the quality of the intervention required to move those people into employment, the focus may instead be on those who are further away from employment.

<sup>6</sup> These are average values. The values in the Social Value Bank are differentiated further by age and region.

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see <http://www.hact.org.uk/social-value-bank>

Some housing providers are using tools like the Outcome Star to help measure these less tangible outcomes of their activities. Generally speaking, housing providers have also recognised that there is a need to collect more data themselves in order to track progress of different projects. Likewise, HACT's Wellbeing Valuation methodology includes an array of figures relevant to these journeys into employment, including improved confidence and reductions in social isolation.

When measuring the outcomes of activities and interventions around employment, housing providers are faced with issues around the complexity of the measurement mechanisms as well as what they actually want to measure. Measurement mechanisms must recognise this complexity and take into account not only purely quantitative measures, but also journeys into employment and the levels of support required.

### **Key Learning**

Approches to employment that focus solely on tenants may seem attractive as a way to use resources and limit the scope of employment activities, but this approach may not have the greatest overall impact.

**Taking a community-based approach to employment will ensure the greatest potential for partnership working, capitalising on funding opportunities and placing the housing provider in a position to act as a catalyst for greater change. A range of new tools are available to help housing providers understand their impact at a strategic level.**



## Conclusion

**Welfare reform has prompted substantial change in the social housing sector: how services are delivered, the focus of 'community investment' activities and the onus on housing providers to become more involved in cultivating employment opportunities for residents. The sector is becoming more responsive to these changes and to the complex political, social and economic environment.**

This report offers a glimpse into the broad array of activity within the sector and showcases the resources invested in supporting tenants into employment. All of these activities suggest that housing providers are looking at the challenges around employment, considering the implications of welfare reform, thinking creatively, and critically exploring different responses. The responses vary and there certainly is no single blueprint for supporting people into employment. What is evident, however, is that interventions that focus not just on residents, but that also look critically at role of the housing provider show greatest promise.

Housing providers are increasingly looking not just at the provision of support, training and advice for residents, but are exploring how they can become catalysts for change in a variety of ways:

- Delivering services tailored to tenant needs through the collection of customer insights and tools like Community Insight and developing centres that provide advice and support for tenants;
- Providing employment opportunities for residents in house, removing barriers to employment and encouraging social enterprise and/or self-employment;
- Establishing relationships with local employers and writing employment opportunities for residents into contracts with external partners;
- Embedding employment and training activities as part of a broader programme of community investment and connecting community investment activities with the core business; and
- Exploring both quantitative and qualitative measures of the impact of employment activities and ensuring that those who are furthest away from employment are not left behind in favour of 'quick wins.'

It is clear that housing providers are taking a more active role in helping residents into employment. So, what's next for housing providers? There are a number of critical areas for further consideration:

1. There is a tendency for the myriad of services (financial inclusion, digital inclusion, employability, etc.) offered to tenants to become fragmented activities.  
**These activities should be better connected to each other and to the core business.**
2. Frontline staff often prioritise activities they perceive as most important to their roles and may not recognise that 'extra' activities are ultimately crucial both to tenant wellbeing and to business performance.  
**The importance of frontline staff as the first port of call for signposting tenants to relevant services should be strengthened.**
3. Housing providers are thinking more creatively about how to deliver services, but too often there is a reliance on assumptions and anecdotal evidence.  
**Best practice will deliver tailored programmes based on tenant needs and evidence-based service provision.**
4. With increasing pressure on budgets, many housing providers are deciding to concentrate their resources solely on their tenants.  
**Greater impact may sometimes be achieved through service provision not only to tenants, but also to residents living in housing providers' operating areas.**
5. The inclusion of conditions beyond the standard elements of rent collections and regulations around ASB as part of the tenancy agreement is increasingly contested within the sector.  
**Building in additional support as part of the tenancy agreement does offer more opportunities to engage with tenants on critical areas, including employment, from the start of the tenancy.**











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