Improving Opportunities: How to support social housing tenants into sustainable employment – Report to the APPG on Housing and Social Mobility

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About the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Social Mobility

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Social Mobility (APPG) was founded in 2020 to champion social housing providers that support tenants and residents to secure sustainable livelihoods.

Housing associations play a vital role in building communities that work. Yet their investment – over £70m in employment support – and the value this creates – is not fully recognised. The APPG on Housing and Social Mobility brings together MPs and Peers from across all political parties to better understand these issues.

Communities that Work provides the secretariat to the APPG and supports it in an administrative and operational capacity. The co-chairs of the APPG are Peter Aldous MP and Liz Twist MP.

The APPG Inquiry into Housing and Employment

In March 2020, the APPG on Housing and Social Mobility launched a national Inquiry to further understand **the employment and earnings gap in social housing and identify how to reduce this**. This brought together insights from sector experts, housing providers, and residents by gathering written and oral evidence which addressed the Inquiry's questions.

The APPG Inquiry was supported by **Communities that Work** and **PlaceShapers**, with additional support from the housing sector **GEM programme**. The research partner for the Inquiry is the **UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE)**.

This report of the Inquiry has been researched and written by CaCHE. This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either house or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of members of both houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the group.

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The APPG on Housing and Social Mobility wishes to thank everyone who has been involved in the Inquiry into Housing and Employment. In particular, the APPG wishes to recognise the contribution of those organisations and individuals who submitted written evidence and took part in oral evidence sessions. A full list of those who took part is at the back of this report.

Thank you to Communities that Work and PlaceShapers and the team of young housing leaders from the GEM programme for supporting the Inquiry.

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Preface

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Social Mobility was founded in recognition of the core role that social housing providers can play in supporting households and communities into sustainable livelihoods through employment, and with an awareness that more needs to be done to support the levelling up agenda across all of our communities.

The APPG is keenly aware that working age tenants in social housing often face additional challenges in securing employment and decent earnings; factors which are so important in enabling households to thrive and plan for their future. The social housing sector can create social mobility, but it does need support to do so consistently and evenly across the country, working with local and national partners to improve opportunities for all.

The Inquiry began in March 2020 and has been mindful of the unfolding situation and new challenges presented by the Covid pandemic. Whilst we are yet to see the full impact of the pandemic on employment rates for social housing residents, it looks likely that they will face even greater challenges in finding and keeping work. The solutions, recommendations and actions proposed matter even more in this context, and we urge all stakeholders to come together for our communities.

The APPG Inquiry on Housing and Employment sought to fully understand the challenges facing working age tenants seeking employment, and to establish clear evidence for what works most effectively and consistently in supporting people to sustain their own livelihoods. We sought recommendations for both the Government and the social housing sector to consider, in recognition that working together provides the greatest chance of achieving long-term, positive changes across communities.

The APPG wishes to extend sincere thanks to all organisations and individuals who submitted written evidence and who joined the oral evidence sessions.

Particular thanks are due to the sponsors of the Inquiry, the Research Directors at CaCHE and the tenants and residents who joined CaCHE and Communities that Work in a 'sense check' discussion of the recommendations contained in this report.

We commend these recommendations to you, and seek to work together in partnership across government, social housing, and our communities, to deliver them.

Peter Aldous MP
Co-Chair

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Social Mobility

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Executive Summary

Improving Opportunities: How to support social housing tenants into sustainable employment – Report to the APPG on Housing and Social Mobility

In Brief

This report was commissioned to understand the challenges facing working age tenants seeking employment, and to establish clear evidence for what works most effectively and consistently in supporting people to sustain their own livelihoods.

We considered if living in social housing presented a barrier to employment. This starting point is one which suggests both a barrier to social mobility and poorer outcomes for specific people, their families, and communities. British working age social housing tenants have lower employment rates, earnings, and rates of job progression than their working age counterparts in other tenures. This remains the case even after careful analysis taking account of important differences between groups suggests that these differences are not nearly as stark as the raw numbers would suggest (Judge 2019).

The Inquiry into Housing and Employment found that the security and affordability of social housing actually help people to find and keep a job. Our national system of allocating social housing, with priority to those in the greatest need, means there are simply more people living in social housing who need greater levels of support and time to enter into employment. Whilst there is considerable intervention underway by commissioned employment and training providers, our Inquiry shows that social housing providers are stepping

into this role too, running employment support programmes for tenants, residents and communities. These greater levels of support are now undertaken by an increasingly experienced social housing provider base, for a growing proportion of their residents. Monitoring, evaluation and evidence and impact is also amassing, demonstrating their effectiveness in this expanding role.

In an era of Covid-19 and rising general unemployment, it is essential that this growing good work is not diluted or diminished. As the Government pursues a 'levelling-up' agenda our Inquiry finds that sustaining and supporting the work that is being carried out to enhance employability, and to train and progress people into work, is an essential part of realising that ambition. Housing-centred employment programmes need continued funding support if they are to continue to help hundreds of thousands of people find and keep a job every year. This is less about seeking new funds in a time of economic difficulty, though more would of course be welcome; rather it is about sustaining existing commitments. For instance, securing a durable replacement for European Social Fund (ESF) funding which is so important to this sector, and aligning Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) spending priorities for more disadvantaged groups with the social housing sector, for example through Jobs Plus.

Beyond simple funding considerations, it is also about taking seriously the ideas within the main report to enable, facilitate and promote the range of initiatives and partnerships across this dynamic sector, combining labour market interventions with the work of social housing providers on behalf of their communities.

The Inquiry

Working with Communities that Work and PlaceShapers, the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) led the research behind this Inquiry conducted through the period of pandemic since March 2020. There were three main elements. First, the establishing of the terms of reference for the inquiry, including a background research paper. Second, we called for written evidence and received more than 60 written submissions. Third, we held 11 panel sessions with social housing providers, employment specialists, subject experts and other interested parties, including a panel of tenants. We are grateful to everyone who participated and full thanks are listed later in the main report.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The report draws a number of **conclusions** that help frame the recommendations.

Social housing can support the conditions needed to secure and sustain employment

There remains a view that there is something inherent to social housing that worsens the labour prospects of its residents. There is little evidence that two of the defining features of social housing, namely, tenure security and sub-market rents, have anything to do with the gap in employment outcomes between social housing and other tenures. In fact, these may provide the security and affordability to make active engagement with work possible. However, the other feature, allocating social housing to those in greatest housing need will, by definition, tend to generate working age households who may be relatively disadvantaged in the jobs market (though other important factors like job availability and jobs quality, transport, childcare support networks, etc. are also important). While it is right to challenge stigma and discrimination, it is also the case that effective employment training and support for some local residents is required.

Devolved, local, and tailored interventions work well in a diverse range of communities

The evidence suggests an incredible variety in the range of employment and training activities pursued by social housing providers. This included strong support for the intensive use and expansion of customised end-to-end employment support for individual clients and the desire to support interventions from employability to training to placement and to monitor in-work progress, too. This variety reflects funding routes, the strength of partnerships in specific regions, capacity and experience. It will also probably reflect the depth and nature and performance of local labour markets, training options, attitudes of employers and much more. Such variety represents a barrier to scaling up and transferring ideas, but it does suggest that local context is important and is one argument in favour of more devolved funding and delivery systems for employment, skills and training support.

National employment programmes can work locally through social housing partners

Scale and geography were repeatedly found to be important factors in determining the role of housing providers in the labour market. We were told that the work of different scales of associations suggested that both small is beautiful and 'large need not be ugly'. Larger providers like Clarion Futures and Optivo demonstrate positive impact both singly and in partnerships like Love London Working. There is also much evidence of high-quality interventions from smaller and medium-sized associations and other social housing providers. But there is real friction and waste generated by institutional scale elsewhere. We heard how the spatial size of DWP commissioning programmes

were so large that even large consortia would find it hard to deliver. These geographies should be aligned to local labour market areas, not bureaucratic large entities that remove capable performers from being able to participate – that seems a significant loss in value for money terms and in capacity. It is another argument for devolving further funding and delivery of these programmes.

Labour markets and social housing will benefit from medium to long-term commitments to work together, supported by Government

We think that government needs to produce both a strategy and a consistent medium-term policy and practice environment to both enable the labour market and the active housing providers to make the most effective impact – and this should be based on evidence and properly evaluation. This of course has to be viewed through a Covid-19 filter – the employment prospects looks bleak but there will be considerable interventions made locally, regionally and nationally. Levelling-up and Building Back Better (e.g. through large scale initiatives such as green retrofitting) can also create major training and economic development opportunities that social housing providers can and should be partners in Covid-19 also demonstrates deeper inequalities: the digital divide now has direct job implications as we shift to working from home and engaging with service providers online.

Impact measurement is fundamental

We would stress the importance of evidence and impact measurement. Resources will continue to be highly constrained but all employment interventions require a genuine commitment to rigorous evidence and analysis; communicating these approaches to stakeholders and supply chain partners. Social value measures and the principles associated with environmental, social and governance metrics help to demonstrate the wider value of programmes. The use of evidence remains uneven, but the increased use of social value metrics and the more rigorous attempts to demonstrate value is a sign of the way the social housing world is evolving.

Social housing can multiply its impact

At the same time the employment and training benefits associated with housing-led investments such as new affordable housing and retrofit of the existing stock, indicate relatively large multipliers and, potentially, significant labour market gains through direct work and economic activity created further down the supply chain. Judge (2019) proposed, and was supported by written evidence to the Inquiry, that new social and affordable housing development locations should be explicitly connected accessibly to dense sites of employment. There is strong evidence about the economic multipliers achievable from social housing investment and the wider distribution of those benefits (Gibb, et al, 2020).

The report ends with **recommendations** for action by various stakeholders.

1. Funding continuity and commitment over time

The sector clearly needs **funding certainty** over key programmes such as the Shared Prosperity Fund and how it would replace the ESF monies that have been so important to funding and delivering initiatives discussed here. This recommendation will apply to central and local government.

2. Supported by government, labour markets and social housing stand to benefit from longer term commitments

Devolve and disaggregate programmes from existing super-regional scale to more functional labour markets (these might be partnerships of contiguous local authorities or combined authorities, where they exist) and encourage labour market active housing providers to form consortia at this scale to deliver programmes. This recommendation will apply to central and local government, combined authorities, providers, and employment relevant agencies.

Linking these two points, there is merit in thinking more strategically and in a joined-up way connecting skills, training, employment support, employability

and customised work, to further and higher education, **through partnerships operating at a local labour market scale**, as an attempt to balance the trade-off between scale economies sought by DWP commissioning with the local strengths of housing providers and education outlets. Allied to this, we need to promote and support **greater partnership working between housing and other organisations**. For example, local housing associations can be anchors in the community working with, for example, further education colleges, employers and others could then help provide access to the job market.

3. Link social housing investment to employment

Encourage funding bodies like Homes England and local authorities and also the Regulator of social housing to encourage and incentivise (e.g. as a condition of funding or regulatory performance metrics) public funding of affordable/social housing, including existing stock investments, to demonstrate local labour market connections through procurement, supply chains, apprenticeships, etc. This might also be directly linked to green jobs and investment in emerging residential retrofit industries. This might also include embracing more active labour market strategies such as Jobs Plus as well as greater statutory support for the precariously working, the low paid and those starting work. This recommendation will apply to central government, housing agencies, local government, housing providers, employment programme delivery agencies and DWP.

4. Tailored, joined up, one-to-one support based on what the client actually wants.

Greater use of tailored, joined up one-to-one 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 to give them confidence in their jobs, i.e. a greater focus on in one-to-one support and tailored training for them The labour market is a complex multi-faceted system **and policies need to match that complexity** by providing integrated support across the entire employment and training journey. This recommendation will apply to central government, employment and support providers, LEPs, local authorities and third sector.

5. Wider issues need to be addressed: affordable childcare; digital access, affordable and accessible public transport; temporary financial support for people as they transition into work

Affordable transport with a renewed focus on routes and timetables that enable work is essential; the availability and affordability of childcare is also essential. There is also at strong case to provide some **temporary time limited additional financial support at the start of entering the labour market to cover those extra costs** and to cover the initial transition period into employment. This recommendation will apply to DWP and other relevant agencies, central and local government.

