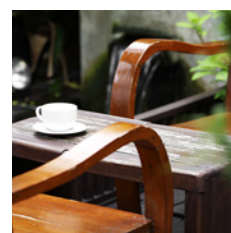
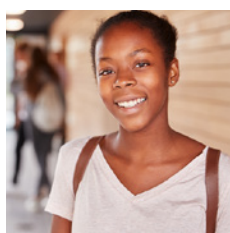
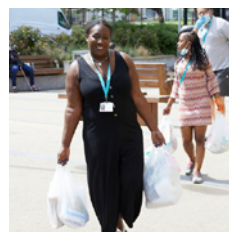
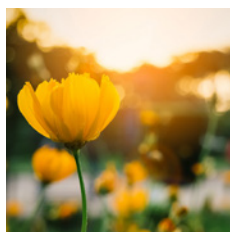
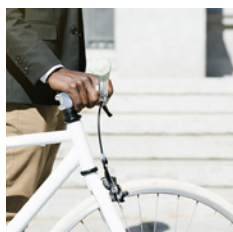
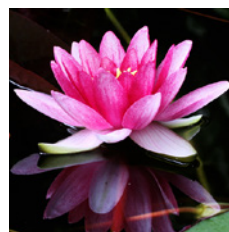
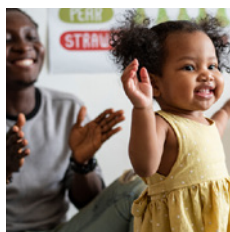
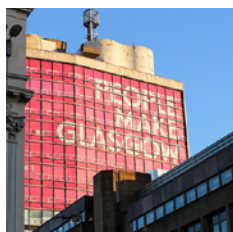
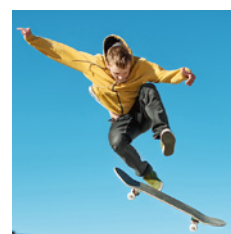
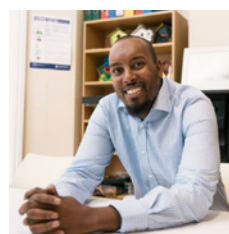
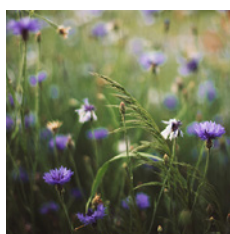




A sector together

The social housing sector and Covid-19

December 2020





HACT works with social housing providers, pioneering change within their businesses through our platform of products, services and consultancy. We identify new opportunities, broker relationships and engage with futures-oriented partners to create new projects and services that transform the social housing sector.

We've been doing this for 60 years. Our ambition is to unleash the creativity and potential of social housing in communities across the UK.

www.hact.org.uk



The Centre for Excellence in Community Investment was established by HACT in 2018. It champions and celebrates the importance and impact of community investment in the UK.

The Centre provides a mechanism for community investment professionals to share and develop their practice. And it ensures community investment is at the core of social housing organisations as they develop their services and relationships with their residents and communities.

www.ceci.org.uk

A sector together

On 16 March 2020, the Government announced a national lockdown; offices closed, home working became the norm and all our futures looked uncertain. Two days later, HACT held its first in what would become a regular series of online meetings with community investment directors. Each shared an update of the actions they had been taking. It made for sobering listening.

Six months on, HACT continues to host those weekly calls, along with regular calls with regional networks of community investment professionals across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

On every call, the dedication and commitment of community investment professionals and their colleagues has been evident. The response from the social housing sector has been fantastic - staff redeployed into frontline roles engaging directly with residents with a huge focus on vulnerability and resilience of residents and communities. The focus has been on reassurance advice and the benefits of working with community groups, and local government and health officials.

We wanted to capture these activities to ensure the depth and breadth of the response by social housing organisations to the Covid-19 pandemic was marked.

This report collects some of those activities. It includes blog posts from a series we called, The View From, in which colleagues from numerous organisations talk about their response to the crisis.

These responses range from a children's cooking project in Gloucester to a motorcycle prescription delivery service in Gwent, from activity packs in Cornwall to food vans with built-in wifi in Glasgow.

As well as stories from colleagues we thought it was important that HACT collected data. So in May we launched our impact measures and with support from all of the membership bodies, we invited social housing organisations across the UK to send us their data for nine community-based initiatives every month. These collated figures are included in this report.

Also included in this anthology is a range of blogs written by HACT colleagues about the sector's response to the crisis and specific issues including mental health and data.

The Covid-19 pandemic is not finished. The crisis is not over. There are still significant risks ahead that social housing organisations will need to navigate.

In working together, evaluating and learning from our experiences, and being bold in our choices, we will be able to realise our roles as anchor based organisations.

HACT will be proud to continue to play a pioneering role in promoting the social purpose of the social housing sector.

Gavin Cansfield
Chair of the Board of Trustees
HACT

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Thank you to all those who contributed their View From blogs or agreed to be interviewed for this series. Taking time out during this crisis to share your responses, ideas and thoughts has been incredibly valuable for the sector.

Thank you as well to the 83 social housing organisations who have contributed their data towards our impact measures. Representing over 42% of total housing stock owned by social housing organisations in the UK, this has helped us to evidence the contributions made by the sector during this period.

Our thanks, as well, to Inside Housing for allowing us to reproduce the content from comment pieces originally published by Inside Housing (pages 6, 36, 93 and 108)

Why taking a long-term view is still important during the coronavirus crisis

Andrew van Doorn, Chief Executive, HACT

31 March 2020

We recently convened a Zoom meeting for community investment professionals to share their responses, concerns and challenges to the coronavirus crisis.

I'd like to share some of the feedback from the meeting.

The immediate focus for most of those we've engaged with thus far has been on identifying and contacting their residents aged over 70 and have an existing health condition.

For many, this has been a Herculean task: one participant has more than 12,000 residents in this category. Another has 4,000, of whom they had already contacted 2,500 to make an initial assessment of levels of support needed.

The numbers involved are huge, and as a result organisations have been pulling in staff from other teams to work the phones. Some have been using scripts, along the lines of those used by fundraising centres, to ensure all staff talk to residents consistently.

