The expanding role of social landlords in supporting tenants’ employment

Lynsey Boother, Adviser to Give Us A Chance (GUAC) lynsey@giveusachance.co.uk

This paper discusses in brief the expanding role of social landlords in moving beyond a narrow focus on the provision of housing toward finding ways of supporting their tenants into work and improving life outcomes. It sets out current examples of programmes being led by social landlords, working in partnership with welfare, employment, and local government services, to support disadvantaged residents into sustained employment. It concludes by introducing the Joint Plan for Housing and Employment that calls for greater integration and partnerships between these sectors.

Why are social landlords involved in employment services?

Housing associations provide two and a half million homes for more than five million people in England. They see it as part of their business to invest in helping to create strong, vibrant communities and support the health and wellbeing of their residents.

In a National Housing Federation survey, carried out by Ipsos MORI, about a third (32%) of housing associations saw supporting their residents, and the wider community, into employment, education or training as a top priority for their organisation.1

Employment support does not only help tenants by enabling them to keep up with their bills and rent, but it also secures long-term rental income for the housing association. 61% of housing associations expected their employment and skills support to increase in direct response to the introduction of Universal Credit.2

The introduction of UC and the context for wider welfare reforms heralds the largest shake up of business plans amongst social housing landlords in a generation and supports both a (traditional) ‘social’ and (increasingly) a ‘commercial’ imperative for housing associations to support more people into employment.

---

1 Ipsos MORI, National Housing Federation commissioned research, October 2014
The welfare reforms introduced over the past five years (caps on maximum benefit claims, removal of spare room subsidies to landlords - ‘the bedroom tax’ – a review of supported housing costs etc) result in reductions in housing association income by up to 12% over the next 4 years. This creates dual, opposing pressures – to cut costs now, or to invest in supporting more tenants into work – a position that protects benefits, especially housing benefit, thus creating security for social landlords in the longer term. The social housing sector is split on how it addresses these pressures, but all have an interest in supporting thriving communities, into work and out of poverty. The issue of in-work poverty is a reality and the employment and housing sectors need to extend consideration to programmers that can address this over the coming years too.

Housing associations remain in a strong position to contribute to the employment support programmes because they:

• have a unique relationship with their residents
• operate in some of our most deprived areas
• take a long-term approach to working with their residents and the communities in which their homes are based
• are major employers in their own right, with established supply chains which can provide further employment opportunities

**Examples of programmes run by social landlords:**

The following case studies are extracted from a report commissioned by the National Housing Federation, undertaken by Lynsey Boother in Jan-Apr 2016. [http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Integration_report.pdf](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Integration_report.pdf)

**Key findings:**

- Housing associations are having increasing success at leveraging in external funding to invest in their employment support activities with a number of new government funding opportunities on the horizon.
- Housing associations share customers with employment and skills providers and have a common ambition to support them. By working more closely and integrating services tenants can benefit from a more joined up pathway towards employment.
- A significant percentage of the organisations which provided information on initiatives had direct experience of delivering Work Programme (25%) and European Social Fund projects (25%).
- 44% of initiatives received external funding, either partial or full.
- At the time of fieldwork, 78% of initiatives running in 2014/15 were due to continue into 2015/16 – a positive picture given new challenges within our sector.

---

Selected Case studies:

**Affinity Sutton**: We looked at Work Programme delivery as a subcontractor to People Plus up to April 2017, apprenticeships, and the pan London housing consortium led by Affinity Sutton bidding for external Greater London Assembly/European Social Fund (ESF) contracts (this is now live, called Love London Working). Affinity Sutton have strong internal support and funding for these areas of work and are also securing more than 20% further funding from other sources, competitively tendered for and reported upon to external commissioners. They run apprenticeships through annual target start numbers and divide this target between internal appointments and subcontractor appointments, encouraging HR departments to consider apprenticeships as appropriate to all entry-level posts as standard. Affinity Sutton use an integral community investment database to track all their activity, develop all KPIs, monitor the activity on sub-contractors’ obligations, and report to their board.

**Athena**: Grown from a loose consortium of north west based housing associations, Athena has evolved into a special purpose organisation (with a board of directors) designed to coordinate bidding activity across the region and partners, thus reducing negative competition between housing associations in any given funding round and maximising chances of success. Athena sets up specialist working groups drawn from members and potential partners to focus on particular bidding opportunities so that it can react to all current opportunities effectively. Athena had strong start up support from New Charter, now 12 housing associations are on board, supporting growth through a modest annual subscription so that a dedicated bid lead is present in Athena, now building in future support costs into the bid budgets for sustainability. Athena is having success, securing Big Lottery Fund round two monies and looking to ESF and Local Enterprise Partnership based commissions in 2016.

