



Communities that Work – CSR Submission – 2021

About Communities that Work:

Communities that Work aims to transform lives for good as the voice of social landlords which support people into rewarding, sustainable employment. Our members provide over 1.3 million homes across England and Wales and features some of the largest housing associations, as well as the very smallest local providers. Regardless of their location or size, our members are united in their focus on delivering vital support, training, and opportunities to help residents into work and progress in their employment.

As the only housing sector organisation dedicated solely to the employment agenda, we work in strategic alliances and form partnerships with stakeholders across housing, employment and government to achieve our goals. At the heart of our work are our members and their aspirations to support more people from across our communities to thrive in life, through work that rewards and sustains families and the places where they live.

Our recent work

Communities that Work chair the national Housing and Employment Taskforce, launched in March 2020 with housing, employment and youth organisations to provide a joined-up focus on employment-related solutions for social housing residents who have been affected by Covid-19, and facilitate clear lines of communication between the housing and employment sectors and the DWP. The Taskforce led the successful call to Government to provide an “Opportunity Guarantee” to young people and the long term unemployed, backed by [over 250 leaders](#) from the public, charitable and private sectors and by mayors and parliamentarians.

Communities that Work also provide the secretariat for the All-Party Group on Housing and Social Mobility, [whose Inquiry into Housing and Employment](#) launched its findings in October 2020. The key findings of this report show:

- The sector clearly needs funding certainty over key programmes such as the Shared Prosperity Fund and how it would place the ESF monies that have been so important to funding and delivering support.
- A national one size fits all approach fails to deliver for those who need it. Instead, the report recommends that employment support is commissioned, designed, and delivered locally – through local government, housing associations and local bodies.
- The tenure security and affordability provided by social housing may give people the stability they need to create a foundation for success, helping them overcome barriers and in turn secure employment.

The role of housing associations in supporting employment:

The role that housing providers and social landlords play in helping their tenants and communities access meaningful employment opportunities and progress in work is well documented.

Housing providers are the second-biggest investor in employment support after the DWP, contributing an estimated £76 million in for their residents and communities in 2019-20.¹ These

¹The impact of Covid-19 on housing sector led employment support, (Communities that Work, 2021)



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contributions demonstrate the sector's significant and sustained investment in partnerships and programmes focused on helping people into meaningful employment and career progression, and in creating employment and training opportunities through a broad range of service offerings.

During the global Covid-19 crisis and the resulting employment crisis, this supportive and two-way relationship has been more vital than ever for thousands of households across the country, as families in social housing are more likely to face economic hardship than their counterparts in private tenures.

We surveyed 32 housing associations, and the feedback showed us that since the start of the pandemic in March 2020:

- 94% of housing associations reported an increase in residents suffering from economic hardship as a result of Covid-19;
- 88% said the number of tenants reaching out for support with their finances increased;
- 81% have seen the number of tenants reaching out for rent support increase; and
- 69% said the number of tenants reaching out for employment support increased.

These figures are deeply troubling, indicating that those who are already financially vulnerable are falling further behind.

As the Government aims to level up communities across the UK in order to close this widening equality gap, it is vital that sustaining and supporting the work that is being carried out by housing providers to enhance employability, and to train and progress people into work, is an essential part of realising that ambition.²

Levelling up in partnership with housing providers:

This spending review is pivotal to determining the shape of our economy as we begin to build back better. In conjunction with the highly anticipated framework for the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the Government now has the once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine the way we invest in people and place and level up the whole of the UK.

We urge Government to work with the housing sector to amplify its efforts to reduce inequality between communities and empower individuals with the skills and opportunities they need to succeed. The time to act is now.

1. Set up UKSPF for success from the start

Including housing providers' voice and views in shaping the Fund will help make sure it is effective from the start. Housing providers have an extensive history of actively engaging with and working alongside Government to successfully deliver programmes that reduce inequality. Our strong local networks combined with our understanding of the needs of people and places across the UK give us unparalleled insight into how to level up communities. We have trusted relationships with the people and places who UKSPF is aimed at and can shape the Fund with their needs in mind, optimising its impact.