1. Background

There is well established evidence of the long-term poorer labour market outcomes associated with living in social housing for working age residents (see Gibb, et al, 2016; Judge, 2019). However, Judge found that after controlling for key factors such as the characteristics of working age tenants in social housing (filtered by priority needs-based allocations systems), as well as locational labour market disadvantage, a large amount of the gap in employment rates disappeared – but a distinct albeit smaller difference compared to the rest of the population remained.

In the summer of 2019 Communities that Work and PlaceShapers, acting as the secretariat for the Westminster All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Social Mobility, partnered with the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) as research input for an inquiry into social housing and employment.

The Inquiry was however delayed, first, because of political uncertainties and, second, the calling of the December 2019 General Election. The launch took place before the full onset of Covid-19, and while it was initially hampered by the virus and lockdown, it was ultimately possible to complete written evidence submissions and a substantial series of oral evidence sessions by early September 2020. The impact of Covid-19 on the labour market is an unfolding situation and while much of the evidence we amassed came towards the end of the initial national lockdown, the full impacts on the economy and on residents' labour market position were only then emerging. Undoubtedly, a further challenge for working age social tenants is that they, along with the population in general, must now compete for jobs and training in the context of a post Covid-19 recession.

The Inquiry's key questions were developed prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. Since then, the world has been deeply changed and the economic and public health situation irrevocably impacted by the coronavirus, social distancing measures, and economic shutdown. These issues will affect the choices ahead on how economic and social recovery is engineered in the months and years to come. While the five questions that are at the heart of the Inquiry remain relevant and wholly valid, we must accept that each is now to be understood in part through the lens of the multiple dimensions of the shock caused by coronavirus. This unanticipated economic crisis is inducing an uneven recession which compounds pre-existing structural factors that create barriers to employment. However, it also presents opportunities, that and target recovery. We think this makes the timing and significance of the Inquiry all the more relevant.

The Inquiry established key questions that were pursued through our work:

1. **What is the relationship between social housing and employment?** What factors affect social renters' work chances? What do we know from specific places, experts and organisations about the employment gap? What are the causes or key drivers and to what extent do these relate to personal characteristics, local markets, the demand-side and other factors that impact on employment chances? Can we combine and synthesise local, UK and international evidence across quantitative and qualitative knowledge, information and expertise – to build a compelling picture?

2. **To what extent are social housing tenants more likely to be in lower paid and unstable employment than people living in other tenures?** What factors affect social renters' work choices, and what positive interventions can be adopted to support wider work choices? What is the quality of the evidence relating to these questions, both the causes and subsequent interventions? Do we understand why outcomes vary?

3. **How can the social housing sector be the catalyst for closing the social housing employment and earnings gap?** How do we best deliver support that enables the whole social housing sector to get more tenants and residents into good quality, sustained employment that secures the livelihoods of households in the long-term? Can we review and synthesise the types of interventions being carried out by housing providers and other actors or stakeholders working with communities and disadvantaged places? What works, why (and for whom), and can effective intervention be scaled up to work in different contexts?

4. **What can different tiers of Government do to support the social housing sector and tenants, to reduce the social housing employment and earnings employment gap?** And what positive interventions can be adopted to close the employment gap? What works, why (and for whom) and how do we know (what is the evidence base)? Are effective interventions scalable and transferable across different contexts? We were keen to hear examples of good practice and successful initiatives, as well as to learn lessons why other interventions were less effective.

5. **Cross-cutting the above four questions, we wanted to hear about how the voice of residents' lived experience was heard and was engaged with.** To what extent were residents involved in the design, delivery and consumption of initiatives by providers and government agencies? How have policies and practices been accountable to the people they are designed for? What lessons can we learn for future employment innovation that will embed tenants and engage with them fully and effectively?

In the Spring of 2020, the Inquiry received 61 submissions of written evidence (see page 57) and held 11 evidence sessions from July to early September involving more than 50 participants including housing and labour market organisations, residents, local authorities and members of the APPG (oral evidence on page 58). Written submissions and oral evidence sessions addressed the key lines of inquiry above. In practice, they

also tended to emphasise examples of perceived good practice and the extent to which these were evidenced (and would lend themselves to scaling up), setting out policy options for central government, local government and other relevant agencies, as well as reflecting on the impacts of Covid-19. We are grateful to everyone who participated but the views expressed here are those of the Inquiry and the authors are solely responsible for any errors or omissions contained within.

Our approach to making sense of this evidence was as follows. For each of the three substantive sections of the Inquiry report we did three things. First, we took stock of relevant background research; second, we reviewed the written submissions in relation to the theme; and, third, we did the same with the oral evidence sessions – all in an effort to create a synthesis and identify variety of response, where appropriate. It is also worth saying something about the nature of the submissions we reviewed. They come from a combination of housing, employment and training service providers, primarily housing associations but also local authorities, ALMOs and other specific subsidiaries. We also received evidence and heard from a number of subject experts and from residents. We would stress that the nature of the submissions varied considerably, as did the reliance on evidence. Several drew on the background research paper we contributed and others focused more on their own micro-level good practice or experience working with their tenants and local residents. Here we have tried to capture the preponderance of views on questions, as well as noting the (increasing) use of evidence in making specific cases for programmes, investments and the like. At the same time, the report attempts to provide a balanced account and, where deemed relevant, we have given more weight to stronger evidenced arguments.

The structure of this report, using the three elements outlined above, is as follows. After the introduction, section 2 briefly provides a diagnosis of the social housing-employment challenge and asks why it matters (questions 1 and 2 of the key lines of inquiry). Section 3 provides an overview of the considerable volume of good practice and innovations we found across the sector (key lines of inquiry question 3). Section 4 asks how outcomes might be improved by policy innovations introduced by a range of public sector actors (question 4). The final section is a short summary and conclusions followed by recommendations for action by different key stakeholders (includes question 5).

2. The Diagnosis and Why it Matters

In this section we look at the drivers of social housing working age labour market outcomes. This combines background research literature as well as written and oral evidence for the Inquiry. We focus on essentially two kinds of drivers – personal factors and attributes on the one hand and wider structural or contextual factors on the other. Of course, the two often intertwine and reinforce each other.

Judge's (2019) paper is summarized in Box 1 and is a useful point of departure.

Box 1: Judge (2019) Research qualifying the evidence on the labour market outcomes of working age social tenants in the labour market

Judge (2019) begins by noting much lower rates of employment and economic activity amongst working age social tenants. In the period 2014-18 just over half of working age social tenants were at work compared to 80% of those owning or in the market rented sector. At the same time, more than a third of social tenants of working age were economically inactive, twice the rate of other tenures combined.

However, these stark differences are in part explained by characteristics of working age social tenants which have little or nothing to do with social housing tenure per se. Working age social housing tenants are more likely to have long-term illness or disability, dependent children (including single parents), and lower level qualifications – all characteristics which are associated with lower levels of labour market participation. But there is little evidence that social housing drives these characteristics. It just so happens that, partly because of the way it is allocated, people with these characteristics tend to end up in the social housing tenure.

Judge finds, once controlling for these incidental characteristics (insofar as possible e.g. certain long-term illnesses may go unreported) that: "60 per cent of the employment gap disappears (falling from 27 to 11 per cent). If all tenures matched the characteristics of the population as a whole, we could expect 7 out of 10 social renters to be in work, compared to 8 out 10 living in other tenures. The effect of the exercise is strongest on inactivity rates: controlling for personal characteristics reduces the inactivity gap between social renters and others from 21 to just 7 per cent" (Judge, 2019, pp. 1-2). Moreover, a significant proportion of this outstanding difference is likely to be explained by contextual factors, and other personal characteristics that were not controlled for. In particular, social renting tends to be more concentrated in areas with weaker labour markets, and social tenants may also be disadvantaged by possessing lesser digital skills and weaker family support networks.

Figure 1 summarises the comparison made by Judge (2019) of social renters and non-social renters' work status before and after accounting for the different attributes the different sub-groups possess (see the note in the table that indicates the factors that were controlled for by Judge).

Figure 1 Work Status Compared: Social and non-Social Rented Working Age Individuals, UK, 2014-18, %

WORK STATUS	SOCIAL RENTER	NON-SOCIAL RENTER
In employment	54	81
Inactive	37	16
Unemployed	9	3
Correcting for personal attributes1		
In employment	68	79
Inactive	25	18
Unemployed	7	3

Source: Judge 2019 based on ONS Labour Force Survey 2014-18 and Judge's calculations

Note: factors controlled for: sex, age, labour market experience, qualifications, ethnicity, marital status, dependent children, lone parent, disability and poor health.

2.1 Background Research

What do we know about the nature and extent of these differences in employment rates and earnings? Research (Gibb, et al, 2016) on housing and work incentives for those on low incomes and at the margins of work combined evidence review with primary research. This is explored further in the Inquiry's background research paper (Gibb, 2019*). The main points to stress from the 2016 evidence review are:

- US research suggests that **some welfare programmes impede participation rates** particularly for female – headed households but do not seem to impact on long-term labour supply.
- Evidence (e.g. Goulding, 2010) suggests that around **one-fifth of poverty is recurrent**. Moving out of poverty is not just about a job per se but also the quality, pay and security of the work. Bouncing between low pay and unemployment is common and increasingly frequent. This was reinforced by the quantitative work carried out by Gibb, et al, 2016 (also, see, Stephens and Leishman, 2017; Judge and Slaughter, 2020).
- Housing can constrain work opportunities at **neighbourhood level**, which can lead to poorer job prospects for long-term residents. Social networks are important to accessing employment and local face-to-face contact is particularly so. Local jobs markets matter most to those with low skills levels, who are likely to search for and take up jobs in smaller geographies than the highly skilled.
- There is often a **spatial mismatch** between people and jobs, i.e. housing areas are distanced from areas dense with job opportunities. Low skilled groups are particularly disadvantaged because they have fewer commuting options. Reliance on public transport can prevent commuting if services are unavailable or expensive. Relocation involves financial and other transactions costs, for instance, the loss of support such as informal established exchanges of flexible free childcare. The evidence regarding social renting on employment outcomes is inconclusive in that quantitative and qualitative evidence point in different directions.
- There is **little econometric evidence** that withdrawal rates of housing benefit create strong deterrents to entering employment. Qualitative research is more likely to identify such effects, but even here such evidence is relatively weak. Despite this, evidence reports former benefit recipients taking paid work despite being financially worse off. Incentives to work are also **shaped by powerful non-financial influences e.g.** barriers created by childcare obligations and costs, although there is disagreement about how big an effect this has.

*https://www.communitiesthatwork.co.uk/appg/

Judge and Slaughter (2020) examine the inter-relationship between housing, work and poverty. They look at the longer-term impact of households moving into work and especially the notion of in-work poverty and the growing sense that work does not pay. They also ask whether tenure plays an important role in influencing in-work poverty. They note that the poverty differential for social tenants compared to others is higher for working households (34%) compared to (13%) for out of work households. They conclude, first, that entering work has a strong downward effect on (rates and depth of) poverty. Second, the poverty rate does not improve any further once work is entered, even for those who stay in work. Third, moving out of poverty is common but cycling in and out of poverty is also a frequent outcome. Fourth, social renters in work are more likely to be in poverty. Fifth, lower pay and fewer hours increase the risk that social renters are in poverty. Sixth, reduced in-work support increase low-income households' exposure to poverty. Finally, while in work, interacting with the benefits system can be problematic.

Overall, the key takeaway from the evidence review undertaken in 2016 is that while evidence is strong in some respects, it is inconclusive concerning some of the issues regarding work and tenure that are too often taken for granted. Gibb, et al (2016) also conducted case studies in a variety of housing and labour market contexts. The study found a "well-entrenched work ethic" among people who are likely to command only modest wages. It also, however, demonstrated that they face multiple disincentives to employment.

2.2 Inquiry Evidence on Barriers to Employment

We now move on to new evidence about barriers and drivers of labour marker outcomes for social tenants provided to the Inquiry in the form of written and oral evidence. Where appropriate, we refer back to the background literature.