Having triaged vulnerable customers and identified those with specific needs, organisations have been taking a number of different approaches to responding to those who need help.

One place-based organisation has been working closely with its local authority's community hubs, passing on details of particularly vulnerable residents and co-ordinating responses.

The government has announced plans for similar hubs across the country. Information on these is still emerging, but there appears to be scope for co-ordinating activities alongside these wherever possible.

Others have been using the staff who have volunteered to go and deliver food and essential medicines. Another organisation has provided staff with the financial flexibility to buy shopping for residents, with their finance team setting up a unique code for them to reclaim these expenses.

For those organisations with stock spread over a wide area – one participant noted that they had stock in 180 different local authorities – there are a number of challenges involved in what to do next.

Who should they contact locally? Who else is working in that area? Who is co-ordinating the response? Our Community Insight tool provides some of these answers.

Partnership working, alongside the willingness to be flexible wherever possible, will clearly play a crucial role in both the short and medium term in alleviating this crisis.

One participant noted that local community groups were also facing capacity issues, whether because of resources or staffing. Another said they were fast-tracking grants to local community groups, while others were allowing any existing organisation in receipt of a grant to reassign it for use on COVID-19-related activities.

At the meeting there was also some thought about the role social housing organisations might play in the next phase of the crisis – using community centres for food distribution, for example.

The role of housing in being able to connect health services with vulnerable clients was also noted – this is something housing might offer to local GP surgeries to ensure that communications cut through to vulnerable groups.

Many organisations shared concerns about the data protection implications of targeting vulnerable tenants for specific services, and the processes of sharing personal details with partner organisations. We told them that the Information Commissioner's Office have made it clear they understand that time, staff and finances are all under pressure at the moment and processes may have to temporarily adapt their usual practices to cope best.

It's also worth noting that data can be processed and shared legitimately if it is in the vital interests of an individual – and given the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic, it is safe to assume that applies across the board at the moment.

Where possible, do document your new processes and try as best you can to share that with those whose data you are processing. However, do not do this at the expense of providing the required support as quickly as you can within your communities.

While most organisations are focusing primarily on vulnerable groups, they are also responding to other emerging needs of their residents

A few noted that despite the uncertainty there has been a surge in job opportunities, particularly in retail, delivery and online fulfilment. Consequently, they have increased the numbers of staff working on their employment teams. Others have said that their employment teams were now working digitally and patchless.

Food poverty is a clear concern for many. The use of food vouchers, however, was seen as more complex. Instead, one participant said they had started sending out fuel vouchers as these were easier for people to use and for organisations to manage. The money residents saved on fuel could then be used on food.

Providing clear communications to residents, particularly around benefit entitlements and the government's various announcements around support for individuals and businesses hit by the impact of coronavirus was another priority mentioned by several on the call.

Some organisations were increasing the numbers of staff in their benefits advice teams to support thousands of people who are concerned about their income and whether they'd be entitled to sick pay. This echoes the data released by Citizens Advice recently, which shows the top ten issues people had been searching for on their website over the past week.

Many organisations are also looking at how they can provide hardship funds to residents, although this might be something that takes a back seat while they deal with more immediate short-term issues.

The meeting demonstrated the flexibility and speed of many social housing organisations in responding to the crisis on their doorsteps, as well as the critical role community investment professionals are playing. They are stepping up to work with partners to signpost to services and to utilise the existing relationships they have with residents and community organisations.

One resounding final message, from one participant: we have to keep taking the long view and not act as if we're in crisis mode the whole time. Otherwise we won't be able to provide the services and support that thousands of our residents need now, and in the future.



The View From: **whg**

Julie Haywood, Director of Community Investment

1 April 2020

We have identified more than 4,000 customers aged 70 or over who may need additional support during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of them live in our Wellbeing Schemes but many live out in the community in general needs housing.

We wanted to make sure they had support and could meet their own physical needs, such as food and warmth. Mobilising our resources, we agreed we would contact all 4,000 customers and gave ourselves five days to complete this mammoth task.

Colleagues from teams across the business volunteered to help contact customers, and we developed a simple, single script to ensure messaging was consistent. Each volunteer had 65 people to contact, and from these calls we

RAG rated each customer. This flagged up anyone who was particularly vulnerable and meant we could refer those who were in particular crisis to the community support hubs that Walsall Council had established.

Together, we've made huge steps in helping thousands of vulnerable people across Walsall feel a little less worried, and a little less isolated.

We're working with Walsall Council which is more effective than us working on our own. We've helped to create virtual project teams behind each of these four hubs, with a dedicated contact for each one. So far we've referred 300 customers who need urgent support from the Community hubs.



We've also joined forces with Walsall Council to look at how we can support those struggling with food provision. Although food banks are currently managing stock levels, face to face customer contact is reducing. We have been helping to support deliveries of food and medicine to particular vulnerable residents, pulling in resources from our Asset Management teams who have been out in their vans supporting deliveries.

One of the issues we've had is around volunteers. It's not possible to get DBS checks done quickly enough at the moment, so we're coordinating with the local police who are able to run PNC checks instead for volunteers coming forward.

The other area of our work we've been focusing on has been employment, as there have been lots of new jobs coming

onto the market, particularly in retail. We had our annual jobs fair at the beginning of March, so have data on 600-700 customers who are looking for work. Now we're connecting them virtually with these new job opportunities.

Next week, we'll be broadening our outreach work out to other groups we know could be particularly vulnerable at this time. These include those in the 60-70-year-old age bracket, customers who have an NST for rent arrears, and those who have taken part in our holiday hunger programme.

Together, we've made huge steps in helping thousands of vulnerable people across Walsall feel a little less worried, and a little less isolated. Of course, it's easier when your stock isn't too dispersed, but nonetheless, we're proud of the impact the whole organisation has made so far.



The View From: Vale of Aylesbury Housing

Caroline Drew, Community Engagement Officer

2 April 2020

When the world is changing in an unprecedented way our first thoughts turn to our residents.


