



GREAT PLACES COMMISSION

Ten recommendations for creating great places to live



**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Great Places Commission came together in March 2018 to understand what makes a place great, and consider how housing associations, working with national and local government and other partners, can create thriving and successful places.

With support from the National Housing Federation, the Commission visited towns and cities across the North and Midlands, meeting housing associations, stakeholders and local residents. Using the learning from this process, the Commission has made 10 recommendations:

1.

The Government should develop an ambitious new national regeneration strategy backed by £10bn of additional investment over a decade. It should explicitly prioritise places and people in greatest need, and should support housing investment alongside related economic, social and physical activity.

2.

The Government must provide local authorities with a sustainable future funding settlement so they can rebuild their capacity and skills, enabling them to lead and coordinate placemaking across every community.

3.

The Government should introduce mandatory good design standards for all new development, including homes and wider placemaking.

4.

The Government should enable improved local management of the private rented sector through a mandatory national landlord register and greater flexibility for councils to establish local licensing schemes.

5.

The Government should require Local Industrial Strategies to include the role of housing, including affordable housing.

6.

Housing associations should commit to cross-sector partnership in each local area. This can provide vital leadership and amplify the sector's impact in each community.

7.

Anchor organisations, including housing associations, should commit to asset-based community development. This approach identifies and mobilises a community's strengths and targets resources accordingly. Its objective is to ensure that services promoting wellbeing and opportunity are delivered effectively to those who need them most.

8.

Housing association boards should review their approach to property sales and transfers to ensure the best outcomes for communities. Boards should always assure an ethical approach to any disposal.

9.

Housing associations should embed wider community benefit requirements in their procurement strategies. They should investigate wealth-building strategies, which seek to capture and recirculate greater levels of local investment for social purposes.

10.

Housing associations should proactively engage with local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships to ensure affordable housing and inclusive growth are central to Local Industrial Strategies.



FOREWORDS

FROM THE GREAT PLACES COMMISSION

It's not easy to define a 'great place'. To some, it might mean nice houses, pleasant parks and clean streets. To others, it's friendly neighbours and a welcoming community. As a Commission, we set out to explore what great places mean to different people – and how housing associations can contribute.

There are so many great places in the North and the Midlands. There are proud people, vibrant communities, and plenty of drive and ambition. But there are also major challenges in some parts – poor-quality housing, inadequate infrastructure and few opportunities.

We believe every place has the potential to be great – but some need significant investment, bold leadership and a long-term vision to get there. As housing associations, we already make a difference – but we want to do more. We exist not only to provide homes, but to support, nurture and serve communities.

“The recommendations in this report are the result of extensive exploration, conversation and consideration with people across the North and the Midlands.”

The Great Places
Commissioners

The recommendations in this report are the result of extensive exploration, conversation and consideration with people across the North and the Midlands. This, combined with our expertise in housing, regeneration and placemaking, has enabled us to draw up the ways we believe housing associations can – in partnership – help deliver more great places.

Implementing the recommendations alone will not be enough. It will also take leadership and determination – but it's an opportunity for our sector to do more of what we do best. We are committed to creating opportunities, sharing prosperity and achieving a more equal society. We seek greater recognition of the challenge and of our role – and more support to do it.

We could not have delivered this work without the support and engagement of everyone we have met as part of this process. And we will not achieve it without you. Thank you all for sharing your views, showing us your communities and homes, and telling us what a great place means to you.

The Great Places Commissioners

THE COMMISSIONERS



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FROM THE NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION



Kate Henderson
Chief Executive
National Housing Federation

“If you want a great place to live, come to a housing association.”

Ambition to Deliver, 2013

This statement is at the heart of our sector’s vision. Housing associations exist not only to provide great homes, but create great places to live. In this report, the Great Places Commission outlines how housing associations, working with partners, can realise this vision – including in some of the country’s most disadvantaged places.

Condensing more than a year’s worth of conversations, insight and evidence into 10 recommendations is no mean feat. The Great Places Commission has devoted a huge amount of time and energy to understanding the obstacles and opportunities faced by places in the North and the Midlands. They are challenging the sector to think differently and ambitiously about our potential to drive positive change, explore new ways of working and forge new partnerships.

With the right support from the Government, our sector can do so much more. We can be even more ambitious, we can deliver even better results for people and for communities.

The upcoming Spending Review is a chance to get this right once and for all. It’s a chance to bring our country back together, invest in the places that need it most and realise the potential of communities across the country. We can’t afford to miss this opportunity.



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

In March 2018, the National Housing Federation brought together a group of 12 leaders from across the housing association sector with direct experience of placemaking and regeneration in the North and the Midlands.