A number of written submissions and oral evidence sessions explored the reasons why social housing tenants experience worse than average employment and earnings outcomes. There is significant consensus about the role that **personal or individual** factors play in explaining the difference in employment outcomes.

The background for this can also be seen in the work already cited and other research. Tunstall and Pleace (2018) provided an evidence review on contemporary social housing, which included a profile of social housing tenants, indicated that compared to the wider population, social tenants have lower incomes, more lone parents, more BME and women-headed households, more single person households and higher rates of disability. As we see below, these features are associated with lower rates of employment and earnings. Wilson, et al (2015) identify three key disadvantaged groups within social housing in terms of labour market outcomes: those with lower qualifications, those who are disabled or with limiting long-term conditions and those with mental health issues. Peabody (2019) found in 2018, and in a context of rising living costs, that the income gap compared to non-social residents in London had widened, social tenants were disproportionately in insecure and low paid work, and that the situation for those with a disability was worsening and relatively more difficult in London. As we see below, these features are associated with lower rates of employment and earnings.

Education and skills: Many tenants lack educational qualifications, which weakens their position in the labour market. For example, one respondent noted "arguably the largest barrier we face is the lack of basic skills among our customer base" (Vivid Homes submission). These basic skills were identified as being basic literacy and numeracy (written submissions by Vivid Homes and whg), or qualifications (submissions by Origin, Thirteen Group, Optivo), or both (Newground Together).

Digital skills: The lack of digital skills was also highlighted by a number of written submissions. These gaps matter because they are often needed to apply for jobs (Newground Together), as well as being needed to perform jobs (Stay Nimble, whg). In one evidence panel, Lisa Raison-Trehy from Southampton City Council argued that:

> *"There's a high level of digital exclusion in Southampton as well. People quite often, they can use a smartphone, but they can't complete the Universal Credit application form necessarily or apply for a job or have particularly good job search skills. And in most employment seeking these days, you need to have good digital skills."*
>
> Southampton City Council, Panel Session

Mental, physical health: Poor physical and mental health are cited as being barriers to employment by at least 15 respondents*. The chronic or long-term nature of health conditions is often cited. Disability is also highlighted as a barrier by at least three respondents (SYHA, GM Housing Providers, and TJE Consulting). Diane Lightfoot from the Business Disability Forum argued that:

> *"Disabled people are proportionality less likely to be in work, and proportionately more likely to be in social housing. So, you have a direct Venn diagram there already. And it's particularly the case the further you get from the labour market as a disabled person, the more and more likely you are to be in social housing."*
>
> Business Disability Forum, Panel Session

Aspirations: The lack of aspiration in some individuals was raised by some respondents (e.g. Magenta Living, Grand Union, Wythenshawe). Although self-confidence was not often raised as a barrier, it is frequently referred to by organisations in their efforts to improve tenants' employability.

Other personal factors: Many other factors that can weaken one's labour market position were referred to in the written submissions and oral evidence. These include the class, social housing stigma, adverse consequences of addiction, domestic abuse, family breakdown and adverse childhood experiences, among others.

A number of key **Contextual or Structural factors** were repeatedly believed to contribute to lack of employment.

Allocations system: Social housing is allocated by priority need favouring, broadly, people living in severe housing stress including statutory homelessness, people with poor health and limiting conditions. This can have cumulative effects on the socio-economic make-up of neighbourhoods over time. Neighbourhoods can facilitate social networks that provide informal recruitment channels that enable local people to find employment (see

*Written submission by Newground Together, Grand Union Housing Group, Wythenshawe Community Housing Group, Origin Housing, Just City Project, Radian Yarlington, SYHA, Greater Manchester Housing Providers, Town & Country Housing, Vivid Homes, Stay Nimble, One Housing Group, TJE Consulting, and Southern Housing Group.

also: Judge, 2019). Many written and oral evidence sessions discussed the long-term impact of allocations over time in the social rented sector.

Alistair Smyth, Guinness Partnership, noted: *"I think the point that's already been made around allocations is an important one, but I think at the same time I'd want to say the allocation system does what it's supposed to do in that it allocates social housing to people that need it, so this is not in any way to suggest that that is not right, it just means that therefore people coming through to live in our homes may be slightly more disadvantaged in terms of accessing the labour market:"*

Heidi Leyshon (Sovereign) drew out some of the wider labour market implications: *"If you're in social housing because of any of those factors, that affects your ability in terms of work, or working hours, or not being able to work at all, which then in turn affects your work status, and your earning power. If you are able to work and you've got caring responsibilities for example, or a disability, the sort of jobs that are available to you tend to need to be jobs that are quite flexible, particularly in hours or where you can work from. That in itself, that flexibility seems to provide a trade-off in terms of your earnings, and your contract type."*

Transport: Case study evidence in Gibb, et al (2016) reported that the changing nature of jobs worsens the effect that the cost and reliability of public transport has on work incentives. The cost of car ownership (running costs and repairs) can thus be a significant disincentive and barrier to working, even for those people who have a car. Of the other causes of the poor employment outcomes, transport is mentioned most frequently by (fourteen) respondents. This is particularly problematic when social housing is located in peripheral urban locations (which is common because social landlords often look for cheap land), and rural areas. The cost of public transport was also mentioned by one respondent (Southern Housing Group), who also noted that car ownership is low among social tenants. The effect of poor or expensive public transport is that it limits the search area for employment. One respondent pointed to a "more fundamental long-term disconnect between housing, transport, employment and place" (Red Kite) – this is expanded on below.

"Starting from a position of economic instability, without access to support that would lead to training, a choice of employers close to where you live, or the means to get there easily creates the poverty trap. The dynamics at play here lead into the need for benefits to stabilise a household income, but without the necessary ability to save for the future. To enter the job market could mean travelling significant distances, the use of public transport and being located miles away from both the home and the schools of their children. If the options are restricted based on educational, or work-related skills and qualifications, the earning potential less the cost and time required to work could perversely leave a family far worse off. Universal Credit initially sought to redress this inequity; however, this has not delivered against its original lofty ambitions."

Red Kite Written Submission, p.6

Social Housing Stigma: Several written responses and panel sessions raised the stigma sometimes attached to both social tenants and social housing neighbourhoods. While there have been several initiatives in recent years in the wake of Grenfell and the Government's proposed social housing proposals, for instance by the Chartered Institute of Housing – the sense is widely held that this stigma remains and impacts on employer attitudes. The tenants' panel was clear about this – they saw evidence of stigma attached both to the tenure of particularly council housing but also to specific locations assumed to be generically of social housing. Two tenants on the tenant panel session reported personal experience:

> *"We've been bankrupt in the past and everything else and being labelled as a council tenant, I personally believe did affect us back then'. Three others on the panel identified neighbourhoods or parts of where they came from which were perceived in a stigmatising way when it came to work opportunities. This is also part of a wider form of problem, as one tenant recounted: 'I'm a single mum and I live in a rough part of Warrington apparently. So, I'm in a new build, so get looked at now like 'Oh, she's a single mum. She's on benefits so she's just getting everything hand fed to her' but really I go out and work and pay my bills."*
>
> Tenant Panel Session

Childcare: Cost and availability of childcare was raised by almost as many respondents as transport as a barrier to work. Both its cost and availability are mentioned. Informal networks at neighbourhood level, and their absence for others, were a source of childcare and other support which enabled some people to enter employment. The likely loss of such support was a barrier to moving to another area (Gibb, et al, 2016). One respondent suggested that allocations policies may not take account of the need to be close to support networks which are a source of childcare (Raven Housing). In the oral evidence sessions, one respondent (Victoria Whittle, Clarion Housing Group) said: "Certainly in London, one of the main barriers for us in terms of engaging and moving people into work is around childcare". Oral evidence from the Peabody Trust suggest that barriers can interact:

> *"What we have done is identified particularly vulnerable groups among our residents and the factors that lead to additional challenges among them. Recent ones have been working parents and the challenge of childcare and balancing work and childcare amongst single parent households, but also balancing it across a family and also those living with a long-term illness or disability – where we found both cultural and practical infrastructure based challenges from being able to look for job adverts through to being hired through to progressing as well."*
>
> Peabody Trust, Panel Session

BAME: The empirical literature (e.g. Judge, 2019, and Tunstall and Pleace, 2018) report the disproportionate incidence of poorer labour market outcomes for BAME residents and communities, and several written and panel session submissions indicated that this represented features of institutional and other forms of racial discrimination. TJE Consulting in their written submission, when considering the source of differences in social housing employment rates and earnings, said: "We cannot ignore that social housing providers house high proportions of BAME and disabled people both of whom can experience significant barriers and discrimination when it comes to employment opportunities". This was echoed by Southern Housing Group discussing the sources of poorer labour market outcomes: "In some areas the majority of social renters are from BAME communities. On top of the disadvantages highlighted above these residents may face additional bias when trying to access or progress in work".

Benefits, employment terms and work disincentives: Work disincentives also arise from the benefits system, according to specific respondents (and evidence in the background research e.g. Gibb, et al, 2016). This is not only because means-tested

benefits are withdrawn as incomes rise (Red Kite), but because of the instability of the relationship between benefits and work arising from insecure jobs and variable hours associated with zero hours contracts (e.g. CHP). One respondent (Thirteen Group) suggested that young people (aged 18-25) are deterred from taking work when they live with parents who are dependent on benefits. This is because their employment may lead to a loss of household benefits. (This is likely to be a reference to non-dependent deductions in Housing Benefit). Gibb, et al (2016) found that the underlying level of rents is the principal housing factor in affecting the incentive to work. It is notable that whilst Housing Benefit is recognised as protecting out-of-work incomes, its role as an in-work benefit is downplayed. The effects of housing on work incentives (i.e. location, security, affordability, etc.) are most acute for people with fewer skills who are more likely to enter low-paid, part-time and insecure employment. This is compounded by age discrimination and poor health.

Austerity: One respondent (Just City Project) pointed to the impacts of austerity which impacted disproportionately poorer people because they are dependent on state support. We know also that pro-poor local government services were hit relatively hard by spending cuts (Hastings, et al, 2017) This could contribute to a cycle of homelessness, allocation to social housing, tenancy failure and homelessness (Just City Project). There can also be reinforcing intergenerational adverse interactions between household poverty and opportunity for younger parts of the household.

Tim Edwards (TJE consulting) made the point that: *"There's also some counterintuitive things in the benefit system. So, for example, a young person wants to do an apprenticeship, we've had examples where parents are going to lose their household income through the benefit system because a young person wants to take an apprenticeship and dissuaded them to take that course because of the overall impact on the household income."*

TJE Consulting, Panel Session

This point on the impact of changing non-dependent deductions is reinforced by doctoral research at Heriot-Watt University by Janice Blenkinsopp. Here we would also of course draw attention to the comparatively better housing benefit treatment of social tenants versus private tenants (excepting the spare room subsidy).

Digital connectivity: Digital connectivity was highlighted as being important by at least four respondents (e.g. North Star, Radian, CHP, and Housing LiN). One highlighted that this was especially a problem in rural areas. This might become more important post Covid-19 due to the rise in home working.

Labour market: It is surprising that lack of employment per se, wider labour demand, was not raised by many respondents. Indeed, some suggest that there are entry level jobs available in hospitality and care. However, irregular and variable hours (for example associated with zero-hour contracts) can be a problem, as can lack of flexibility. Giving evidence, Hannah Slaughter (Resolution Foundation) said that:

"We've got some hypotheses. So, one of the main ones, which I think has been backed up by some of the qualitative research we've done since, is the link to the local labour markets of social renters. So, we know that people on lower incomes generally, and also when we look specifically at social renters, tend to have lower commute times. They're more likely to want to work closely to home, whether that's because they have children that they need to coordinate childcare around or whether it's because they are taking cheaper but slower forms of public transport, like buses."