Ensuring they have vital information at their fingertips and someone to call in times of uncertainty. However, for some of our residents, who do not have digital access, are living alone, reliant on services that have suddenly stopped or are vulnerable, they can quickly become isolated.

Following the self-isolation guidance from the Government we quickly put out a call to action to our employees to contact over 2,400 residents over 70, living in an independent living home or have a disability or vulnerability.

Over 20 employees volunteered to help us contact them! Through these calls we aimed to provide reassurance and understand where residents might need more help.

Our support for our residents doesn't end after one phone call... We will be here with our residents, not until this situation ends, but for as long as they need us.

As a result, we have alleviated the fears of residents who haven't been able to get to the post office to pay their rent, have put them in touch with local volunteers to help them get food and supplies and been there as someone to talk to.



*"One well spirited lady has
an incredible passion for
video gaming. She boasts an
unbelievable collection of over
1,000 video games."*

David Goss, our Service Charge Manager, volunteered to call our residents as part of this programme and was astounded by the impact.

"One tenant told me she was having no trouble self-isolating, she has been self-isolating for two years now as has been suffering with numerous health complications. She told me she doesn't see anyone, no friends or family, but relies on Age UK's Befriending scheme for company and she's very sad that has had to stop due to the current situation.

She told me she's very lonely at the moment and began to cry as she told me to stop her if she's talking too much.

We began to chat; she is a funny and well spirited lady who has an incredible passion for video gaming. She boasts an unbelievable collection of over 1,000 games. She told me how when she first went to the computer game store and asked for a game, the response was "is this for your son or grandson?" She told me she quickly put them in their place and from then on, they knew her on first name terms. As now do I as well."

Our support for our residents doesn't end after one phone call. We will continue to call weekly to check-in, have a friendly chat and support where we can. We will be here with our residents, not until this situation ends, but for as long as they need us.



The View From: **Sovereign**

Matthew Buckham, Communities Director

6 April 2020

Covid-19: It's a marathon not a sprint

It's Saturday night. The pubs are closing, but not voluntarily, swathes of police patrols are closing them. It has the feel of an apocalypse.

I was on a stag do in Berlin when the severity of the Covid-19 crisis really hit me. I awoke the next day and the streets were deserted.

Popping into a coffee shop before the flight back home, the owner told me the business is going bankrupt. His girlfriend has left the city to head home to her parents. He was in limbo land – the new land for these uncertain times.

Back home I wondered: What does normal even look like anymore – today, tomorrow and the months to come?

Customer first

At Sovereign we are customer first. Always. And going into immediate Covid-19 crisis management mode our teams had that front and centre of our approach.

Our incident management team was set up with around 12,000-plus people over the age of 70, as well as more vulnerable residents, as our main focus. Our teams called every one of these people in less than a week, checking in with them and letting them know we would do all we could to support them.



Our approach to supporting our communities has never been as important, with individuals, businesses and organisations facing unprecedented challenges. Within five days of the major

At the heart of our Covid-19 response and our overall strategy is a pledge that we will build on the strength and potential of our places

government announcements starting, my Communities Leadership Team started to formulate a 90-day plan for Covid-19. This followed the recent Board approval of our four-year Thriving Communities strategy – and there were

clearly areas of this strategy that now needed accelerating. I'd expected a bit more time to get plans in place!

We have committed a minimum of £3.5 million spend every year, as part of our 30-year business plan, to building better places and spaces, and great homes in great communities.

Thirty years started now. We quickly set about turning transforming our delivery programmes into virtual experiences for our customers. Our employment officers turned to Skype, Zoom and FaceTime. Our Community Development Officers started linking into local online forums and support networks.

At the heart of our Covid-19 response and our overall strategy is a pledge that we will build on the strength and potential of our places, so that customers and communities can thrive. This includes delivering proactive services such as money matters, employment coaching, and crowdfunding or grants.

Other measures we have put in place include putting £50,000 into PayItForward crowdfunding platform to support local community businesses

Collaborating with friends and allies

So how can we do this in a Covid-19 world? Firstly, we spoke with our friends and allies, including local authorities, community groups, MPs, councillors and other housing associations to discuss what our local communities could need from us. This included having a Zoom conference with 15 other housing associations organised through HACT.

One of the great ideas to come out of this call was from Sam Scharf, my counterpart at Orbit Group, to start a weekly round-robin call to share our thinking and knowledge, and collaborate with more vigour and purpose than ever before.

A further example of collaboration is that we have been able to bring forward more work via our proactive Money Matters (financial inclusion) and digital areas by utilising Orbit's procurement and current programmes, meaning the following can be up and running this month:

- a new web portal linked to MySovereign, our online customer portal
- an extended debt service to support existing Tenancy Support teams when they speak to customers over 70
- a new mental health line through BigWhiteWall.

Other measures we have put in place to date include:

- Bringing forward our Community Grants programme through The Good Exchange with £100k of investment
- Starting a crisis fund delivered through our Tenancy Support team
- Putting £50k into pay it forward crowdfunding platform to support local community businesses
- Making our employment service fully digital, undertaking 121 support, reducing travel and freeing up time
- Exploring global ABCD toolkits and sharing best practice with global contacts including Taramack Canada and Nurture Development
- Launching a fuel voucher offer, with thanks to friends at Clarion.

Virtual teams

Like many businesses when the national call came to work from home our teams saw full-scale migration from our business as usual. Many of our teams at Sovereign had worked from home before, but the shift to the new normal saw us all embrace a remote and agile new way of working.

That meant around 2,000 – including the contact centre – switched to working from home in a week – an amazing achievement and testament to our technology and our IT team.

While we must focus on the here and now, we need to look to the future. We must think and prepare for the recovery post-Covid 19 too.

As I write this from home we're all having to adjust to this new normal, juggling work and childcare arrangements with my wife. But it's opening opportunities and innovation too – I've just finished a Zoom conference with virtual mini break-out sessions with our over 70's community development practitioners and community groups, bringing people together from across the world through #TogetherApart and Nurture Development.

This is important as, while we must focus on the here and now, we need to look to the future too – how we work and the services we provide over the medium to long-term. We must think and prepare for the recovery post-Covid 19 too.