The Great Places Commission was asked to:

- explore the characteristics that contribute to thriving and resilient communities
- make recommendations for how housing associations, national and local government, and other key partners, can collaborate to make these a reality.

It was decided that the Commission's work should focus on urban areas in the North and the Midlands. This responds to concerns about a lack of focus in national policy on places where the housing challenges are not those of pent-up demand and growth pressure. There seems to be little effective national response to issues of decline and disinvestment faced by many places in the North and Midlands.

Despite the geographical focus of our work, many of our recommendations and findings will be applicable in places across the country.

“As housing associations, if we want to offer great places to live, we would do well to capture the energies, skills and knowledge of our communities and engage them in responding to the issues they face.”

Sonia Thompson, former Board Member at Tuntum Housing and Great Places Commissioner

ACTIVITIES, MARCH 2018 – FEBRUARY 2019

The Commission carried out a series of visits to places in the North and the Midlands, and the Federation hosted a number of member workshops to gather input and feedback on the Commission's work.

MARCH 2018

Commission visit to Liverpool City Region, North West.



MAY 2018

Commission visit to Dewsbury and Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire and the Humber.



JUNE 2018

Member workshops in Coventry, Leeds and Newcastle.



JULY 2018

Commission visit to Nottingham and Derby, East Midlands.



OCTOBER 2018

Commission visit to Middlesbrough, Seaham and Gateshead, North East.



NOVEMBER 2018

Publication of the Great Places Commission's interim report.



DECEMBER 2018

Commission visit to Walsall, Birmingham and Coventry, West Midlands.



FEBRUARY 2019

Member workshops in Manchester, Nottingham and York.





REGENERATION TO REBUILD A NATION

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Over the past year, we have seen the positive impact previous national regeneration programmes have had on people and places across the North and Midlands. These substantial, targeted, government-supported interventions were essential when there was no prospect of the market delivering the decent homes and sustainable places we want everyone to enjoy. We have also seen, however, that such market failures still exist in many places and have contributed to a sense of distance, disappointment and distrust felt by many towards 'the system'.

Since 2011, the Government has retreated from major local initiatives and holistic national programmes for physical and social regeneration. Its focus has instead favoured areas of higher demand and growth, widening the wealth and opportunity gap between these and 'left behind' places. Initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine are welcome, but their ambition has not been matched by resources.¹

We have been unable to ascertain the effectiveness or impact of private sector growth-led initiatives due to a lack of evaluation.² But what we have seen are places in which current government policy provides no answer or solution to obvious and damaging market failures. This cannot continue.

“Some areas need much more than new build housing to help them prosper. These places need proper jobs, skills training, patient, long-term capital investment, and sometimes more radical solutions.”

Sinéad Butters, Group Chief Executive of Aspire Housing, Chair of PlaceShapers, and Great Places Commissioner

OUR VIEW

A holistic approach is needed, which combines physical and social regeneration, paying equal attention to people and place-based outcomes. This approach should reflect wider government policies around health, employment, environment and prosperity. It should complement mainstream provision, and lever in private investment where possible.

The new approach should also be realistic about the time required to transform some places and commit for the long term.

Inspired by our findings, the National Housing Federation commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to evaluate different approaches to regeneration. It found that such investment returned benefits worth several times their cost.³

This research, along with the evidence this Commission has gathered, leads us to conclude that the Government must create a new national regeneration programme. The £1.6bn Stronger Towns Fund is a small step in the right direction – and the Shared Prosperity Fund may help further – but more significant and long-term investment is needed.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

The Government should develop an ambitious new national regeneration strategy backed by £10bn of additional investment over a decade. It should explicitly prioritise places and people in greatest need, and should support housing investment alongside related economic, social and physical activity.

The new strategy and resources should be:

- long-term – running for a minimum of 10 years
- delivered locally by a diverse range of partners who are guided by meaningful community input
- additional to existing programmes and spending (including EU Structural Funds, which need to be fully matched by their replacement – the long-promised Shared Prosperity Fund)
- holistic – spanning economic, social and physical priorities (including housing, health and wellbeing), and with the flexibility to deliver solutions tailored to local requirements
- designed with monitoring and evaluation built in from the outset.



“At Castle Vale we have adopted a tenant-led approach to community regeneration and local housing management for the last 20 years. This has seen our estate transformed through the investment of a Housing Action Trust and the continued support of a community based housing association. This means we have been able to sustain the benefits for our community by ensuring that we are investing not just in bricks and mortar, but in the whole neighbourhood, including the provision of youth and family support services, community development, money advice and CCTV.

Our challenge now is building on the culture and practice we have shaped in Castle Vale bringing in new resident leaders who can take the baton from us and find new ways of engaging using digital and social media tools.”