Resolution Foundation, Panel Session

2.3 Summary

The degree of consensus among the 61 written responses is striking. There is broad agreement that social landlords house poorer and more vulnerable people for whom personal factors can act as a barrier to employment. It is also clear that many social tenants experience a range of other barriers to employment, notably poor or expensive transport, and the costs and availability of childcare. The first of these is likely to be associated with social housing often being clustered on estates that are some way away from centres of employment. However, childcare costs are likely to be faced by people regardless of tenure. Discrimination against BAME tenants was raised by some respondents, whilst the stigma associated with social housing or estates was also mentioned. Digital exclusion – both in terms of access to the internet and equipment and the skills to use it – was raised and believed to be increasingly important.

Covid-19 has highlighted these factors in relation to home working, which in turn led to the suggestion that poor space (as opposed to bedroom) standards may become another barrier to employment. There was within the written evidence comparatively little reflection in the submissions on the adequacy of income from employment, or longer-term life-chances. There is surprisingly little emphasis on job availability although there was more, if modest, discussion of labour demand in the panel sessions. Work disincentives also arise from the inter-action of the benefits system and the variable hours associated with zero hours and other flexible contracts. There was a focus on unequal access to jobs within labour markets because of spatial mismatch as opposed to regional variation in the assessment of barriers to employment, other than the suggestion that digital connectivity and public transport are more problematic in rural areas.

A key theme running through the evidence sessions and the written evidence is implicitly or explicitly whether the 'gap' in labour market outcomes, after correcting for the sorts of issues identified by Lindsay Judge, is the result of the fundamental characteristics of social housing itself – namely, sub-market rents and security of tenure – and that there is a negative tenure effect? Yet, Gibb, et al, 2016 found clear evidence that these very characteristics of social housing enhance labour market participation i.e. a positive tenure effect. It is highly likely that adverse labour market outcomes arise from it the personal factors of such households who are filtered into social housing through well-established needs-based allocations mechanisms, combined with wider forces such as the benefit system, local labour demand and the structural forces at play we have identified.

Joe Dromey of the Learning and Work Institute argued in his evidence that:

> "The question is, does this arise from something about the experience of being in social housing, or does it account for who ends up in social housing, and who leaves social housing. ….I think my argument would be it's probably much more the latter than the former….. My personal view is that…. it's something to do with where we are with social housing, in England at least, in the UK more broadly, and the kind of residualisation of the social housing sector."

The Inquiry submissions were also able to build on the emerging impacts of Covid-19 for already disadvantaged working age residents in social housing. Our panels expected such groups to be in danger of losing out as the supply of people looking for work rapidly expands, as is expected, and this will in part serve to highlight their comparative lack of qualifications, digital skills and other employability dimensions. They may be more likely to remain unemployed or retreat further into precarious work that offers little scope for progression. This also suggests that the quality and added value of employability, employment and training initiatives offered by housing providers has to rise to the emerging challenge.

3. Good Practice to Overcome Barriers

The focus here is not to compile a long list of initiatives carried out across the country (and there is a considerable number). Rather we are concerned here with what works and why – the critical success factors and how they might be translated, scaled and generalised.

We will highlight a small number of local programmes but more to make a wider point. However, we do acknowledge the volume of evidence we received from our written submissions and in oral evidence sessions. There are many highly skilled interventions and activities going on that make a considerable difference to lives throughout England, be it employability, coaching, skills and training, work placement, job search, employment and labour market intelligence, and much more besides. The social housing sector is an established and major player in the employment and training field but, as indicated above, now efforts must be redoubled in the wake of Covid-19. As in the previous section, we begin with previous research in this topic, before moving on to the new evidence we have gathered for this inquiry. We summarise the critical success factors at the end of this section.

3.1 Background Research

A research study for Riverside (PSI, 2009) undertook detailed quantitative and qualitative research, recommending that social landlords should signpost services that would support work, training and skills; landlords should promote creche facilities and other childcare support services and promote start-up businesses in this area; landlords should prioritise work-related support for disabled, those with long-term limiting illnesses and those with mental health challenges; and, they should promote and support access to affordable credit and financial inclusion advice.

Riverside (2013) followed through a qualitative longitudinal study of clusters of households, indicating both widening income differentials and improving employment outcomes despite a difficult context (e.g. the under-occupation penalty). Ill health remained a key barrier to work and progress within work.

NHF (2014) remains a useful overview of what their members do to support employment, both through housing and more broadly. Nearly 40% of housing associations are providing employment and skills support and nearly 30% more are planning to do so. They identify the particular skills and strengths that associations are likely to have in order to play a positive role in the local labour market and for employability. Working effectively in partnerships with other key providers (including councils, government departments, employers and the voluntary sector) is essential. The overview also reminds us that associations are on the frontline of managing welfare reform but that they are also major employers in their own right (and indirectly via their ongoing programmes and supply chains).

Wilding, et al., (2019) asks what we know about the employment and training support provided by housing associations. They found that, first, housing associations do provide vital employment and training support to their tenants; second, there is a strong business case to do this for associations in terms of management of arrears; third, investment in employment support policies and programmes work in that they do improve employment rates; and fourth, associations are increasingly using external tools and metrics to measure the impact they are having or could have in this field of work (we return to this later).

Wilson et al (2015) investigated what works for key disadvantaged working age tenants not in work. They conclude (p.35) that "research points to the critical importance of personalised, intensive, face to face support. Typically, this includes support to: Prepare for work – building confidence and motivation, setting goals, referral to specialist support, preparing for interviews and applications; Look for work – assessing skills and capabilities, understanding where and how to look, support to then find jobs, overcoming setbacks/ maintaining confidence; Get into work – through engaging employers and then brokering between them and candidates, supporting with application processes; and Stay in work – particularly through the first few days and weeks."

Wilson, et al.,looking specifically at housing associations argues that they (and presumably other social housing providers) are in a strong position to do this effectively because (pp.48-49):

> 'They have a unique relationship with their residents; they operate in some of our most deprived areas; they take a long-term approach to working with their residents and the communities in which their homes are based as part of their general social purpose; they are major employers in their own right, with established supply chains which can provide further employment opportunities; they have an investment in the success of their employment, training and skills programmes; they have a good understanding of the local employment market and strong relationships with other organisations across both the public and private sector; and, they use their own resources as well as attracting investment from partners."

Wilson, et al., go on to identify nine specific interventions that generate positive cost to benefit ratios of greater than 1.0 and which all could help improve employment, employability and also reduce the economic disadvantage faced by the most marginalised (pp.50-69). These include strategies such as: skills academies i.e. workforce training and work experience; jobs-plus i.e. intensive saturation approaches to support people into work; intensive support to help people prepare for and find work; intermediate labour market work with e.g. temporary jobs to act as a stepping stone into more long-term employment; and, targeted financial incentives in the form of return to work bonuses.

Dromey, et al., (2018) also examine the role that housing associations can play supporting employment. They argue that the sector has a key role in increasing employment rates and reducing poverty. They estimate that housing associations provide annually £70m on employment support but that national employment policies have failed to properly engage with the housing association sector, undermining the opportunities to develop more focused place – based employment programmes and initiatives.

Dromey, et al (2018) make the following relevant recommendations. Future employment and skills services should be further devolved, and commissioned by local government, in order to support more effective place-based support, with housing associations playing a major role. Second, adult skills devolution should be promoted: local government should work with housing associations to support residents to access skills training. Third, housing associations are local anchor institutions*, with the ability to shape their economies and support inclusive growth. This should be fostered and nurtured. Finally, Government should ensure that the Shared Prosperity Fund, which will replace the European Social Fund after Brexit, is quickly established and that it is accessible to housing providers to maintain high-quality employment skills support.

**That is, a leading local body with a role delivering or partnering with other key e.g. statutory bodies, which is well-known in the community and, to differing degrees of formality, plays a leadership and advocacy role for the community in question.*

3.2 Written and Oral Evidence

Written responses took two forms. First, some talked about their own (organisational) concrete activities in terms of their impact on residents and tenants. There was considerable variation in the extent to which these outcomes were evidenced or whether such evidence was contextualised. Second, and to a lesser extent, written evidence suggested what could be done by the sector more broadly and what proposals might have greater purchase. Again, evidence backing this up is often variable (or self-evident) but there are important messages worth developing. Below, we summarise responses and pull out potential cases studies and vignettes. We also relate the material to examples drawn from the oral evidence sessions.

Looking across the written evidence submitted, there is considerable evidence reported on both larger and smaller scales about the types of activity being led by housing associations, other providers, and their subsidiaries:

- **Employability, customised and tailored support** often involving one-to-one support, mentoring, coaching, raising aspirations (e.g. Clarion; Nottingham City Homes) and partnerships with intermediate labour programmes (e.g. Phoenix with Groundworks). In the tenants' panel there was agreement that emotional support and mental health concerns need to be addressed first. You need to 'walk before you can run' and, indeed this is important to not wasting money on the wrong types of interventions to suit what individual clients really need.

- North Star, in their submission, also focused the **unique access** they believe housing associations have to their tenants and their ability to publicise job opportunities and ability to fund projects, building trusted relationships with customers over time as well as with local businesses for both employability and jobs. They also favoured peer mentoring and tailored support, all useful to raise aspirations and confidence (also raised by Radian, among others). This sense of the role of housing associations was also often connected to community development perspectives and asset-based approaches (e.g. Nottingham City Homes made similar points). Several submissions also raised the **instrumental reasons** for making interventions work: lower rent arrears, tenancy sustainment, community cohesion, injecting income into the area and opportunity for tenants to progress to shared ownership, etc, (thereby freeing up social units).

*And presumably other social housing providers too.

Sue Ramsden (NHF) built on this point in oral evidence saying: *"We're seeking – very much in line with Communities that Work, recognition of the potential of a greater role for housing associations in terms of employment skills, development of the kind of place-based approach, and the value that housing associations can add on a more sensitive place-based approach in terms of local conditions and the way that how the money is made available around employment skills work, whether that's…. money or the reconstituted [Shared Prosperity Fund]."*

NHF, panel session

- Links to Further Education, **qualifications**, apprenticeships and Higher Education (e.g. Phoenix; Origin). Other employment **support services and wrap-around support** including, for example, money and debt advice (e.g. SYHA).

- Local **labour market intelligence**, knowledge and **connections embedded with specific employers** regarding vacancies (e.g. Phoenix). Job fairs, pop-up events, direct or proactive employment, voluntary and training/upskilling opportunities (e.g. closing the digital gap) within Housing Associations (Saxon; Stockport; Origin, West Kent), as well as individual placement and support programmes working with the health and care sectors locally (SYHA).

- **Partnership working** with Local Economic Partnerships, DWP, European Social Fund projects, Jobs Plus and several other activities. Several noted interest in working more closely and in partnership with DWP and Job Centre Plus. Sovereign's submission pointed out how they deliver place-based Jobs Plus and they also try to locate new developments where there is access to work, childcare and transport. More broadly, several submissions expressed much interest in extending wage subsidies and financial support into rent incentivisation schemes as part of Jobs Plus initiatives.

- There was also a desire to use and benefit from **job and training opportunities arising from housing associations** and other social landlords' well-developed **purchasing power leverage** emerging from local supply chains and community benefit procurement practice etc.

- Several submissions pointed to the importance of follow-up work through the **monitoring of progress** by staying in touch with clients 6 months or later after being placed in job or training opportunities (e.g. in the Stockport submission).

Back to Work initiatives, like Motiv8 (a branded Greater Manchester version of Building Better Opportunities funded by the European Social Fund and Big Lottery) were raised by several respondents operating in the North West. Several larger housing associations (Clarion and Optivo) play key delivery roles in Love London Working (LLW was also part ESF funded). The combined GM projects also include Skills for Employment (SFE) and Skills Support for Growth (SSG), with mention repeatedly made here and in oral evidence sessions about the imminent ending of European Social Fund money and concerns about how the Shared Prosperity funding to come will operate and effectively replace ESF sustainably. A key to these initiatives is **cross-association collaboration within regions**. Associations demonstrate an ability to work together e.g. LLW was founded in 2016 with nine partners.