The impetus may well have sped up our delivery in some programmes, but it is clear that this is a marathon not a sprint and we must keep moving forwards.

For now, we're seeing communities rekindling conversations, those over the garden wall chats and, mostly, acts of kindness, be they big or small. That's how we'll navigate these uncertain times.

Nobody knows how long we – as individuals, employees of businesses and communities – will be affected. However, what we do know is that, as an organisation with communities at our heart, our focus will not change.

This impetus may well have sped up our delivery in some programmes, but it is clear that this is a marathon not a sprint and we must keep moving forwards.



The View From: **Newydd HA**

Lisa Voyle, Senior Project Officer

8 April 2020

HAPI (Healthy, Aspiring, Prosperous and Inclusive) is a National Lottery Community-funded project that is hosted by Newydd Housing Association.

The initiative aims to improve residents' health and wellbeing through a number of interventions around food and nutrition, physical activity, emotional wellbeing, employment, education and training and volunteering.

In the past, we've run a number of activities, like couch to 5K, Pilates, Glee, mindfulness, stress management, cooking on a budget and a variety of employment-related training opportunities. Traditionally, we've delivered these in the communities of Cynon and Taf Ely valleys within the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

With Covid-19, however, we put the initiatives on stop. At least we did for a week. And then we decided to try and deliver them through Facebook Live. If our participants couldn't come to us, then we'd go to them through Facebook.

We've increased the number of people following our Facebook page by over 400 users... Most remarkably, our videos have been viewed over 13,500 times.

We contacted our regular providers and asked them whether they would be able to use Facebook Live. Most of them were intrigued and said yes, so we developed a schedule within 24 hours and started promoting it to our residents.



The schedule included a variety of activities that would appeal to as wide an audience as possible, making it as inclusive as we could. Our first Facebook Live happened on 24 March with Sing Along with Steve. Since then, the programme has gained momentum: activities now include singing, cooking, dancing, Pilates and family fitness, six days a week.

*Delivering our content digitally
is something we'll be continuing
once this crisis is over*

We're now trying to find other activities that we can stream or video, including gardening, holistic therapies, jazzy junk, mindfulness and drumming workshops. We're hoping to have this content available over the Easter weekend and beyond – fingers crossed!

Since going live, we've increased the number of people following our Facebook page by over 400 users and have had over 9,000 engagements through reactions and comments to our posts.

Most remarkably, our videos have been viewed over 13,500 times. When we checked the stats, we found that while most lived locally or across the UK, we've also had views from India and Ireland.

We're really enjoying delivering our HAPI activities in this way. Although nothing can beat face to face contact, this is a great way of us keeping in touch with our participants and gaining new ones while we're all going through a challenging time. Delivering our activities digitally will definitely be something that we'll be continuing once this crisis is over.

TIME TO FIND YOUR PARTNERS

Andrew van Doorn, Chief Executive, HACT

14 April 2020

We had a number of conversations last week with community investment professionals about the role of local community hubs and local resilience networks, and we thought we'd share what we know about them, as well as how partnering is becoming the modus operandi.

There's a fairly simple distinction between the two:

- **Local resilience networks** act at a strategic level. They are more concerned with disaster management, involving local authorities working with, for example, the emergency services.
- **Community hubs** act at a practical level. Every local council has been asked to set them up with the primary aim of getting food, medicine and other essential supplies to those people who've been identified as vulnerable and do not have any other support systems in place.

Community hubs should be the focus for social housing organisations. At the moment, however, their establishment has been sporadic and the level of coordination inconsistent.

Some local authorities already had them in place. Some didn't. Some already had good relationships with local social housing organisations. Others might have limited contact.

In Walsall, the local council established four community hubs almost overnight. After phoning over 4,000 vulnerable residents, whg have been referring those who they've identified as the most in need.

There was a similar level of urgency in Greater Manchester. They already had a collective of social housing providers working together with the council and were able to use those relationships to kick start conversations to establish a model for food distribution to those most in need in the city.

While there might have been some teething problems, the model that has evolved in Greater Manchester is simple:

- Social housing organisations contact and identify those residents with need;
- The most vulnerable are then referred on to the hub;
- The community hub then coordinates food and medicine supplies to them. In Greater Manchester, their aim is that they will deliver a food supply to a vulnerable resident the day after the point of contact, with enough food being delivered to last for three days.

For placed-based social housing organisations and those working in pre-existing networks, engaging with local community hubs should, in theory, be relatively straightforward.

Those social housing organisations with stock in multiple boroughs will need to work out how they best engage with multiple local community hubs.

For some, this might be identifying other social housing organisations who have stock in that local. This is a time for having conversations with your colleagues from other organisations. Who, for example, is best placed to liaise with the hubs?



Who is best placed to lead on managing needs of vulnerable residents? Who can provide specialist support or digital capacity that they can share?

One other question that many will be asking is how else can you help? Many community hubs are already asking social housing organisations to contribute financially. They might also need people, so is there an opportunity to second some of your staff whose workload might have reduced into the hubs? Do you have staff with a reduced workload who have project management skills, for example?

Two other ways that social housing organisations can help locally: with food and with local community groups.

When it comes to food, the issue for foodbanks at the moment is not about money. What they need more than anything is food. Their usual sources – supermarkets and restaurants – have limited supplies, and the only place many can access food at the moment is through wholesalers. This, however, presents additional problems because most of the food supplied by wholesalers comes in bigger sizes that aren't appropriate for personal use. Again, many are also looking for help with project managers and other skilled people.

The other way that social housing organisations are helping is by providing small grants to local community groups to cover their increased costs. Those community groups working around domestic

violence, ASB and youth work will be critical in the months to come. Many will need financial support now to ensure they are still in existence when they're most needed.

Many social housing organisations have achieved an amazing amount over the past two weeks. Thousands of residents have been contacted and identified as being vulnerable. Now the focus is on ensuring that food and other essentials can be delivered, that adequate resources are available for advice and support services, and that initiatives like hardship funds are being stress tested.