Sue Spicer, resident and Board Member, Castle Vale



CASTLE VALE, BIRMINGHAM

The Commission visited the Birmingham suburb of Castle Vale, which is a good example of the value of long-term commitment to holistic regeneration.

In the early 1990s, faced with chronic social, economic and physical problems, Castle Vale was designated a Housing Action Trust area, with a 12-year remit to regenerate the estate, including through large-scale reconstruction. This long-term commitment has resulted in positive outcomes for health, employment and crime rates – in some cases overtaking city averages, where it once lagged behind.

The regeneration process has continued under the oversight of Castle Vale Community Housing Association, now part of the Pioneer Group. The association sees its role as supporting the long-term success of the area, with a focus on community development, health and employment, as well as ongoing maintenance. This is reflected in the views of Castle Vale's residents – with 92% stating they were satisfied with the area as a place to live in 2017/18.

Coincidentally, 92% of residents also voted for the Housing Action Trust in 1993, such was the level of dissatisfaction with the area at the time.



Find out more: www.cvch.org.uk





HEALING THE CUTS TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

In every place we visited, local authorities are performing an invaluable role – often leading, and always supporting, efforts to help people and places in need.

We understand the difficulties local authorities face – austerity has severely limited their ability to drive local regeneration and renewal. Central funding for local authorities has decreased by over 30% per head in real terms in this decade.⁴ This is more than any other element of Government spending. The Local Government Association (LGA) estimates that there will be an £8bn funding gap for local authorities by 2025.⁵

The impact of these cuts is magnified in the kinds of places we visited. The Centre for Cities found that urban areas have been hit twice as hard by these cuts as elsewhere,⁶ and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) North report found that, in the North and the Midlands, overall public spending fell by £6.3bn between 2010/11 and 2017/18. At the same time, spending in the South increased by £3.2bn.⁷

Statutory services – notably social care – are consuming greater shares of local spending. Consequently, 79% of councils have reduced their housing spend – a third by over 50%. In terms of economic development, the National Audit Office estimated that local authority net spending fell by 68% between 2010/11 and 2015/16.⁸

As with overall spending, the North has been hit hardest by cuts to placemaking services: housing spend fell by 84% in real terms⁹ between 2010/11 and 2017/18, compared with 43% elsewhere.

“Local public sector organisations are no longer resourced to make a meaningful impact in their own communities, and interventions in failing housing markets are exceptionally expensive.”

Kevin Parkes,
Executive Director of Growth and Place at Middlesbrough Council



Overall public spending in the North and the Midlands fell by £6.3bn between 2010/11 and 2017/18 – while spending in the South increased by £3.2bn.

Source: IPPR North

OUR VIEW

Austerity has seen a sustained reduction in the ability of local places to shape their own futures. This is particularly true for places where the need for regeneration is greatest.

It need not – and must no longer – be this way. Thriving, healthy places, with vibrant and successful communities, require strong, well-resourced local authorities to support them.

An end to central government cuts is essential. Yet proposals to reform central government funding¹⁰ threaten already hard-pressed urban authorities in the North and Midlands even further by reducing support based on need.¹¹

OUR RECOMMENDATION

With 2019/20 being the last year of the current funding settlement, the Government must provide local authorities with a sustainable future funding settlement. This is essential so they can rebuild their capacity and skills, enabling them to lead and coordinate placemaking across every community.



Housing spend in the North
fell by 84%
between 2010/11 and
2017/18 – compared
with 43% elsewhere.

Source: BBC

AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS, DURHAM CITY COUNCIL

Durham City Council's Action Area Partnerships give local people and organisations a say on how services are provided.

There are currently 14 partnerships in the county, consisting of members of the public, and representatives from the county, town and parish councils, police, fire, health, housing, business, university and voluntary organisations.

The partnerships:

- work with communities and organisations to identify priorities and solutions
- allocate funding to local organisations and support their development
- monitor the impact of funding on communities
- ensure communities can get involved in the partnership's work.



Find out more: www.durham.gov.uk/article/1960/About-AAPs





POWER TO THE PLACEMAKERS

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

We are all influenced by the places around us. We respond positively to well-designed, energy efficient and spacious homes in well-planned and maintained surroundings with good access to facilities and connections.

Unfortunately, many places aren't like this. Too many people suffer with poor-quality housing, sometimes in rundown or badly designed neighbourhoods, and lack the spaces, services and connections they need to sustain a good quality of life.

These problems are not insurmountable. We have seen places repurposed and revitalised through holistic strategy, long-term commitment and intelligent and inclusive design.

Funding alone is not enough to ensure sustainable success. Good design is also essential. Numerous sources of guidance exist (including many produced by housing associations) – yet our investment and planning systems afford them little priority.