There was also a sense that the potential for engaging in employment support is stymied by the **scale of geographies** required to bid for employment support contracts, with DWP, for example (see the oral evidence from Magenta Living). In a panel session, one contribution (SYHA) pointed to the large size of the North East programme which made it ill-suited for housing associations to apply for. Implicit here was the sense that smaller geographies drawn around functional local labour markets would be a better fit for housing associations as lead delivery bodies working in partnership, rather than the larger spatial scales used by DWP. Linked to this was a call for more devolved employment funding for associations (e.g. the submission from Origin) and better incentives to encourage more participation in employment and skills opportunities

via social housing regulation (e.g. if the Regulator added employment activities to the neighbourhood and communities standard required of providers), as well as greater scope for partnership working with local authorities, local employment partnerships and with DWP to support social tenants into employment (e.g. submission by Efficiency North).

Box 2: Magenta Living Inspiring Dream Programme

In their written evidence, Magenta Living, based on the Wirral, argued that the quickest and easiest way housing associations can help to enhance earnings and employment outcomes is to use their relationship with communities to engage those who are harder to reach and help to build their confidence to engage with mainstream employment and skills services. Magenta Living's Inspiring Dreams programme is designed specifically to do just that. The programme takes a holistic approach to looking at the issues that can cause real or perceived barriers to employment and take the first gentle steps to addressing them. Because it is internally funded, they are not driven by quick job outcomes and rather can support participants to move to further training, volunteering and employment at the right pace for them. In an oral evidence session, they argued that over a two-week intensive programme client confidence is built with 'remarkable results'. Clients are asked what their biggest challenges have been, and they found that the mutual nature of the group inspired each other – "Well, if he's thinking about dealing with getting a job and he's got all that to deal with, what I'm dealing with is nothing. I can do it too." As Sally Ross who leads on this at Magenta Living said: *"they've all lifted each other up and really sort of brought each other along together and then, when they've moved on to another course that's taking them either into IT skills or the next step towards employment, they've gone together."*

Linked to the above is the **size disparity** between larger associations, who have the capacity to do employment and training support to scale, and smaller/medium sized providers' ability to access commissioning, procuring and delivering larger local programmes. Genuine partnership is required both with statutory bodies and across the housing association sector. Across our evidence-gathering this asymmetry was frequently noted and questions asked: should more be done to align consortia to work across local labour market areas, combined authorities and county council or more functional boundaries? How might bodies like LEPs ensure consistent capacity building among providers in an end to end model that links DWP to Further Education to life-long learning to Job Centre Plus and housing associations and similar providers? Along with the common call for more joined up working and spatial strategies, is a deep-rooted concern about the future of these programmes post Brexit (and post the ESF).

With **scarce resources**, councils have to be shrewd in their interventions. Southampton City Council, for example, has a dedicated team for training, employment, education and motivation, which is resourced from HRA funding. They would like to see professional employment support accreditation for social landlords and staff, building on accreditations within the British association for supported employment. This is an important point since it provides **incentives to support preventative work** e.g. accreditation (in the same way that there is an instrumental organisational reward for individuals and teams that improves their finances by getting tenants into work and also helps achieve public purpose goals).

Examples of initiatives that can evidence degrees of success included mentoring, with Efficiency North suggesting that their **EN:Able Communities project** has demonstrated 'that mentoring is needed to support people into, and in, work'. EN:Able also developed 'links with local employers' and seeks to develop 'employment-based Hubs in the Yorkshire and Humber area,' with the view that the

model could be transferred elsewhere. They also cited **Construction Skills for Life**, 'developed in West Yorkshire, whereby local training providers… provide short (6-8 week) courses based on Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours with informative, advice and guidance, and up to 2 weeks' work experience to enable entry level for those NEETs'.

Leeds City Council also provided examples of 'what works,' including 'targeted recruitment in priority neighbourhoods,' working with other partners; 'local budgets for community projects,' including those around employment/skills'; and digital skills initiatives. Another respondent highlighted the need for holistic approaches to employability programmes, encouraging customers to engage with wider support services, e.g. an in-house Money Matters team.

The Tunbridge Wells **Working for Everyone** programme was cited by Town & Country/ Peabody as good practice, with the aim 'to close the employment and skills gap' for social housing residents and other disadvantaged people locally via a one-stop shop. This was a partnership between the Borough Council, Town and Country Housing, the local Business Improvement District, and British Land (owners of a local shopping centre), with support from other VCSE partners, including Mental Health Resource and Citizens Advice. Optivo cited their 'successful construction-themed employment projects,' including **Build Yourself and Women in Construction**, suggesting that they are well placed to develop future initiatives, for example around the low carbon agenda.

The submission the Just City project highlighted the benefits of community research approaches, included the **USE-IT!** Model in Birmingham. This is a "major ERDF-funded intervention working in Ladywood, a deprived inner-city ward, to test new strategies to help residents develop resilience and overcome poverty. Academics at the University of Birmingham devised an accredited research training programme, coupled with mentoring, that upskilled over 100 residents, while at the same time gathering rich data to inform the decisions of public organisations in the city."

Box 3: Optivo

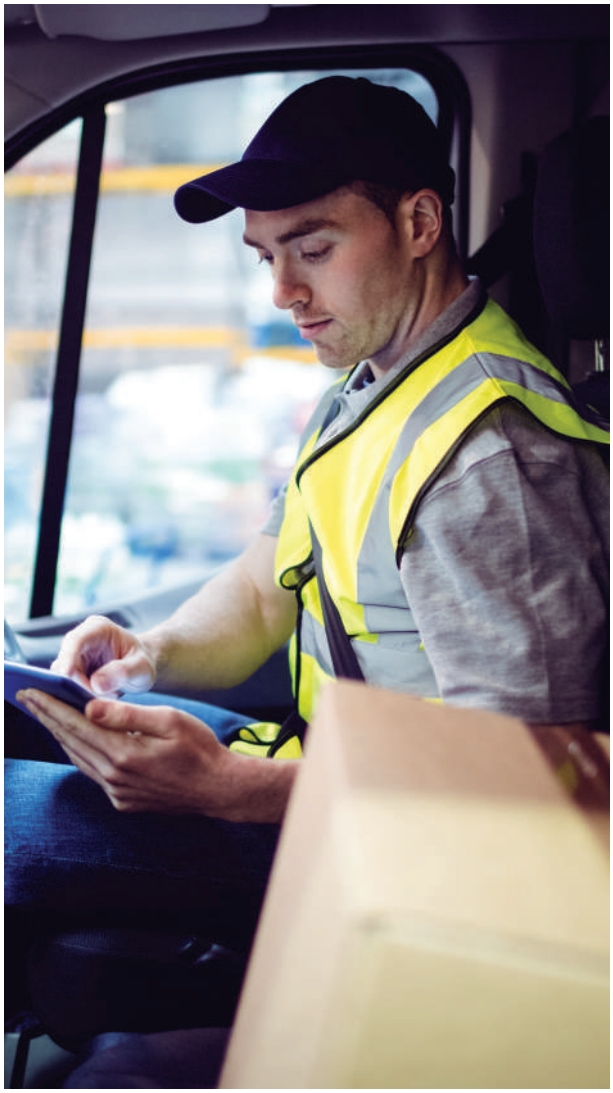
Over the last 3 years, Optivo have created 3,000 jobs and training slots (5,000 people in programmes in the last 12 months). They are one of nine partners aiming to provide 6,300 jobs for those far from the labour market in London through Love London Working. They seek to leverage social value through their supply chain and work through Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) metrics to demonstrate their social returns.

Optivo's work is however also thriving at the local scale. Their tenants told us that Optivo have been effective through engaging their clients in personal development training, developing job interview skills, helping support new businesses and seeking out supply chain opportunities with their contractors. Oral evidence from Optivo staff argued that what really matters is effectiveness at the local scale. Locally, they work with employment support officers, local community residents, peer support, a WhatsApp group, and mutual support groups that deal with ambition, aspiration and confidence.

There are practical examples here in the written and oral evidence of **bespoke support** showing flexibility, compassion and a willingness to go further and unlock situations, often not of the client's making. These include overcoming key blockages by providing bespoke grants to help people get to interviews or meet childcare expenses and, in one case, purchasing a musical instrument. One good example came from the tenants' panel where a Together tenant told his story:

"I'm with Together in Halifax and they have a charity called Newground that are part of their group, and part of the Newground service is to help people that are away from the labour market or are far removed from it to get back into work. So I went to that service in 2018 and they provided all kinds of support, emotional, professional to help me get back to a position where I could start working again from being removed from the labour market. So I think Newground do a lot in that respect. They were able to find me a work placement with the housing association, various training courses that I never knew about, they were able to facilitate be going on those, passing various examinations. They just facilitated a great deal for me to be able to move forward basically. I'm not sure how common that is for housing associations, but that service was invaluable to me for getting back into work."

Tenant Panel Session



Box 4: Clarion Futures

Clarion are the lead delivery partner for Love London Working, a major employment programme agency established in 2016 and managed by the GLA, worth £33m and funded in part by ESF. On the programme each client works with a specialist employment advisor with a focus not just getting into work but staying in work. Clarion offer a free service to all of its residents and operates with more than 40 advisors offering a range of employment and support, employability advice, support for childcare and training. In 2019-20 they helped around 4,000 people into work and placed 250 into apprenticeships. More than 200 started their own business. Clarion Futures staff told us that their annual spend is £6.6m on employment and training, just under half of which comes from Clarion's own budget (and is targeted at their own residents); most of the rest comes from the ESF and is therefore vulnerable in future.

The evidence submitted to the Inquiry indicates that housing providers are on a journey that will lead to embedding the use of more rigorous evidence into how they evaluate and appraise their activities, including employment and training support broadly conceived. There are multiple benefits associated with **credibly evidencing impact** with larger associations drawing on in-house capacity, others working in partnership with collaborators like the NHS to do Random Controlled Trials (SYHA) and still others (often smaller organisations) availing themselves of sector standard tools like those from HACT (e.g. social bank monetised values of wellbeing changes associated with interventions and investments, as well as social returns methodologies, HACT's community insight profiles, and even the use of ESG metrics promoted by lenders and the Regulator). We also saw examples of softer evidence of throughput and input measures (people supported, jobs and training slots provided created and input costs, alongside perhaps sustainability of jobs over time). The value and importance of social impact evidencing can be connected to wider programmes e.g. working with funders and the Regulator using ESG metrics. These appraisal and evaluation techniques can help win funding, but they also demonstrate value for money and wider social and environmental goals, too – thereby connecting and informing instrumental, preventative and public purpose goals. This use of evidence is growing and will not be reversed.

From a public policy point of view, they also offer the possibility to make more reasoned analysis of the scalability and potential spread of specific success stories. It is encouraging to see organisations like SYHA embrace and seek to learn from trials. We would welcome consortia of providers clubbing together to support evaluative research on their programmes and also that larger employment programme should invest in serious evaluations, as standard lines in their budget.

However, it is important that evidence of targets should not be achieved at the expense of the needs of individual clients. This is a long-standing problem of much wider relevance than this inquiry and topic, but it is worth repeating. One Housing's written submission (p.2) said:

> *"One of the problems for all employment services, including those run by housing associations, is that they have targets for getting people into work which sometimes work against giving someone long-term, intensive support. More importance needs to be given to the quality of the support rather than just the job outcomes".*
>
> One Housing Group

So, while there are examples of successful initiatives and case studies of interventions worth exploring further at a range of spatial scales – there are also barriers that create unevenness, a lack of stability on the policy landscape, funding worries, uncertainty created by Brexit and by Covid-19, and now a rapidly weakening labour market and development context for housing associations.

3.3 Summarising Critical Success Factors

There are a number of important success factors (and one threat) to which we can point.

First, there is widespread and evidenced commitment to, intensive but flexible and bespoke one-to-one support, customised and tailored to the specific requirements of the client, with dedicated professional support throughout the journey, including post-placement monitoring.

Second, opportunities to be seized because of the perceived trusted position and long-term relationship between tenants and their social housing provider.

Third, many housing providers occupy a leading and/or strategic partner role in local labour market employment support and training collaborations. Programme flows from the anchor role and the public purpose of such providers buttressed by the instrumental incentives they have to improve the labour market position of tenants.