² *Improving Opportunities: How to support social housing tenants into sustainable employment. Report to the APPG on Housing and Social Mobility, (CaCHE, 2020).*



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2. Ringfence funding within UKSPF for housing providers

UKSPF can harness housing providers' unique ability to co-invest in people and place alongside Government by setting aside funding for the sector. Doing so will amplify the Fund's ability to deliver at scale and speed to reach those most in need of support and ensure it delivers with impact through joint investment. This distinctive joint investment opportunity means Government can achieve greater value for money and unprecedented levels of funding can be invested in strengthening communities and employment opportunities. Tapping into housing providers' investment capability also means that in the longer term, more complex and expensive interventions can be supported – with Government needing to provide only a fraction of the cost.

3. Put housing providers at the heart of UKSPF delivery

Housing providers deliver bespoke support that grows local economies based on specific resident and community needs. Greater use of this kind of tailored support which focuses not only on employment opportunities, but also finding out what the individual wants and how to actually get them into a job and give them confidence in their work can help people overcome barriers to employment and in-work progress.³

As community anchors, housing providers connect with the vulnerable and hard-to-reach people every day and work with partners to bridge gaps and create opportunities – ensuring no one is left behind. UKSPF should fully utilise providers' local insight and proven ability to give people the tools they need in order to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth.

4. Cut the red tape

EUSF was overly bureaucratic and siloed in both its access and delivery. Government has the opportunity to give communities of all regions and sizes the chance to level up by designing UKSPF with less bureaucracy and a flexible, place-based approach. This will enable more communities to benefit from the Fund while also providing more effective, better-targeted support that drives stronger success rates.

5. Irradicate digital exclusion to improve employment outcomes.

The ability to function as an adult in society now requires digital access and skills in order to engage, get support, job search and meet employment requirements. Digital access and skills are imperative for social housing tenants to obtain the services they need, secure employment and progress in work.

The need to irradicate digital exclusion is becoming increasingly critical as pandemic has transformed society's ways of working to a system that embraces remote working. In order to reduce inequities and build a workforce for the future, the Government needs to address digital exclusion in relation to adults. Irradicating this digital divide is fundamental to our economic recovery and ability to level up.

³ Ibid.



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6. Support a Green Jobs recovery working with the social housing sector

While meeting the net zero target by 2050 is one of the UK Government's priorities, decarbonisation and retrofitting existing homes to improve EPC ratings play an important role within this initiative.

There is an opportunity to collaborate and engage between the sector and the Government as protecting the environment and decarbonising homes are also the industry's key priority. This initiative also creates opportunities for further job creation, new skills and training for local people across our communities.

7. Provide skills and job opportunities to get people into work

Bring together national departments with local housing partners to better mobilise the Chancellor's Plan for Jobs, supporting more people into work and developing the skills they need to thrive as the UK emerges from the pandemic. This will ensure that employment support needs are met across communities and enable social housing to deliver in partnership with government for recovery.

This includes:

- Contracting and commissioning that encourages joint housing and employment service partnerships.
- Accelerating the tender process and considering grant support to deliver urgent support, fast.
- Supporting an expansion of existing employment support services, enabling Job Centre Plus and housing to work together locally.
- Supporting Jobs Plus pilots.

Jobs Plus entails:

- *A proven, community-based approach to addressing employment issues with social landlords in the lead.*
- *An approach that can increase employment, improve earnings and raise household incomes out of poverty.*
- *Intensive, co-ordinated and neighbourhood-based support to prepare for and find work – delivered through an integrated local hub that brings together housing, employment and other local partners.*
- *Open to all in the targeted community rather than specific groups of residents, so removing barriers and stigma in taking part.*
- *Community support for work – with residents providing peer support, outreach, and championing the service, as well as engaging in local design and oversight.*
- *Rent incentives to make work pay – so ensuring that it always pays to work, and that transitional costs including transport, childcare or suits and boots can be covered⁴.*

⁴ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/developing-a-jobs-plus-model-for-the-uk/>



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Summary

The Covid-19 crisis has given way to an economic and employment crisis, and housing associations are key in helping to support thousands of households across the country access sustainable and meaningful employment, as well as progressing in work.

This spending review is pivotal to determining the shape of our economy as we begin to build back better. The Government now has the once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine the way we invest in people and place and level up the whole of the UK.

We urge Government to work with the housing sector to amplify its efforts to reduce inequality between communities and empower individuals with the skills and opportunities they need to succeed. The time to act is now.