Major physical regeneration is not always necessary. In many places, other smaller interventions and forms of support are the priority. A recurring theme from our conversations with residents has been the importance of accessible, pleasant and open spaces – inside and outside – where people can meet, learn, relax and enjoy themselves. We held many of our resident workshops in such spaces and believe them to be essential for developing a sense of community.



“I challenge all those involved in designing and building new neighbourhoods to see them through the eyes of a child... if we can do this, we will start to build housing developments that have a human scale and make walking and socialising a natural choice.”

**Helen Forman, Senior Design Officer,
Leeds City Council, and Board Member,
Connect Housing**



OUR VIEW

Many housing associations are grappling with the challenges of revitalising under-performing places in the face of adversity. As commissioners, developers and managers of millions of homes across the country, housing associations play an important role in encouraging and prioritising high-quality, inclusive and people-centred placemaking.

Successful placemaking may involve major physical redevelopment, as we encountered in Birmingham and Nottingham. Housing associations, with their long-term stakes in places, are well placed in many areas to lead such processes. But in other areas, where local authorities are no longer able to lead regeneration, and while private sector development often seeks to minimise long-term design quality as a short-term cost, it can be difficult for good placemaking to prevail.

Strong national and local planning policy, and conditions attached to public sector funding, can be powerful tools to encourage good design. Working with communities from the beginning of the process, and subsequently throughout, will help identify the right design and secure support for it.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

The Government should introduce mandatory good design standards for all new development, including homes and wider placemaking.

There is much more to discuss about the detail – but what is needed now is the commitment.

“If we shift the conversation to talking about ‘homes’ not ‘units’, we will adopt a different mindset. Rather than looking at the numbers on a spreadsheet, we’ll focus more on what’s best for the people who are going to be living there, and what will create the most homely environment.”

Nick Murphy, Chief Executive,
Nottingham City Homes

THRIVE, DEWSBURY

The Commission hosted one of its resident workshops at Connect Housing's Thrive centre in Dewsbury. Thrive is a community interest café and space that hosts events and offers spaces for residents to meet and relax. It also showcases local talent, including through regular art exhibitions.

Thrive offers low-cost or free sessions for local people, including music therapy, crafts and a support group for people experiencing chronic pain. It also rents spaces and serves locally sourced food. Both the venue and café operate as social enterprises, with all profits reinvested in its community work.



Find out more: www.thriveatconnect.org





LIVING WITH THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

A consistent issue raised throughout our conversations, particularly with local authority colleagues, was the challenges presented by the private rented sector (PRS).

While private renting is a positive choice for some, it is the tenure of last resort for many. This was particularly evident on our visits to Middlesbrough, Liverpool and Nottingham. In addition to the PRS being the sector with the greatest concentration of substandard homes,¹² problems arise with both landlords and tenants at the lower end of the market. A recent study by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health revealed 'poor property conditions and the presence of unscrupulous, exploitative landlords'¹³ – a finding echoed in a recent select committee report.¹⁴

Clusters of poor-quality PRS homes can also lead to concentrations of households with complex issues or in need of additional support. We have seen neighbourhoods where absentee landlords have little interest in contributing to the management or reputation of an area, undermining the local authority's or housing associations' efforts to improve it.

OUR VIEW

Many powers exist for managing the PRS but their application is often complex, expensive and inconsistent. Even if convictions can be secured, they are often minor in comparison with the extensive work required. Two-thirds of local authorities did not prosecute a single landlord in 2018¹⁵ (although it is important to note that much can be achieved without litigation).

Local licensing schemes are one of the more powerful tools available to local authorities seeking to exert more control over their local PRS. Around 50 are now at various stages of implementation across the country. Establishing these schemes is a complex and resource-hungry operation, however, which has deterred councils from making more use of the powers.

National PRS landlord registration would achieve some of the benefits of greater visibility and legal compliance with a lower cost than full licensing schemes. Scotland and Wales have such registers. Selective licensing schemes could still be deployed where needed, with a national register providing a good foundation for these.

“In some of our town centre areas, it’s unusual to find people resident for more than a year. This obviously really mitigates against building strong communities and having a clear strategy to improving the quality of housing.”

Professor Paul Crawshaw, Teesside University

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Our call for local authorities to be better resourced would help councils make more use of powers already available. However, we also support improved management of the PRS through:

- the introduction of a mandatory national landlord register
- more flexibility for councils to establish local licensing schemes.

Housing associations should consider how they can help councils establish and manage local schemes, perhaps by sharing intelligence, seconding staff or offering property management services.

“There is a clear link to be drawn between the rise of the PRS and the transience of the population and breakdown of strong communities.”