Fourth, developing and investing associations and other social housing providers have supply chains and procurement purchasing power which they can and do use to support tenants and residents in the labour market, alongside their role as direct employers.

Fifth, there is much to learn from examples like Love London Working and Greater Manchester's Motiv8 regarding regional partnerships of associations working collaboratively with the local public sector to generate scale economies and significant programmes addressed at the long-term unemployed and those a long way from working.

Sixth, scaling up and transferring lessons is however threatened by both funding threats (how ESF is replaced) and by the asymmetry between the size of housing associations (small can be very effective in local settings) and the scale of, for instance, DWP programmes across large regions making it difficult for consortia of associations to compete.

Finally, it was striking in both the written and oral evidence how much housing providers are seeking to evidence impact and to appraise future impacts. This signals commitment to external accountability, rigorous use of analysis, and seeking public value for money. This is a trajectory that will not be reversed, and we see providers at different stages of the journey embracing tools like ESG or the HACT social value bank through to their own commission and participation in serious scientific evaluations like RCTs. This supports strategic development of the wider functions of housing providers, but it also makes a huge contribution to scalability and transferability of what works. However, as we noted, it is important that strategies and programmes do not become uncritically reliant on generic measures or externally imposed targets.

4. Improving Policy

4.1 Policy Themes

The written evidence provided a lengthy and diverse set of policy proposals to improve and sustain employment and training support involving social housing providers. Below these are grouped into eleven main headings. We also draw on relevant oral evidence. There is a summary at the end of the section. As one might expect, there is a reasonable correspondence between policy 'asks' and beliefs about the barriers faced and the quality of initiatives already underway.

Additional funding for employment, training and skills

Multiple responses highlighted a need for further funding , highlighting the need for sustained funding over a long time period, rather than short-term projects . One participant recognised that opportunities needed to be 'based on local employer and employment needs' (Newground Together), while another highlighted the benefits of funding existing programmes that are known to be effective, such as Motiv8, Working Well, Steps to Work and Hidden Talent (Wythenshawe).

The need for sustained funding was highlighted as particularly important because of the current uncertainties regarding replacements for European funds post-Brexit (i.e. the ESF) and the impacts of Covid-19 going forward (Guinness, Hyde), as well as the impacts of austerity since 2010 (Just City Project). A few participants mentioned the Shared Prosperity Fund, but one (Efficiency North) expressed uncertainty about its terms and conditions, and how far it could replace European funding. Another emphasised the need for greater involvement of social housing providers in its development (Sovereign).

Several participants commented that the social housing sector was well-placed to deliver training and employment programmes, in particular, citing that if the Government increased funding for social housing more broadly, this could have a knock-on effect on training opportunities (e.g. apprenticeships) and employment (e.g. in construction) (Wythenshawe, Radian Yarlington, Optivo, CHP).

A range of different interventions were suggested, targeted at different groups. Suggestions included 'projects which specifically support career progression and moving out of in-work poverty' (House of St Barnabas, also Raven), and those which focus on upskilling via further training and education, to enable people to gain higher skilled jobs (Radian, GM Housing Providers). Another response suggested a need for 'more intensive, longer-term and holistic' support for adults, to help them with 'financial resilience, self-confidence, motivation and a range of other barriers which hold them back' (Southern). Others highlighted the need to support those in insecure employment or who are unemployed (Stockport Homes, GM Housing Providers). Several participants cited the 'Opportunity Guarantee' idea, to ensure young, unemployed people have the help they need to gain employment, via investment in employment support, education, training and jobs (Guinness, Plus Dane, Torus Foundation).

Futures Housing Group highlighted the findings of a Learning and Work report, Emergency Exit: How we get Britain back to work, in which they cited calls to the Government to introduce a 'Plan for Jobs' involving 'investment and incentives to create jobs'; a 'Youth Guarantee' to stop the increase in youth unemployment, for example via support to stay in education, an Opportunity Fund 'to create ring-fenced temporary jobs for young people' and refocussing apprenticeships on young people; and increased support for finding work, with Emergency Exit recommending a need for at least 10,000 additional JCP work coaches, and £2.4 billion funding for long-term unemployment.

Building back better and green retrofit was seen by several as a coincidence of wants for policy and the under-served in the labour market with opportunities for training and work in a new growth industry. The Torus Foundation commented (written submission p.6):

> *"Nothing puts into perspective the need for future skills more that the Low Carbon Agenda. To achieve Government targets, Housing Associations can contribute in more ways than simply retrofitting existing stock and building new homes to carbon neutral standard. The sector has access to a unique pool of talent ready to be trained and engaged within maintenance and construction work."*
>
> Torus Foundation

Expanding funding for education throughout the life course

Submissions also highlighted the need for additional investment in education throughout the life course, to help people gain higher skilled and better paid employment. One participant suggested reforming adult education, stating that the current requirement for eight attendees per course is prohibitive (Sovereign). Another emphasised the role of central government in promoting the importance of basic skills in English, Maths and IT, with a need for better careers advice in schools and funding for additional, more accessible courses (Vivid Homes; also, Weaver Vale).

There was recognition of the need for further advice and support in terms of employability and skills, in addition to formal education. One respondent emphasised the need for mentoring for school children (Onward Homes). Another emphasised the need for school pupils to learn about 'job search opportunities, budgeting and careers advice as standard' (Jigsaw Homes). This view was echoed by another large housing provider, who emphasised the need for government investment to help prepare young people for employment, such as via extracurricular and pastoral activities, suggesting that schools need to play a bigger role in preparing people for work (Southern).

A localised, personalised approach: targeted support for deprived areas/ disadvantaged individuals

Another common theme was the need for further targeted support for particularly deprived areas or disadvantaged individuals, which is tailored to the needs of the area and local population (West Kent Housing, Prima, Optivo, Bolton at Home). In terms of place, participants emphasised the need to target funding at deprived areas and/or those with high levels of unemployment (Stockport, GM Housing Providers, Beyond Housing) and the need to recognise the varied needs residents living in social housing, with different barriers to employment, e.g. for peripheral estates, there may be a need for funding to improve public transport infrastructure and affordability issues (Just City Project). There was recognition that some areas had experienced greater difficulties transitioning to a post-industrial economy, and that this issue may be compounded by Brexit, with the suggestion that central government needs to support local authorities to help address economic inequalities (Beyond Housing). Other spatially targeted suggestions included 'ring-fencing jobs for people living in socially deprived neighbourhoods' and 'providing quotas for organisations to recruit from certain postcodes' (Jigsaw Homes).

Regarding population groups, some responses emphasised the need to target those furthest from the labour market (Wythenshawe), such as those with limited literacy (Workhome Project). One submission suggested focusing interventions for those with mental health or substance use issues, to 'build the stability required to work or access skills training' (Just City). For residents with a disability, one submission recommended the need for 'equal access to job application processes through disability accommodation, including videoconferencing interviews after the lockdown ends' (Peabody). There was recognition of the need for job-focussed training, particularly for those groups most adversely affected by welfare reform, such as lone parents (Clarion) and also those most affected by increasing unemployment levels resulting from Covid-19, such as young people and women (Longhurst Group, Guinness Partnership). Another submission highlighted the utility of supporting policies focussed on specific communities or groups of jobseekers, such as the former New Deal or Future Jobs Fund schemes (Radian, Clarion).

Within this theme, there were also several comments regarding the need for greater devolution, whether that be to the regional, local or even community anchor (i.e. social housing provider) scale, with the view that localised solutions can be more flexible and effective*. Respondents suggested several ways in which they thought devolution should be used, for example in terms of employability/ training budgets (Wythenshawe), or to allow combined authorities greater responsibility for planning and housing (Just City, Midland Heart), economic development (Jigsaw) (seen as particularly important in light of impacts and likely recovery from Covid-19) (Radian) or adult education (GM Housing Providers). In his oral evidence, Joe Dromey of the Learning and Work Institute said: "I think more devolution of the employment and skills support that we see, which I think is broadly positive, the more there are possibilities for partnership working on a local level between housing associations and local government".

A radical variant was proposed by Heidi Leyshon (Sovereign) in an oral evidence session:

> *"I'd really like to see the government approach to having a policy where each individual is given a training and skills pot that is flexible each year. The reason I'm looking at that is I'm seeing other countries are doing that, and it's really helping with the levelling up and the good work agenda. Before the crisis I think there was a real recognition of the growth of the in-work poverty situation that we've got, where work and jobs and security and the pay is not quite working. For me, I know the customers that we work with, the biggest barrier for them on top of maybe not having that aspiration, that self-belief, is if we help them with that, they then can't afford the training and the qualifications, to be able to move on in the job market. I think if there was a policy that the government have for each individual, as a country, it would mean that we're all more skilled."*

Reforms around commissioning/ procurement

Another recurring theme was suggestions around reforming commissioning and procurement, to enable the involvement of social housing providers in the design and delivery of employability programmes (Efficiency North, Longhurst, TJE Consulting, Torus Foundation). There was a view that these processes can sometimes be complex (Longhurst group) and inhibit the involvement of smaller organisations (e.g. SYHA). Further, there was concern that 'prime contracts' often covered a large geographical area and were thus unsuitable for local housing associations, with a recommendation for DWP to commission contracts for regional or sub-regional areas (SYHA). Submissions highlighted that reviewing these processes could make it easier for the social housing sector to engage and allow 'a more diverse and specialist range of provision to better meet local needs,' for example around prime contracting or increased stipulations for local social value (TJE Consulting; see also Clarion).

**Wythenshawe, Birmingham Just City Project, SYHA, Midland Heart, GM Housing Providers, West Kent Housing, TJE Consulting*

Issues relating to welfare reform and Universal Credit

Another common theme was the need to address issues around welfare reform, and particularly Universal Credit, which can inhibit people's entry to (full-time) employment. One response stated that as social housing tenants' housing benefit entitlement is reduced if they earn over £400 per week, this makes the transition to full-time work more challenging (Midland Heart). Several participants thus cited challenges for social housing residents seeking work, with uncertainty regarding whether they will end up worse off financially as a result of Universal Credit calculations (Centrepoint, Longhurst, BPHA, Southern). There was a recommendation to calculate eligibility for in-work Universal Credit after all housing costs had been considered (South Liverpool Homes). Another response suggested the need for 'flexible tapering to the benefits system to allow social tenants a very gradual shift to full self-employment' (Workhome Project).

The submission by CHP highlighted the need for clearer and more accessible guidance from government regarding how transitioning to work can affect benefit payments, with a need for additional financial support during this transition period. Similarly, The House of St Barnabas recommended the need to 'provide support and security through the welfare system for people going through the transition from low paid insecure work into better work' (also Prima Housing Group). There was a recommendation, reflecting a well-established long-term aspiration that, as a goal of the welfare benefit systems, government must seek to ensure people are better off in employment (Prima).

The 'bedroom tax' policy was cited as particularly problematic in the context of Covid-19 and the increase in home-based working, meaning tenants may have little room for comfortable home-based working, with the recommendation that this be abolished (Magenta Living, Workhome Project). The Workhome Project also recommended the need to 'enshrine the right to work from home in law.'

Another commonly cited issue was the up-front costs associated with finding work, such as travel, clothing and childcare expenses (see below), with no guarantee of work, and payment being in arrears even if people do gain employment (BPHA, Peabody). As such, submissions recommended reforming universal credit to cover these costs upfront (Sovereign, CHP).

Employment reform

Related to these issues, several participants also highlighted the need for higher level legislative employment reform, to provide more secure employment and income . Submissions highlighted a need for flexibility for some, such as those with caring responsibilities (Prima, Peabody). A more generous living wage was recommended by several participants , as was the abolition of 'zero-hours contracts and false self-employment' (Phoenix; also, Vivid, Jigsaw). Another recommended implementing the Low Pay Commission recommendation that 'all workers have a right to predictable hours' (Sovereign). Others made specific recommendations about apprenticeships, including one suggesting a review of the apprenticeship levy 'to encourage the social housing sector to utilise this resource to create apprenticeship opportunities to work in social housing (Radian), and another suggesting increased funding for apprenticeships and job training schemes more generally (Rooftop housing).