Over the next few weeks, one critical issue is how social housing organisations share data and intelligence with community hubs about vulnerable people, as well as with emerging issues they are identifying around, for example, financial hardship and domestic violence. Community based intelligence is going to be critical for understanding and managing emerging risks, ensuring that support and interventions are both coordinated and thought through.

What's clear from our conversations this week, however, is that colleagues are working together in a way that is unprecedented. That might be sharing ideas about fuel vouchers, learning from each other's online wellbeing modules or with the newly established local community hubs. And it's these partnerships that are going to be the foundation for the impact that social housing can have within communities over the months to come.



The View From: **settle**

Gavin Cansfield, Chief Executive

15 April 2020

How Covid-19 might change the way we support communities

Three weeks ago I wrote about our initial response at **settle** to the Covid-19 outbreak. Like everyone else we are struggling with a short period of time feeling like for ever. The early steps we took – recognising the importance of our role in supporting local communities; focusing on the safety and well-being of residents and colleagues alike – were crucial. We are now turning our minds operationally to the stabilisation and recovery periods and strategically to what this will mean for landlords like **settle** in the longer term.

Most of us moved to working from home immediately, including our customer contact centre team. Where this was not possible, we developed clear guidelines on social distancing which are being strictly followed. In line with government guidance, only essential services and repairs are being delivered. If residents are experiencing financial difficulties, we have pledged to help with rents and promised

that no-one will face debt-related tenancy enforcement action at this time. We are donating to a local foodbank and we are relaxing our usual sick pay policy to ensure anyone off ill or self-isolating due to Covid-19 will receive their full pay for the duration of their time off.

Our social purpose is more than ever our moral compass in these uncertain times. I am incredibly proud of the way all of my colleagues have rallied round to ensure we continue to deliver for our customers.

Supporting vulnerable customers

Our core focus has been on ensuring the well-being of vulnerable customers. From the outset of the pandemic we have built on our knowledge of our customer base to identify which of our more vulnerable residents lack existing support structures both practical and emotional. We have around 3,000 residents who may need additional help from us during this time, including those the government has identified as being most at risk from Covid-19.

We began contacting these residents by phone last week and have seen a hugely positive response to these calls, with all residents reassured that we had taken the time to get in touch. Many of the residents we contacted confirmed they have what they need, but where further support is needed, colleagues have quickly put this in place. Arranging a delivery of food and for a prescription to be collected are just two examples of the important difference these calls have made.

Emergency community monitoring tool

To speed up the process of contacting residents who may need our help we will be reaching out to them by text and email, using an existing community monitoring tool that we have specially adapted to respond to this emergency. We began using the tool last week and it is facilitating two-way conversations with residents and speeding up the process of providing support where it is needed most.

With many colleagues unable to perform their normal roles, we have been encouraging them to volunteer to be part of our efforts to be a reassuring voice for our vulnerable residents. The response has been absolutely fantastic and it has been hugely rewarding to see colleagues embody the culture that we have worked so hard to embed at **settle**. Their response has been defined by selflessness, generosity of spirit and a simple desire to help. I have never been so proud of my organisation. Some of these calls are very short but the feedback nevertheless is that the knowledge that someone cares is immensely valuable. A smaller number last much longer and deal with more complex needs. These can be emotionally draining for colleagues but equally rewarding where we are able to help.

Long-term commitment

I started by noting that under the current circumstances a few weeks can feel like a year. What does this mean for the relationship we have with our customers and colleagues? If we think of this as a decades worth of change in a year how will the world of work, the essential contract with our residents and communities and relationships with stakeholders all shift? What will be retained from the current period and what might this mean for how we engage with people and deliver our services?

As a society we are already beginning to discuss the impact on mental health of the lockdown and the isolation this means for many individuals. Community-based housing associations such as **settle** have a key role to play in responding to this challenge and help build ongoing resilience. The response to Covid-19 requires a long-term commitment to support our communities. We must and will continue to provide all the support we can for as long as we can.

Even as we start to **settle** into the new normal, it is clear that we are in this for the long haul. It is clear to anyone who has taken time to think about the future that, even when we emerge from lockdown, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic will be with us for years to come. For the housing sector, the impact on structural poverty levels, on the wider economy and on our public services and attitudes will be significant. In addition, there are many other societal changes that are hard to forecast. It is clear that the future will be unlike the past. This doesn't mean that the past has no lessons for us but it does mean that imagination and ingenuity must also be our guides if we want anything truly good to come out of this crisis.



The View From: **Community Gateway**

Sian Coulton, Community Engagement Manager

17 April 2020

When the crisis started, the first issue we looked at was food distribution.

We already had an existing food distribution programme in place, and we've been able to link this into a city-wide approach to the issue. There are over 25 hubs across Preston and a further 10 food banks, each of which is providing food parcels to families and people in need.

The strong, pre-existing relationships meant that it's been easier to coordinate the response, so we can share resources across the city and refer vulnerable people into each other's hubs, depending on their need, location and the day of the week, as different hubs open at varying times. This co-ordinated approach is making sure that there is enough food for everybody who needs it.

We have experience of running food hubs in half term and holidays, when tenants struggle to feed their children who usually get free school meals. Now everyone who has children at home every day has seen their shopping bills go up. We're running two hubs every week, securing fresh and frozen food, so we can give people a mix of food to last them for a week.

We have also started to deliver a weekly mobile pantry to provide a comprehensive food hamper for a few pounds to those customers over 65, self-isolating or vulnerable who cannot get out to do their shopping or don't have any support. Our first delivery began last week, with 27 individuals receiving food from the pantry, including fresh fruit and veg plus a bag of ambient food.



Linked to that has been our work with a local social enterprise called The Larder. They are offering fresh nutritional meals that are ready cooked and can be delivered either hot or cold for reheating, depending on the needs of the individual. We take referrals from different partner organisations as well as have conversations with our own tenants to work out the best form of support for them.

At the moment, our only issue is the number of people we can enrol on the scheme - we've had to limit it to 36 families, but have had a lot more who want to take part.

We've also started a new initiative with The Larder to encourage children to learn how to cook, whilst also providing them

with nutritional meals. Colleagues from Community Gateway deliver food parcels with fresh ingredients and recipe cards to families, and then we send them a link to a video filmed by The Larder staff showing them how to cook each meal.