Kevin Parkes,
Executive Director of Growth
and Place, Middlesbrough Council

REVIVING EMPTY HOMES IN NORTH ORMESBY



North Ormesby is an inner-city neighbourhood in Middlesbrough that faces problems of poor-quality housing, empty homes, absentee landlords and severe economic pressures.

Middlesbrough Council has teamed up with housing association Thirteen Group and North Ormesby Community Land Trust to invest in existing housing stock and bring empty homes back into use. At the time of the Commission's visit (December 2018) there were 27 properties being renovated to a high standard and re-let to people with a local connection and commitment to investing in the community.



It is hoped that this significant investment will generate a ripple effect in the neighbourhood, encouraging other landlords to invest in their own stock, while also creating employment and training opportunities for young people.





INTEGRATING WITH ECONOMIC REGENERATION

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The Government's Industrial Strategy (2017) is the policy framework for improving regional growth and reducing gaps in productivity. It usefully identifies five foundations of productivity – 'people' and 'places', alongside 'ideas', 'infrastructure' and 'the business environment'.

At local level, the national Industrial Strategy will be delivered through Local Industrial Strategies, developed by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) or mayoral combined authorities.

This Commission has engaged with this important policy agenda at national and local level. We met the Government and shadow ministers and discussed local strategies with stakeholders in the Midlands and the North. Engagement between housing associations and Local Industrial Strategy partners seems to vary – there are examples of clear collaboration, such as in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, but also instances where LEPs and housing associations are hardly connected.



EU funds significantly contributed to regional growth in the UK, particularly in poorer areas, including many parts of the North and the Midlands.

Source: LSE

OUR VIEW

We welcome the Government's ambition for growth and prosperity in all parts of the UK, and we believe the Industrial Strategy, alongside other programmes and funds, can help. However, Local Industrial Strategies must:

- Focus on inclusive growth. This requires a greater understanding of who is driving, accessing and benefitting from growth and opportunities, and how economically struggling places can be better connected with growth opportunities.
- Be people-focused and developed in partnership with local communities, anchor institutions and other stakeholders. Based on our experience, these strategies currently have limited visibility with the communities, housing associations, or voluntary and third sector organisations they should impact on.
- Be properly resourced. It is currently unclear what resources will be available to deliver local priorities.

The Industrial Strategy, its emerging Local Industrial Strategies, and the promised Shared Prosperity Fund, should build on the approach of EU Structural Funds in targeting people and places with the greatest need. Research by the London School of Economics (LSE) found that EU funds 'significantly contributed to regional growth in the UK, particularly in poorer areas', including many parts of the North and Midlands. The LSE also reported that 'development policy works better not when concentrating on enhancing regional advantages, but rather when focusing on remedying regional disadvantages... with more emphasis on place-based, tailored interventions that are more sensitive to local characteristics'.¹⁶

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Complementing our call for a major new commitment to holistic regeneration, we believe the Government should require Local Industrial Strategies to include the role of housing – including affordable housing – in physical, economic and social regeneration. This should be coordinated with investment in transport and other infrastructure.

“Feeling contented and connected is what I think makes a great place to live. You might be happy because you feel safe, or you can see greenery, or there are things to do, or because you can access a good education or find a job.”

Ian Wardle, Chief Executive of Thirteen Group and Great Places Commissioner



What is inclusive growth?

It has often been assumed that economic growth benefits everyone. In recent years, however, this has come under increased scrutiny as wages have stagnated, social and spatial inequalities have widened, and social mobility has dwindled. **Inclusive growth** has become a popular term for economic growth which is distributed fairly across society, creating opportunities for all. It is concerned with the distribution of growth as well as its scale.



GOSCOTE LANE CORRIDOR REGENERATION, WALSALL

By tapping into Black Country LEP's economic growth ambitions, Midlands-based housing association whg managed to secure funding for the Goscote Lane Corridor regeneration scheme.

The scheme, developed over three phases, will deliver more than 800 new homes in Walsall. The project was accompanied by environment and infrastructure improvements to adjacent public space, as well as delivering employment and training opportunities for local people.



Find out more: www.housing.org.uk/goscote-lane





**BETTER TOGETHER –
ONE PLACE, ONE SECTOR,
ONE PURPOSE**

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

We have been inspired by the passion, energy and expertise of housing association staff working in communities to support positive local change. At an organisational level, we have seen many associations acting as anchor institutions, and feel there is value in understanding the sector's role and impact from this perspective.

Our sector is well placed to rise to the challenges and work with partners to develop new solutions. But we must be clear and consistent about our purpose and uphold the highest standards of leadership and practice.

We have seen examples of housing associations of different sizes working in the same areas and exploring effective ways to collaborate. Conversely, we have also encountered examples of some associations failing to collaborate well and appearing disengaged from local priorities. This is a view held by some external stakeholders too.