Improved public transport and childcare services

Several participants highlighted poor/ expensive public transport and childcare as barriers to both finding and sustaining employment. As mentioned previously, these were seen as particular challenges for people attending interviews and for those starting work, with payment in arrears (BPHA, CHP). A need for accessible and affordable public transport (including cycling provisions) , particularly for residents on peripheral estates (The House of St Barnabas), was another key theme. For example, one respondent commented on the need to 'provide support to work assistance with travel, clothing grants and improve access to childcare

benefits' (Cross Keys). In terms of transport, one respondent suggested that local authorities could work 'with local transport providers and other partners' to 'cross-subsidise transport services for social unemployed residents similar to the over 65s' (West Kent Housing). Where they are operating, this could be addressed by regional transport bodies (One Housing Group).

Several participants highlighted issues around childcare, with the view that specific intervention/ subsidy was required to address affordability for social housing tenants. Another suggested regulating the cost of childcare (Raven). One specifically recommended that 'the government should double free childcare available for 3 – and 4-year olds to 30 hours per week for all, with expanded provision for 2-year olds' (Peabody).

Addressing digital exclusion

Several participants highlighted the need to address digital exclusion (Stockport, GM Housing Providers, Vivid, CHP), both in terms of funding to support access to good quality, affordable broadband for all and to support the development of skills for using information technologies (GM Housing Providers, CHP). These issues were highlighted as particularly important in light of the increase in home-based working resulting from Covid-19, with a need for funding to also ensure homes are suitable for home-working (Workhome Project, CHP, Plus Dane). One respondent suggested that they would like to work with government to 'design specialist courses covering the skills needed to work from home, including independent working, managing a team remotely and using a variety of videoconferencing apps' (Optivo). One participant suggested a social housing tariff for affordable broadband (West Kent), while another recommended the need to 'reclassify the internet as a utility service that is available for all to access and use' (Workhome Project).

Support for strengthened partnership working

Partnership working was another recurring theme . As one respondent commented, 'it is imperative that local, regional and national governments involve housing associations at a high level in planning services and infrastructure that impacts employment and social mobility' (Newground Together). This is because of both the need to address the employment rate among working age social tenants and is also in part a recognition of the perceived stigma attached to social renting. Another highlighted the role for central government to expand partnerships with housing associations, local government, charities and the wider employment services sector to improve employment and earnings outcomes for social rented tenants, particularly in the context of Covid-19 (Guinness). 'Cobra for Jobs' as a 'collaboration between government, policymakers, business, education and housing associations to continue good work and levelling up agendas' was another suggestion (Sovereign). One submission suggested the 'co-design of programmes with the housing sector' and 'using the housing sector as a key partner for multidisciplinary/ wrap-around interventions' (L&Q). The need for training opportunities to link with job availability was also recognised, with one response citing the Cube project in Miles Platting, Manchester as a successful example of this for construction vacancies (Jigsaw).

Some participants recommended the need for compulsory closer partnership working between housing associations and DWP and/ or Job Centre Plus . Another commented that at the local level, 'JCP Partnership Managers could make greater use of the Flexible Support Fund (FSF) to engage social housing providers and unleash their potential in helping residents back to work' (SYHA). A further suggestion was that JCP and social housing providers should collaborate more, for example sharing resources and databases (Efficiency North). More broadly, one participant commented on the need for a specialist strategic team working closely with central government and local authorities (Onward Homes). To enable improved partnerships, one participant suggested that central government should provide guidelines regarding expected principles of partnership working within local authority areas (Vivid).

Local Government

Related to the points above regarding partnership working, there was several recommendations that partnerships between local government and housing associations should be strengthened (Stockport, Grand Union, GM Housing Providers, Nottingham city homes), for example to fill skills shortages (Stockport, GM Housing Providers).

Another theme was the need for more support and funding for local government to improve employment and earnings outcomes, working in partnership, with recognition of the impacts of austerity (Hyde). Another recognised the important role that local government, as an 'anchor institution,' can play in responding to local needs or developing 'collaborative multi-agency working

projects' (Just City Project). Again, however, they highlighted the need for greater funding for this from central government, along with greater devolution of powers and more recognition of the potential role of local government from central government, so that localities can develop locally based interventions (Just City). Similarly, another participant emphasised the need to address funding issues for local government services that relate to employment and employability agendas, such as for children's centres, youth services, social services and libraries (Longhurst Group). A couple of respondents commented on the need for a clearer role for LEPs (Efficiency North, Radian).

Housing policy was another area of intervention commonly cited, falling under the remit of local authorities, but with central government providing the framework (Just City, Midland Heart, Sovereign). This included recommendations around the need for more funding for affordable housing provision in general (Midland Heart); and those around the need for a greater focus on social mix for both existing and new housing developments (Just City), with the view that this could address cited challenges regarding the residualisation of the sector and stigmatisation of certain communities (Midland Heart). Another recommendation was to develop more affordable housing with good access to well-paid jobs, public transport and childcare provision (Sovereign). Others suggested further investment in diversifying social housing, for example with one recommending the reintroduction of rent-to-buy options (West Kent Housing), while another suggested that more investment in shared ownership housing could increase social mobility (Clarion).

Additional suggestions

One additional point concerned addressing issues of stigma/ representation, with participants citing the impact this can have on employment prospects and social mobility (Newground Together, Onward, Rooftop Housing, Sovereign). One suggested that the government's focus on aspiring to home ownership contributes to this stigmatisation, suggesting instead that government should 'support and facilitate the integration of socioeconomic levels in social housing' via social mix (Weaver Vale). One participant highlighted the need for government to reframe the perception of social housing as 'an opportunity for social mobility,' rather than stigmatising it (Sovereign).

Others emphasised the need for employer engagement and wage incentives for employability and training initiatives or placements, particularly for those most in need, such as those with disabilities, the long-term unemployed and young people . Another suggested a need to 'encourage employers to place more value on lower-paid staff, improving retention, training, rather than disposable staff who are easily replaced' (Raven). Other incentives could relate to tax or grant funding for businesses to take on longer-term unemployed people (Jigsaw). Another suggested the need to incentivise private sector investment in low-skilled communities in particular, and to increase requirements for diversity and inclusion (Magenta Living).

Finally, multiple participants highlighted a need for integrate policy at both central and local government level to improve the employment and earnings. Cited policy areas included , employment, employability education and skills, transport, housing, regeneration health, business/ social enterprise support and support services, including for those with mental health or addiction issues .

Interestingly, while several participants commented on the need for a holistic approach to improve employment and earnings, only a small number related this to issues of societal and structural inequality (Centrepoint, Phoenix, Southampton City Council, TJE consulting as example exceptions), although several did refer to the 'levelling up' agenda between different places . These were more common amongst respondents from the Midlands and northern England. Moreover, a number of people in the oral evidence sessions did discuss poverty, inequality and health inequality in more structural terms.

4.2 Written and Panel Evidence Summary

A wide range of interventions were suggested, with the evidence generally based on respondents' own experiences of delivering employability and employment support interventions, rather than citing secondary research. There was consensus that, while many social housing providers are well-placed to play a larger role in improving employment and earnings for social housing tenants, there was also agreement about the need for further central government funding and support to enable the social housing sector to fulfil its potential in this regard. Responses regarding the role of central government could be largely classified into two groups: interventions enabling social housing providers to play a greater role, and interventions addressing barriers to employment.

A common theme was the need for further sustainable funding streams for employment, training and skills interventions, combined with additional funding for education throughout the life course. Responses generally suggested that with additional funding, the social housing sector would be well-placed to design and deliver such interventions. There was concern, however, that sometimes commissioning, and procurement processes favoured larger providers, and that a more localised and personalised approach, which allowed smaller organisations, working in partnership with others, would be very beneficial for the delivery of interventions. Multiple participants emphasised the need for targeted support for deprived areas or disadvantaged individuals furthest from the labour market, and there was a general view that reforming procurement to allow a more localised approach would be beneficial in this regard. Another theme was the need for more employer incentives, particularly to employ and support those from disadvantaged groups.

Responses also commonly cited the need to address the barriers to employment, to ensure that people are better off in work, and that they are not disadvantaged financially if they increase their hours as they transition to full-time work. Several participants thus made recommendations regarding welfare reform and particularly Universal Credit. The need for financial support for those looking for work, and during their first month of employment if payments are made in arrears, was also cited. There were also several responses around employment reform, with participants highlighting the need for more secure, well-paid work, for example by abolishing zero hours contracts, but also allowing flexibility, for example for those with caring responsibilities. Improvements to public transport, childcare and broadband infrastructures were seen as vital to enable people to find work and, increasingly, to work from home, given the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many participants highlighted the need for central government to better support and facilitate partnership working, recognising that while local government has a crucial role to play in addressing employability issues, its abilities have been greatly curtailed due to austerity. Several participants also highlighted the need for further devolution of powers and resources. Less directly, several

participants made suggestions regarding local housing policy, with some viewing that stigmatisation of certain areas can affect people's employability. Some recommended a need for more funding for social mix, or for greater diversification of social housing. Other participants highlighted the role for central and local government is dispelling myths about social housing, to reduce this stigmatisation.

Participants highlighted the need for joined-up policy at both central and local government level, recognising the complex factors that affect the relationship between social housing and employment and earnings.

5. Conclusions, Summary and Recommendations

We are not going to repeat our summary comments from each of the last four sections. Rather these are summarised in simple diagrams over the next few pages. Here we make a few general conclusions, suggest recommendations for action and point to key first steps.

5.1 Broad Conclusions

Throughout the oral evidence sessions and in much of the written evidence there was discussion of stigma attached to the social rented sector and debate as to whether there is something about social housing that independently worsens the labour prospects of its residents.

Our view tends to side with that expressed by Joe Dromey at the end of the second section of this report. There is little evidence that two of the defining features of social housing, namely, tenure security and sub-market rents – have anything to do with the gap in employment outcomes between social housing and other tenures. However priority, the third defining feature, allocating to those in housing need will by definition produce working age tenants facing various challenges when assessing the labour market (though this occurs alongside other important barriers like job availability and jobs quality, transport, childcare support networks, etc.). While this will vary across space and time, there will be a degree of residualisation and relatively concentrated deprivation and poorer work outcomes in the tenure. While it is right to challenge stigma and discrimination about social renting it is also the case that effective employment training and support for some local residents will be required.

This is why we recognise the quality and tenacity of many of the programmes we have received evidence on from across the country. But we should be clear that these are not normal times and the recession will place extraordinary pressure on these services and competition for vacancies. This is why they must continue to be funded and programmes extended to align with housing and community investments, training programmes, retrofit and further leverage of procurement and supply chains to this end.

The figures below draw on earlier sections to summarise the barriers to employment and the range of interventions, respectively. The barriers include a recognition of the contextual role social housing

can play through both the location of social housing relative to jobs, which may well reflect previous generations of building location decisions, as well as the impact of allocating housing on the basis of need. The second figure draws on Wilson, et al (2016) who distinguishes interventions across the three stages of individualised intervention. We have also added a fourth column which reflects wider labour market and economic structural forces shaping work opportunities. A third diagram summarises the policy areas identified as requiring prioritisation.

Personal and Structural Factors inhibiting Social Tenant Labour Market Participation

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	STRUCTURAL FACTORS	SOCIAL HOUSING CONTEXT
Education and skills	Job availability and quality of jobs	Allocation system
Digital skills	Austerity impacts	Location
Disability	Affordable and available transport	
Aspiration and confidence	Affordable and accessible childcare	
Other factors: Adverse childhood experiences;family breakdown; domestic abuse, etc.	Digital connectivity	
	Discrimination and stigma	

Labour Market Intervention stages (based on Wilson, et al, 2016)

PREPARE FOR WORK	LOOK FOR WORK	GET INTO WORK	STRUCTURAL CONTEXT
Employability	Job search	Finding a job	Jobs availability
Confidence and aspirations	Application support	Starting and staying	Content of jobs
One-to-one intensive support	Personal resilience	Monitoring progress	Economic demand

One could not fail to find incredible variety in the range of activities pursued by housing associations and other providers. On the one hand this reflects the range of obstacles and barriers to overcome, summed up by the strong support for the intensive use and expansion of customised end to end employment support for individual clients and the desire to support employability to training to placement and to monitor in-work progress, too. This is expensive but effective. One also imagines this variety reflects funding routes, the strength of partnerships in specific regions, capacity and experience. It will also probably reflect the depth and nature and performance of local labour markets, training options, attitudes of employers and much more. This variety represents a barrier to scaling up and transferring ideas, but it does suggest that local context is important and is one argument in favour of more devolved funding and delivery systems for employment, skills and training support.