The project has gone down really well. People are really engaging with it. At the moment, our only issue is the number of people we can enrol on the scheme. We've had to limit it to 36 families but have had a lot more who want to take part, so we have been sharing the recipes and videos with them still, with them providing their own ingredients. We're looking to repeat the initiative over the summer holiday as well.

We're also aware that many tenants are struggling to keep their children entertained, whilst having them at home every day. So as well as the online cookery masterclass, we're also providing resources, links to fun activities and as educational activities online. We'll be carrying on with these over the next few weeks, helping our residents through these difficult times.

The whole organisation has got involved, as colleagues who are unable to fulfil their normal duties have been getting involved with food deliveries and on the phone lines. We have been phoning all our customers to check on their welfare and ask if they require additional support, so we can keep in tune with our communities and respond to any future emerging needs. We have set up our own Support Hub to allow us to facilitate any request we receive. Tenants can call or email for individual support or can make use of the dedicated section on our website to access information around other local trusted providers.



The View From: **Community Impact Partnership**

Jules Tompkins, CIP's Investment Manager

22 April 2020

Established in 2018, Community Impact Partnership is a joint venture with four housing associations set up as a vehicle to enter the social investment market.

Social investment is a broad term but in this context it's the use of repayable finance to help enterprising and impactful organisations to achieve a social purpose. Often more flexible than grant funding alone, this type of finance can help unlock opportunities for growth, social impact and support growing organisations to achieve a more stable financial position. When the funds are repaid, they can be reinvested and recycled, making the money work harder and go further than a traditional one-time grant.

Social investment is a tool in the funding box. It can be a great enabler and, in some cases, helps to drive changes in the way an organisation may think, plan and deliver services increasing its resilience going forward. But it's not always the right tool. You wouldn't use a spoon to change a plug and in a similar vein, sometimes repayable

finance is not the right choice. For the four HA partners involved with CIP (Clarion, L&Q, Orbit and Peabody), social investment was a natural next step to keep expanding the tools and resources they have available to invest in communities, build stronger local economies and achieve greater social value from supply chains.

CIP provides an opportunity to support enterprises in a different way, offering an alternative perspective and insight about the role the housing sector can play in helping to sustain, stabilise and grow social enterprises. It aligns strongly with the placemaking focus, supporting local innovation and enterprise, securing different types of investment into a community as well as creating jobs and social impact. CIP is also exploring the role it can play in helping increase the presence of social enterprises within the supply chains. Investing to help increase the capacity and capability of enterprises to deliver quality goods and services whilst also achieving positive social impact. This in turn helps buyers secure greater social value from

their contracts and supports a stronger social economy.

Building a pipeline and identifying the right opportunities for social investment takes time. Like most financial transactions, the decision to commit an investment is (in part) driven by the risk-return factor. In grant making the risk-return is about social impact, on the opposite end of the spectrum, mainstream investment is driven by the financial return. Social investment is a mix of the two. We tend to support organisations that present a high-risk profile (often because they are quite early stage, reliant on public sector revenues or have limited resources available to them) but rather than look for a higher financial return, we try to balance the risk against the potential social impact. Yes, we'd like our money back at some point and yes, we charge an interest rate but without the potential for positive social impact we'd be unlikely to take the risk (even if it was lower).

So why am I going on about risk-return and social impact? Well, because in a few short weeks the Covid-19 pandemic has rewritten the rules and the risks. We have no idea how long its impact will last or what the world will look like on the other side.

As an investor there is little we can realistically do to manage the impact caused by the inevitable financial crisis and, often more of a challenge, the tension that some organisations will feel between the need to make decisions about how to help their business and the potential downside of a significantly reduced social impact. Like most others, our priority is to help organisations to survive in the first instance and hopefully thrive again in the future.

In the short term, we've relaxed some of the terms on our existing investments to provide flexibility and breathing space and will keep reviewing this on a rolling basis as the crisis continues. We know social organisations by their very nature will keep focussing on social impact wherever possible, but we don't expect them to achieve what they originally set out to do right now. As things move forward, we'll look to follow their lead in terms of the support and resources they might need in future.

We're also drawing on the other available tools. Access to skills and professional advice is being offered through a series of topic-based webinars, information about emergency resources is on our website and we've kept the fund open for new applications.

We know taking on a debt is unlikely to be anyone's first choice in the circumstances, but it is still a tool in the box that could be worth exploring. As a starting point, any social impact organisation considering whether social investment is a potential option should consider.

- 1 Does a reasonable percentage of their existing revenue already come from trading or other forms of earned income such as contracts? (around 20% or more)
- 2 Are they likely to face a cashflow problem now or in the next 12 months?
- 3 Do they have a reasonable idea what their future revenue streams might look like? (even if they can't offer any certainty at the moment)

If they answer yes to at least two of these questions, social investment is an option they could consider.

THE NEED FOR A DATA CULTURE WITH STANDARDS AT ITS HEART

Thames Menteth-Wheelwright, Events and Communications Officer, HACT

23 April 2020

Data has been crucial to how the housing sector has been able respond to this crisis. How it plans and manages crises in the future will also depend on creating robust and long lasting data cultures.

As we move past the one-month anniversary since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown, the country, and the world, is waking up to the crucial importance of data. In how we track, monitor and understand the disease as well as how we identify vulnerable groups and target resources, the value of data as well as the importance of structures which enable the collection, synthesis and application of that data, has never been clearer.

This realisation has been most acute in the context of the NHS, which has had to mobilise rapidly to meet the needs of this crisis and save lives. Early on it was determined that many people with medical problems would be highly at risk of developing complications from Covid-19. These people needed to be identified and contacted as a priority.