**B3 Living**: We looked at two different partnerships; a local Skills Group and a split funded Troubled Families programme. The Skills Group is supported by B3 Living through a contribution of staff time, training activity and partnership development leads to tenants and residents. Local JobCentre Plus (JCP) offices and the local college have joined forces with B3 Living to drive up engagement with local employers, moving from quite passive models of referrals to JCP for job seekers, to local employer market warming events, meetings, briefings and work-based training programmes leading to guaranteed job interviews for participants with target employers. This proactive approach is seeing hundreds of B3 Living residents gain employment. The Troubled Families programme costs are split between B3 Living and the local authority, recognising the joint mutual interest in bringing a whole service support to families that now includes housing support. B3 Living have a dedicated staff resource in place supported by the contract to reach both tenant families and others in the locality; the contract stretches B3 Living beyond its tenant base in a positive way, raising the profile at the local authority and with other agencies involved.

**Spectrum and the Aster Group**: This partnership developed a local relationship with DWP and JCP officers that has resulted in a unique data sharing partnership between the agencies. By part sharing the costs of a JCP member of staff, the housing associations were able to dedicate the JCP adviser’s case-load time to
working on their tenancy bases, developing and sharing data to track and support shared customers. Using ‘informed consent’ and a data sharing protocol signed off by DWP, the housing partners were able to better understand where their tenants were in the JCP and Work Programme employment support journey, and were better able to provide more intensive support to individuals (at risk of sanction and benefit defaults) to improve their employment chances and become more financially inclusive. This opened up a new set of support services to JCP that had not been previously understood, running through housing associations operating in exactly the same areas but not traditionally included in JCP Adviser’s local referrals information (the District Provision Tool). The data sharing and shared staff resource have integrated services and created cooperation and understanding between co-located partners, improving employment outcomes, and increasing support for those who need it most. Whilst not part of this research, Your Housing Group also share JCP adviser time and extend the support service available to tenants, and Coast & Country have experience of this too. Give us a Chance is in the process of advocating for greater, standard sharing of data and services between JCP and housing, within the DWP.

**The Learning Curve working with Selwood Housing:** Representing a good example of keeping local doors open to partners and speculating on how delivery can be managed, The Learning Curve and Selwood Housing have moved from informal partners to The Learning Curve becoming an independent charitable subsidiary of Selwood Housing. Initial business-led drivers have resulted in an improved, integrated, housing employment and skills support offer across Selwood tenants and the wider community. Selwood sought to diversify their business and broaden its operational agenda. The Learning Curve sought wider corporate support for its flexible, Skills Funding Agency (SFA) contract dependent operations, to bring consistency, back office support and future sustainability to its community learning agenda. With a merger the most definite type of integration, efficiencies have been made, service offers joined up, and funding steams diversified across the business. With housing and employment and skills expertise now under one roof at Selwood, the association and The Learning Curve are in a strong position to deliver on all existing SFA contacts and to compete for more at ESF, DWP, BLF and LEP levels.

**Moving ahead - the Joint Plan for improved partnership working – GUAC and ERSA:**

The Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) and Give Us a Chance (GUAC) launched a housing and employment support services joint plan on 18th May 2016, outlining how joint working between the sectors can be encouraged for the benefit of tenants, residents and whole communities.

ERSA is the representative body for the employment support sector, with over 220 members and GUAC is the leading consortium of social landlords in the employment and skills sector with over 50 members.

The joint plan outlines a four point plan to encourage and facilitate joint working between housing and employment.
The plan calls on Westminster and the devolved administrations to:

1. **Recognise the role of housing associations in employment support.** GUAC and ERSA are calling for greater recognition of the work and investment that housing associations are making to support residents into sustainable work and beyond. Housing association’s have generated over 10,000 apprenticeships over the past three years, and delivered thousands more employment and training opportunities to their tenants and wider communities.

2. **Design programmes with input from frontline experts in the housing sector.** Housing providers are locally trusted partners who have experience and expertise working with their tenant and communities. This expertise should be utilised by commissioners when designing new programmes.

3. **Include housing providers in devolution and service integration discussions.** Often those people accessing public services have multiple needs and are being supported by multiple agencies. All local delivery partners would benefit from stronger alliances and partnerships.

4. **Create a climate that enables information sharing between partner services.** The employment support sector would greatly benefit from knowing the landlord and housing status for the individuals they work with. ERSA and GUAC call on government to ensure that restrictions on sharing data are reduced to facilitate a closer working relationship.

   “Many housing association are already playing a key role in supporting their residents and the local community into work, in many cases working closely with the employment support sector, but more can be done. We need to ensure that the conditions allow for this work to be continued and extended.” **Kirsty McHugh, Chief Executive, ERSA.**

   “The housing sector has the expertise and relationships to be a valuable partner in delivering employment support. The ERSA/GUAC plan calls on governments, whether in Westminster, devolved administrations or regional levels, to support the housing sector to help their residents and the local community into sustainable work and beyond.” **Lynsey Boother, Adviser, GUAC.**

**Joint Plan:**