“We must work with those who share our ambitions, like the people we met [on the Great Places Commission visits] because they'll be living with the result of our efforts long after the building contractors have left.”

Kevin Rodgers,
Chief Executive of Citizen and
Great Places Commissioner

OUR VIEW

In recent years, housing associations have been through a process of consolidation. We don't believe any particular type or size of association is better or more efficient than the rest. However, big constitutional changes, such as mergers and amalgamations, can have a considerable impact on local perceptions and relationships.

One of the issues we repeatedly encountered was how best to approach great placemaking where multiple associations are represented in one place. There was considerable interest in the potential of a Lead, Influence, Follow, Exit (LIFE) model as a framework for housing associations to use when developing partnerships and agreeing priorities in an area.



Anchor institutions are organisations that, in addition to their core functions, deliver significant benefits to the wider local economy. Anchor institutions tend to be major employers and spenders, often with strong local ties. They are usually not-for-profit organisations, such as local authorities, universities and hospitals, although some private businesses may also be considered 'anchors'. We believe many housing associations are – or could be – anchor institutions in the places they operate.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Housing associations should commit to cross-sector partnership in each local area. Strategic collaboration, combined with on-the-ground community partnerships, can focus leadership, amplify the sector's impact in each community, and promote efficiency and innovation.

Based on our extensive discussions, there is clear support for the LIFE model. The challenge will be its practical implementation. We believe there is an important role for the Federation and associations already organised into local partnerships to promote new ways of working and share best practice.



The Lead, Influence, Follow, Exit (LIFE) model is a collaboration model in which different partners each play a specific role – or choose to step back – based on an assessment of their expertise and resources.

Its benefits include:

- promoting place-based collaboration and partnership while recognising that different organisations have different priorities and play different roles locally
- making best use of limited resources by identifying specific roles and making local delivery more efficient
- recognising the different skills and expertise held by each organisation and providing a framework to maximise these
- Providing a clear route for engagement with external stakeholders.

SECTOR PARTNERSHIP BUILD SALFORD

Founded by a partnership of four local housing providers, contractors and education providers, the Build Salford traineeship programme is laying the foundations for a successful career in construction for young people in the city.

Build Salford targets NEETs aged 16-24, with recruits taking part in an intensive 12-week programme where they learn classroom-based employability skills as well as on-the-job training in a range of disciplines from plumbing to plastering. The majority go on to secure an apprenticeship.

Now in its third year, the initiative has grown to 17 partners across the city, including a number of Greater Manchester Housing Provider members. Build Salford is a huge success story, in a city that has the highest NEET levels in the region, transforming the lives of young people, and proving just what can be achieved when the sector collaborates among itself and with others.



Find out more: www.salfordcc.ac.uk/blog/2017/03/10/build-salford-construct-your-future-with-fantastic-traineeship-opportunities





THINKING LOCAL, ACTING LOCAL

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Some of the most inspiring activity we have seen is taking place at grassroots level, delivered by 'hyper-local' institutions which are fully in tune with their place's needs. Rooted in the local area but also connected more widely, these organisations enjoy a level of reach and trust within the local community that others can often only aspire to. This connectedness and commitment can be invaluable when supporting people facing complex challenges.

Housing associations have a proud history of community development, and are among the largest remaining employers of community development officers in the country. There are many examples of housing associations – as well as local authorities and others – working well with community groups. But we believe there is an opportunity to do more and to do better.

“What would happen if we turned the conversation from ‘what’s wrong’ to ‘what’s strong’?”

Chris Chinnock,
Head of Business Development,
Nurture Development

OUR VIEW

Our sector can make a difference in communities, not only through the physical provision of quality affordable housing, but also by investing resources and expertise in the communities we serve.

Successful community development requires genuine partnership with communities and residents, sharing power and influence to deliver better outcomes and sustainable change. Commitment to community development can capitalise on existing social capital and infrastructure, address gaps where they exist, and demonstrate that institutions are genuinely committed to working with people in the long term.



Asset-based community development¹⁷ is an approach to working with communities that focuses on strengths and assets, rather than problems and deficits. It is a 'glass half-full' approach that usually focuses on local areas, developing people's local knowledge and relationships, and seeking inclusive solutions.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

All community anchor institutions, including housing associations, should apply asset-based community development approaches. These approaches identify and mobilise a community's strengths and target resources accordingly – with the objective of ensuring that services promoting wellbeing and opportunity are delivered effectively to those who need them most.

“We should ensure communities are engaged from the outset, then taken on the journey as matters progress. This approach will also transform community activists into advocates – rather than opponents.”

Steve Coffey,
Group Chief Executive of Torus
and Great Places Commissioner



Feedback from residents at our community workshop in Liverpool, March 2018.