Scale and geography were repeatedly found to be important play filters in determining the role housing providers in the labour market. We were told that the work of different scales of associations suggested that both small is beautiful and 'large need not be ugly'. Larger providers like Clarion Futures and Optivo demonstrate positive impact both singly and in partnerships like Love London Working. At the same time there is much evidence of high-quality interventions from community anchor smaller scale associations and other social housing providers, and this is also true of medium-sized bodies, for instance, collaborating in Greater Manchester very effectively. But there is real friction and waste generated by institutional scale elsewhere. We heard how the size of DWP spatial programmes were so large that even large consortia would find it hard to deliver a successful bid. These geographies should be aligned to local labour market areas not bureaucratic large entities that simply remove capable performers from being able to participate – that seems a significant loss in value for money terms and in capacity. It is also another argument for devolving further funding and delivery of these programmes.

Key Policy Requests from Inquiry Evidence

Sustainable funding
Strengthening procurement and commissioning
Improved public transport and childcare services
Addressing digital exclusion
Welfare benefit reform for work incentives
Education support over the life course
Personalised approaches
Employment legislation reforms
Local government funding restored
Affordable new supply and invest in existing stock
Strengthen partnership working
Devolve funding and delivery mechanisms to local settings

Not surprisingly, the need for protected and increased funding featured prominently in our written submissions. We think that government needs to produce both a strategy and a consistent medium-term policy and practice environment to both enable the labour market and the providers like housing associations to make the most effective impact – and this should be based on evidence and properly evaluated.

Everything said here has to be viewed through a Covid-19 filter – the employment situation looks bleak but there will be considerable interventions made locally, regionally and nationally. If government is to level-up it needs to direct resources, innovation and capacity both to the North but also to disadvantaged places and communities more generally. Building Back Better (e.g. through large scale initiatives such as green retrofitting) can also create major training and economic development opportunities that housing associations can and should be partners in . Covid-19 also demonstrates wider and deeper inequalities holding people back – for instance, the digital divide now has direct job implications as we shift to working from home and engaging with service providers and statutory bodies online.

We started this report from the Resolution Foundation's empirical analysis of the gap between social tenants and other working age people. It is insightful to consider the policy observations that were in turn made by Judge (2019). Judge suggested (1) investing in 'closer to work' initiatives are particularly important because of the significance of disability and mental health issues; (2) there is merit in shifting new build of social homes closer to work opportunities (acknowledging that they might be more expensive); (3) social/tenure mix matters in that it may support word of mouth labour market opportunities; and (4) recessions hit social tenants relatively hard and early so future wider policies to smooth the economic cycle can be distributional.

Where is the tenant voice in these programmes and the extent to which they are co-designed? The providers who gave us evidence had much to say about this aspect of the work. After all, we saw the importance of evolving long-term relationships

with residents. It seems likely that involvement or participation will feature in the forthcoming proposals from Government on social housing so it follows that future planning and bidding for programmes must and should make the most of this opportunity to work with local residents to secure feedback and monitoring and to build into project governance the same principles apparent in the design of the one to one intensive programmes we heard so much about. We carried out a focus group with tenants and this suggested both the positives about what organisations were providing in terms of employment and training support, a recognition of the context and challenges providers face but also a sense of what could be done better, including in terms of participation.

Co-production and design of services, innovation and scrutiny by and for tenants and residents were regularly advocated for both democratic or public purpose and instrumental reasons. In one panel session, a staff member from One Housing said:

'We base all our resident engagement around serviced provision design improvements, any customer-facing policies, anything at all, we attempt to co-create with our residents in that, and we need to get better at it and improve….I think you are in risky territory when people are sat behind a desk designing things on behalf of them without getting really good insights into actually do we know the problems, what are the experiences, what are the hurdles that need to be overcome, and what are those solutions? "

However, it is also the case that co-design with residents and tenants is not always simple. Nic McGrath from Newground Together focused on diversity within the tenant body:

"I think, from a very practical sense, the best way to incorporate a co-design element from programme participants is just to be very smart at capturing the feedback on what their experience was…. But equally, I think understanding that there's not a one size fits all solution. So, there might be within broad cohorts of people we engage with , there might be specific things that are very different about engagement and what works for a young person versus an older person or a single parent or somebody who's from a BAME background. They could all be very different and sit alongside one another. … giving a nod to the diversity of the people that we would be working with alongside, getting qualitative feedback, quantitative feedback from it, prior participants would be the best, the most practical way of building co-design."

A final theme that we would stress is the importance of evidence, impact measurement and evaluation. Resources are and will continue to be highly constrained in the public sector so building strategies and bids for funding/delivery and communicating these approaches to stakeholder requires a genuine commitment to rigorous evidence and analysis. Organisations like HACT and the principles associated with ESG metrics are a great opportunity to demonstrate the social return, the benefit to cost ratio and the wider value and impacts of these programmes. At the same time the employment and training benefits associated with housing-led investments such as new affordable housing, retrofit of the existing stock and other neighbourhood or community investments – all can show relatively large multipliers, value-added and, potentially, significant labour market gains through jobs, apprenticeships and work created further down the supply chain. The use of evidence remains uneven, but we are sure that the increased use of social value metrics and the more rigorous attempts to demonstrate value is a sign of the way the social housing world is changing and for the better.

5.2 Recommendations and Next Steps

While we think the recommendations speak for themselves, we have indicated specific stakeholders that they might be directed towards.

In 2016, Gibb, et al. made a number of recommendations that remain valid today. These included:

- More regional and national public funding resources should **invest in neighbourhoods** to reinforce positive social networks helping social landlords be better placed to work with statutory bodies and deliver employment and training programmes locally. *[Central Government, national housing agencies, combined authorities and Local Government]*

- **Affordable transport** with a renewed focus on routes and timetables that enable work is essential; **the availability and affordability of childcare is** also essential. *[Central and Local Government; local service providers]*

- **Social rented housing fundamentally enables working** so greater security and lower rents guaranteed would be valuable (and runs counter to e.g. the conversion of social housing to affordable housing which increases rents) – this is a labour market case for supporting the growth in genuinely social renting. *[Central Government; national housing agencies; housing providers and trade bodies]*

- The level and implementation of housing benefit and **Universal Credit should not add excessive barriers** to starting to, or increasing, working [DWP].

Our recommendations, in the light of the background research, written submissions and the panel sessions, would include all four of these points. Of course, we need to improve public transport's cost and availability and make childcare services more accessible and affordable. Neighbourhoods and communities are essential to the infrastructure and support networks we all need to be able to work and progress. Not all of our local areas are well enough supported and that investment and strategic commitment would itself be a useful source of work and training. Scotland has through its devolved powers over social security shown that it is possible to amend universal credit's delivery and rules in ways that help low income households. Minor changes could be important at the margin. For instance, time limited support to help people when they first start work would be a good piece of preventative spending with public finances payback as well as doing social good.

Finally, and a recurring theme, we would argue that social housing per se can help people into work because of the security and lower rents it offers. This is but one reason why we need more of it. Judge (2019) proposed, as did some of our written evidence, that new social and affordable housing development locations should be explicitly connected accessibly to dense sites of employment. There is strong evidence about the multipliers achievable from social housing investment in terms of jobs, spending and the like and the wider distribution of those benefits (Gibb, et al, 2020). The greater use of rigorous evidence of social and economic impacts, carefully handled, will reinforce these arguments about housing investment.

The analysis of the evidence submitted to us also generates a number of further recommendations for early action.

First, **provide greater use of tailored, joined up one-to-one 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 to give them confidence in their jobs**, so a greater focus in one-to-one support and tailored training for them. *[Central Government, employment and support providers, local authorities and third sector]*

Second there is a strong case to **devolve and disaggregate** programmes from existing super-regional scale to more functional labour market areas (these might be partnerships of contiguous local authorities or combined authorities, where they exist) and encourage labour market active providers to form consortia at this scale to deliver key local programmes. *[DWP, Central and Local Government*

Third, encourage and support **greater partnership working between housing associations and other organisations**. For example, social housing providers can play the role of anchors in the community working with, for example, further education colleges employers, and other organisations that could then help provide access to the job market. *[Central and Local Government, combined authorities, providers and employment relevant agencies]*

There has been frequent use of the notion of community anchors in this inquiry. Social housing providers by definition have long-term relations with their residents, tenants and communities. The NHF told us that a round 1/3 of housing

associations are doing employment and training work and would do more if they could. This is significant resource that can help develop people at the margins (and beyond) of work. In an era of 'levelling-up', it would be a mistake to lose or dilute this potential and track record in precisely the places government wants to transform.

The third recommendation is to provide some **temporary time limited additional financial support at the start of entering the labour market to cover those extra costs** and to cover the initial transition period into employment. *[DWP and other relevant agencies central and local]*

Fourth, funders likes Homes England or the Regulator or local authorities should explicitly **Incentivise affordable and social housing programmes and existing stock investments** using public funding, such that they promote better labour market outcomes for local people via procurement and supply chain routes through local labour clauses, apprenticeships and other matching of people to opportunities. This might involve soft loans or larger per unit grant in return for achieving these sorts of impacts. This might also be directly linked to green jobs and investment in new residential retrofit industries. *[Central Government, housing agencies, Local Government, and housing providers]*

Fifth, the sector, the sector and existing partnerships clearly needs **funding certainty** over key programmes such as the Shared Prosperity Fund and how it would replace the ESF monies that have been so important to many of the funding and delivery initiatives discussed here. *[Central Government]*

Linking up the last two points, there would be much merit in thinking more strategically and in a joined-up way connecting skills, training, employment support, employability, and customised work, to further and higher education, through partnership bodies operating at a labour market sensitive spatial scale, as an attempt to balance the trade-off between scale economies sought by DWP in its commissioning with the local and regional strengths of housing providers and education outlets.

Sixth, further labour market reforms embracing **more active labour market strategies** such as Jobs Plus should be promoted along with greater statutory support for the precariously working, the low paid and those starting work. *[employment programme delivery agencies and housing providers, Local Government and DWP]*

Seventh, the labour market is a complex multi-faceted system **and policies need to match that complexity** by providing support across the employment journey – for employability, mentoring and customised one to one support for those far from work, but also training, education and skills, as well as job search and capacity to monitor progress once in work. These are key to making employment status stick and the relative neglect of component could well undermine the wider outcomes of interventions. *[All partners, providers and agencies working in this sphere]*

The final recommendation is to actually provide some **temporary time limited additional financial support at the start of entering the labour market to cover those extra costs**, to cover the initial transition period into employment and to provide some additional financial support at that stage *[DWP and other relevant agencies central and local].*

Ultimately, there is an inequalities argument that can't be ducked – we are approaching a very difficult labour market setting for the population in general and also growing pressure on resources. Yet, there is a positive tale to tell from the evidence that the Inquiry has assembled. If we stand still or indeed seek to carry on as before, we risk moving sharply backward from the gains made and the potential for more still 'on the table'. Far from levelling-up and supporting social mobility, retreat means abandoning people, families and communities that have entrusted the housing sector to continue to play this important role.

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- Futures Housing Group
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- Housing Learning and Improvement Network
- Hyde
- Incommunities
- Jigsaw Homes
- Karbon Homes
- L&Q
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- Longhurst Group
- Magenta Living
- Midland Heart
- Newground Together
- North Star
- Nottingham City Homes
- One Housing Group
- Onward Homes
- Optivo
- Origin Housing
- Peabody
- Phoenix Community Housing
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- Prima Group
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