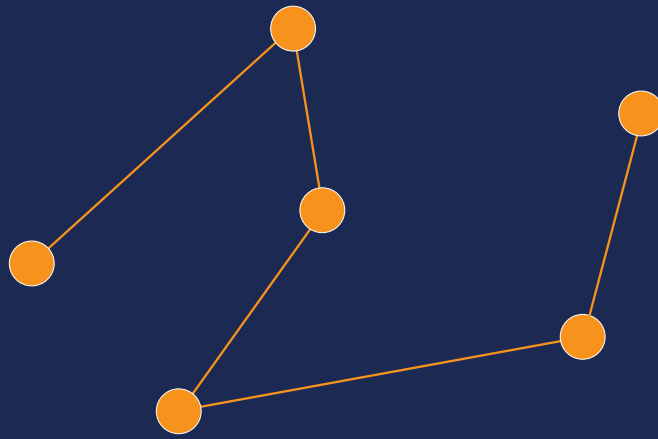
The question, however, was how the NHS would pull together data that was not all located in one convenient table. The answer, in part, was data standards. After identifying patients for inclusion in the shielded patient list using four major national datasets and GP's field-based knowledge, NHS digital developed a new standard to make the monumental exercise of data interrogation, analysis and comparison on this scale much easier.

As a result, 1.5 million people who are “at high risk” have now been identified and placed on the shielded patient list (SPL), while another larger group of “at risk” people, those who are normally susceptible to influenza, have been instructed to socially distance. What the NHS example demonstrates is that you can bring together disparate data from lots of different systems when you need to, but only if you have the right data structures in place to allow you to do so.

In the housing sector, of course, this move towards data has also been happening. And for many housing associations, Covid-19 has exposed the gaps in their data culture – incomplete and incorrect datasets and a lack of common data standards have hindered how quickly and effectively some organisations have been able to mobilise resources.

Over the past few weeks colleagues across the sector have lamented the poor quality of the data they hold on tenants, as well as the time spent on inputting and cross-checking data sets. As one colleague said, “we have no way of automatically cross checking the data with the LA list as we have zero common unique identifiers, so data standards across the board would immediately solve this”.

At the same time, there is a desire to overcome these barriers and work more collaboratively to improve data structures and process, and to be able to model and map vulnerability in new ways in order to help residents.



At MTVH, data has been crucial in shaping their response to the crisis. In order to support frontline staff who are making calls and visiting people in their homes, MTVH have developed a Covid-19 application to help frontline staff log calls made to vulnerable residents and support them in these difficult times. The app also includes the ability to RAG-rate calls, which indicates the level of support required for residents. The app will also enable them to combine new data from recent conversations with hundreds of residents with data from other parts of the organisation.

As well as bringing together data from disparate systems, the app makes it easier for those working on the frontline to report their findings up to senior management and enhance effective decision making. While every housing association is trying to get in touch with vulnerable people, MTVH's track record as an early adopter of data standards and its robust data architecture puts it in the right place to deploy the technology to support this high-level response.

At Hyde, the data team has been looking not just at crises management now but also ahead at what the coming months might bring. They have been taking the organisation's data and combining it with scientific research and national data about the geographic and demographic spread of the virus to help them plan for how resident and their staff might be impacted in the future, as well as the implications for the delivery of services.

Doing this effectively requires a data culture that means intelligence gathered by the front line is logged as structured data, making it machine readable and accessible to other colleagues for analysis, reporting and in the long run ensuring the safety of staff, residents and their communities.

Sometimes a crisis is the thing that forces people to change. Often it exposes shortcomings in our current systems and shines a light on better ways of operating, in the short and long term. In the housing sector, it has long been recognised that better data on residents and what services they use enables better understanding of what they need. While most organisations will have parts of that information, few will have a data system which allows them to knit those different strands together into an image of who their most vulnerable residents really are.

Dawning on many is the startling realisation that data will be crucial to how the sector is able to respond to this crisis, but also to how it plans and manages crises in the future.

While Covid-19 has temporarily shifted the balance of risk and reward, now seems as good a time as ever to learn from this moment and embed a data culture that helps pivot our responses now and in the future.



The View From: Gloucester City Homes

Mandi Holt, Community Investment Team Leader

24 April 2020

We're fortunate that we had existing strong relationships with numerous partners across the city when the crisis began.

The thing about Gloucester is that it is laid out like a hub and spoke, with each area encircling the city centre. Even the bus services only go out in one direction, so if you want to visit someone across the city, you always have to take two buses.

One consequence of this is that areas are very distinct and can be quite isolated as a result. Before the crisis began, we already had a unique set of partners in each area.

Our first response was to convene as many partner meetings as we could to see what they were able to offer and how we could best help. Each area

responded and came up with different plans and we then provided support as appropriate to each area.

Some areas are very rich with community organisations and voluntary organisations and were able to respond quickly. It quickly became apparent, however, that a couple of areas had less cover on the ground, and it was difficult to know where support would come from if we didn't step in.

In some areas, we gave out grants to a variety of different organisations, so they could continue to deliver their services, whether for food packs for families, providing cooked meals or delivering craft kits.

In one area where there was no support available we worked with a community



organisation to set up a foodbank from scratch. Using one of our empty offices we were able to open it up to provide a hub for volunteers to move in. We also gave them some funding and have been working together to deliver food parcels to the local residents.

We're thinking about how we can do our gardening competition differently by providing people with growing kits and seeing who can grow the best salad crops.

Volunteering has also been a city-wide response. We put out a call for people to become street champions, which involves them putting leaflets through all the doors on their street offering support. The street

champions then contact the local food referrer so they can coordinate deliveries. This scheme stops duplication and makes it a more personal service – in one area there are now 90 street champions, covering every street!

For the past month, all of our usual activities have been put on hold while we focus on immediate needs. We've been supported in this internally with our colleagues in housing. Now we can start thinking about our other community investment activities.

Before the lockdown, we were getting ready for our summer events, but these have all been cancelled. We're now thinking about how we can relaunch some of them. For example, we usually have a gardening competition. We're thinking about how we can do this differently by providing people with growing kits and hosting a competition to see who can grow the best salad crops.

We're also continuing to support residents into employment, which is more challenging without face-to-face work. Now our work is through phone calls, identifying job opportunities in supermarkets and on farms, and then going back to people and asking them how we can support them to make applications.

That seems to be our new normal now: delivering our projects in different ways. Many residents seem to be embracing communicating in new and different ways but we must not forget the importance of continued work in the community and working with partners on the ground.