**NOWHERE, NO ONE AND
NO HOME 'LEFT BEHIND'**

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

One of the most emotive issues raised during our visits was property disposal. This is a complex issue, with asset management decisions driven by a wide range of business considerations. Property disposals are a legitimate tool, but one that needs to be deployed with care, and with regard for the impact on – and perceptions of – those remaining in and responsible for an area.

OUR VIEW

Our sector needs to manage its assets effectively and ensure resources are deployed in the right way, in line with our social purpose. We consulted with housing associations following our interim report about what an 'ethical disposals policy' could involve, and how it could successfully balance the financial and operational needs of associations with local community interests and priorities.

We believe explicit ethical disposals policies could be a helpful way of communicating the sector's principles and values in this important area, by setting out how such processes should be managed. Housing association boards, staff, residents and other stakeholders would decide how the policy relates to their organisation, and whether existing practice is consistent with it.



What might an ethical disposals policy look like?

Housing associations have a responsibility to ensure they maximise their assets and resources to achieve their social objectives. This may require them to consider the homes they manage and the best use for these going forward. Sometimes, the recommended action will be to sell the property.

In this case, housing associations should:

- Be clear and transparent about the rationale for the sale and communicate this to residents and local stakeholders.
- In the first instance, seek to sell the property to another housing association, the local authority or a local community, voluntary or charitable organisation.
- Where this is not possible, it will explore alternative options including community asset transfer or conversion to a community asset.
- A last resort will be to sell on the open market, attaching conditions to ensure the property and its occupants are a positive presence in the area.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission recommends housing association boards review their approach to disposals to ensure an ethical approach and the best outcomes for local communities.

“There is little point being the landlord of properties where nobody wants to live. Nor is it good stewardship of the homes we have spent large sums building and maintaining to allow the social fabric of the community around them to decline and decay. Above all, we cannot serve our tenants and residents well if we do not do what we can to contribute to their wellbeing outside the home as well as within it.”

Dr David Walker,
Bishop of Manchester,
Chair of Wythenshawe Community
Housing Group and Great Places
Commissioner

STAFFORD AND RURAL HOMES, STAFFORD

In June 2019, housing association Stafford and Rural Homes purchased 154 homes and a community hub from Clarion Housing Group, as part of a bidding process.

The process involved active consultation with residents already living in the homes, and Stafford and Rural Homes is planning a number of events to provide its new customers with further information about the services it provides.

The housing association has strong local ties in Stafford, with a representative from Clarion Housing Group commenting that “as part of a review of our homes and communities, Stafford was identified as an area where customers should have the opportunity to move to a housing association that has a larger presence locally”.



Find out more: www.sarh.co.uk/stafford-rural-homes-acquires-150-homes-national-housing-group





MAKING THE MOST OF OUR MONEY – SMARTER SPENDING

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Housing associations are major spenders locally, regionally and nationally, particularly in the construction and asset management and maintenance sectors. Collectively, the sector manages assets worth £155bn, and last year invested £12.5bn in new and existing homes.¹⁸

This spending, in pursuit of our core provision of affordable housing for those who need it, is valuable in and of itself. But we should always seek to maximise our impact. Better focusing our spending is one of the most tangible ways housing associations can increase their local social and economic benefit.

We encountered an often stated desire to achieve social and economic goals through smarter procurement. However, the complexity of organisations and/or the dilution of the message and the understanding means this desire is not always realised. Common challenges include: the dominance of headline cost (including administration cost); aversion to perceived risk; limited weight or measurability attached to wider targets; and lack of leadership priority.



The housing association sector
invested £12.5bn
last year in new and existing
homes.

Source: Regulator for Social Housing

OUR VIEW

There is scope for housing associations to utilise their spending power to create positive change in their local economy. Key to achieving this will be senior-level commitment, translated meaningfully through core procurement practice – rather than as an optional ‘add on’.

There is growing interest in the potential of ‘community wealth-building’ strategies. Through community wealth-building, anchor institutions use their spending power, workforce strategies and asset management practice to influence the way their local economy functions so that wealth doesn’t flow out but is instead recirculated to the benefit of local communities.

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies is one of the foremost exponents of the community wealth-building approach, for which it identifies five key principles:

- Plural ownership of the economy by encouraging diverse business ownership in supply chains.
- Making financial power work for local places, including through investment of pension funds into local priorities and diversifying sources of investment.
- Fair employment and just labour markets, including recruitment from lower income areas, paying the living wage and creating progression routes for all staff.
- Progressive procurement of goods and services via robust social value frameworks, tailored to local priorities.
- Socially productive use of land and property, particularly that owned by anchor institutions.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

The Commission recommends housing associations embed wider community benefit requirements in their procurement and asset management strategies.

These should maximise the potential of associations' spend and resources to capture and recirculate wealth in local communities. This can be achieved through the development of dense local supply chains of local, ethical and social enterprises and ensuring the socially productive use of land and property. Wealth-building strategies,

building on the likes of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies' work, provide an opportunity to maximise associations' impact in every area.

We recognise these changes are not something that can just be 'switched on'. It is important for housing associations to nurture, develop and support their supply chains and partners as well as their internal functions if they are to achieve the desired outcomes – which include retaining value for money and service quality.

THE ATHENA PARTNERSHIP, GREATER MANCHESTER

Athena is a partnership of 17 Greater Manchester-based housing associations. It was set up to deliver training, employment and skills initiatives for tenants and residents across Greater Manchester and the North West.

Through collaboration and capacity-building, Athena delivers a range of programmes, such as Skills For Employment (SFE), funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), and Big Lottery/ESF-funded Motiv8 (BBO). The partnership creates significant opportunities for marginalised people and removes barriers to their future prospects.

SFE has delivered 692 work placements, 125 qualifications, and helped 263 participants move into jobs.

Motiv8 has worked with 2,649 participants and recorded a total of 5,719 outcomes, which are recorded against health and wellbeing, finance and employability, and self-confidence and self-development.

COMMUNITY GATEWAY, PRESTON

Based in Preston, Community Gateway Association (CGA) was formed in 2005 through the transfer of council homes. CGA was an early partner in Preston's pioneering local wealth-building strategy.

The approach fitted well with CGA's ethos – it was already the largest cooperative in Preston and had been using its procurement creatively before it became a city-wide approach. As a community based organisation this approach is something that is embedded into the culture of CGA through its day-to-day activities. For example, CGA brought its repairs and grounds maintenance service in-house, giving it more direct control over the labour and materials used to support these services. CGA continues to increase the services it delivers in-house having recently expanded the repairs service. It now carries out more than two-thirds of its investment programme.



Find out more: www.communitygateway.co.uk/the-gateway-model





ENGAGING WITH LOCAL INDUSTRIAL STRATEGIES

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

In earlier recommendations, we called for the Government to make housing a component of emerging Local Industrial Strategies and for a national regeneration strategy to include support for housing investment.

Good housing in the right places is important for many reasons – not simply to provide decent homes for all, but to help reinvigorate and reinvent struggling places, link workers and businesses with opportunities and customers, and because the investment can generate further, positive economic effects.

Many – perhaps most – housing associations look to provide support for employability (e.g. apprenticeships or training for qualifications) through their construction and maintenance activities. Some have accessed external funding, such as through the European Social Fund.

OUR VIEW

Investment in housing can be used to create economic opportunities for local people and businesses – these are best designed as part of a wider strategy for the area, including others' investments in people and places.

We think there is scope to bring together and magnify the impact of the sector's activity in this area through more active involvement in Local Industrial Strategies. The pioneer strategies for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands have been shaped by consortia of associations for whom the Local Industrial Strategy (and mayoral backing) provided a useful platform for collaboration.

Housing associations should make the most of the opportunity in each area. Even where housing is not prioritised through the Local Industrial Strategy, other investment creates opportunities for associations and others to tap into – for example for training and employability, community investment and dividends.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

The Commission recommends that housing associations proactively engage with local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to ensure affordable housing is central to Local Industrial Strategies. Better alignment of employment and infrastructure policy with affordable housing will enhance prospects for inclusive growth.

COLLABORATION IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

More than 30 housing associations in the West Midlands formed a partnership to engage with the new Combined Authority and mayor.

Their offer is highly relevant to the mayor's Local Industrial Strategy, and engagement was streamlined by allocating leadership roles across six themes to one or two associations. For example – and reflecting on the good practice this Commission found on our visits – leadership for 'skills and productivity' sits with Pioneer Group and whg.

The West Midlands Local Industrial Strategy – with many great placemaking commitments – was published in May 2019. Greater Manchester's strategy, which was also supported by a housing provider partnership, followed in June.



Find out more: <https://wmhap.org.uk>





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- Home Group
- Liverpool Mutual Homes
- North Star Housing Group
- Nottingham City Homes
- Pioneer Group
- Riverside Group
- Thirteen
- whg

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- Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust
- Kirklees Council
- Leeds City Council
- Liverpool City Council
- Local Partnerships
- Marketing Derby
- Middlesbrough Council
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NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION

The National Housing Federation is the voice of housing associations in England. Our vision is a country where everyone can live in a good quality home they can afford.

Our members provide two and a half million homes for six million people. And each year they invest in a diverse range of neighbourhood projects that help create strong, vibrant communities.

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