The View From: **MTVH**

Sarah Willis, Head of Strategic Partnerships & National Delivery

28 April 2020

I joined MTVH on 9 March. Then a week later the majority of colleagues moved to remote working, so it's been a bit of a roller coaster of an induction!

My focus has been on our partnership work. We've been collaborating around food distribution, working with local mutual aid groups; and partnering with Councils and local voluntary sector groups to deliver some youth outreach safeguarding projects in boroughs like Brent. Our approach has been to collaborate and work with others rather than assume that we should lead.

We've also started conversations with London boroughs about preparing for summer outreach programmes, and what these might look like if we're still in lockdown. We're planning to partner with a group of housing associations, and with local authorities, so we can deliver more joined up provision for young people.

With my background in business transformation, learning and development, I've offered to support community investment colleagues by offering some resilience support to teams and have designed two workshops that I'll be delivering internally. In these facilitated sessions, I'm working with people to enable better understanding of the change curve and what they're going through at the moment. I use a number of tools to illustrate what they can influence, and what they can't, how they can build up personal resilience, and what other resources they might find useful.

I'm fortunate to have a background in facilitation and coaching and had already done a lot of work with corporate clients and the University of Westminster looking at the characteristics of personal resilience that can be drawn on when you're going through change. We are probably all aware that we need to process a lot of internal

emotions at the moment, and to feel a level of control. When there's so much going on, it can be a messy picture and it takes time to work out how you can do something useful.

I've developed a short guide to improve online meetings. With my own team, I always ask four questions: what are you finding hard? What are you grateful for? What are you learning about yourself or your work? What have you achieved? Many people might be feeling that they're not finishing anything at the moment, but even if you've made just one successful phone call to support a resident, then that's worth celebrating.

It's good to be able share what we're feeling, because that sense of commonality helps, there's a relief in that. You don't then feel that you're the only one who is exhausted!

We had a clinical psychologist run a session, exploring how people were feeling at the moment and working with them in terms of their emotional responses.

More widely the People & Communications team at MTVH have been taking the lead on colleague wellbeing. One tool they've developed is MTVH Connect – our new colleague-to-colleague digital community. MTVH Connect is a weekly programme of online talks, events and learning open to all colleagues. There's a coffee room, where people can drop in virtually when they want to have a break from work, so they can share experiences and what they've been doing – a bit like they would in a physical environment.

We've also invited a number of external speakers to take part in interactive sessions with colleagues. Toufik Kacimi, Chief Executive of Muslim Welfare House talked about his work and about community and how we respond to the impact of Covid-19. We've also had a clinical psychologist, Dr Helen Sinclair, to run a session, exploring how people were feeling at the moment, and working with them in terms of their emotional responses.

Colleagues have responded positively to these speakers. The psychologist helped them acknowledge what they've been feeling. She also provided them with tips about how they can deal with the current situation and manage their emotions. For example, about using physical shaking to burn off adrenalin and using humour in meetings to lighten the situation. And the importance of having a routine when you're working from home. We've also had a number of fascinating and popular colleague conversations featuring interviews with those continuing to work on the front line – in our key worker accommodation, in care and support, and community investment.

My main reflection is that I'm really impressed by how the sector has responded to this crisis. At MTVH we managed to get a support hub up and running in two weeks. Something like that would have taken months to do previously and I know other organisations have had similar successes. Now, as a sector, we're sharing what we can do. Greater collaboration is vital and uniting around our shared agenda to support residents and communities enables us to go beyond our own organisational boundaries. We're all social housing providers and that's something that should bind us.

WHY HOPE MATTERS NOW, MORE THAN EVER

Andrew van Doorn, Chief Executive, HACT

29 April 2020

Over the last six weeks, we've been talking with colleagues from over a hundred housing associations across the UK on a regular basis. Initially, those discussions were focused on identifying vulnerable residents and the best ways of organising the distribution of food and medicine and other essential supplies. Now, those conversations are changing.

Now, we're talking about hardship funds and rent relief. About volunteering and working with local community groups. About domestic violence and anti-social behaviour. And increasingly we are talking about what happens next.

We're facilitating numerous conversations with housing colleagues to help them share learning, identify best practice and support each other. A sector that was used to working in silos is increasingly beginning to work together for a common purpose. We're proud to be helping to facilitate that shift.

Now our focus is shifting to the medium to long-term plans, about the next three, six and twelve months. About the impact this crisis will have on residents and staff. About the trauma we will feel. And about the sustainability of our response and the resilience of our communities.

How recovered they will be, and how ready the sector can become, should there be further waves of infections in the future.

In the coming months, we're going to see a significantly more challenging economic environment. We'll see even more demand on public sector services and resources at a time when the government might be deciding to turn off its funding tap.

We'll see a simultaneous decline in rental revenue with an increase in demand for our community-based services. We'll see the impact of unemployment, of isolation, of the loss of identity.

There will be a significant amount of issues that we have to start to think about now, and address.

One word that's cropped up in many of our conversations is resilience. How will we be able to rebuild resilience in our staff, in our residents and in our communities?

Take the example of the BAME community. We know from current statistics that the BAME community has been disproportionately affected by Covid-19. Of those who have died in hospital, over 30% have come from BAME communities.



We know, as well, that around 60% of frontline social housing staff in London also come from BAME communities. And that BAME residents are more likely to work in low paid, insecure jobs, as well as in the NHS and across social care.

We will need, then, to be mindful that our BAME residents, our BAME staff and our BAME communities will have been disproportionately touched by this crisis. That they will be disproportionately affected by trauma.

That's not to suggest that this crisis is unique to one community. We know, for example, that more residents will be unemployed. More are and will be claiming Universal Credit. Many more will be suffering from poor mental health for the first time and will not know how to deal with this.

The evidence suggests that common mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, in general, tends to be transitory. Our challenge is to stop these incidents of poor mental health becoming embedded, so that they become long-term health issues, affecting the wellbeing of thousands of people.

If we look at the mental health sector, it has recognised that one of the most important things for recovery is hope. And that is something we have

to focus on as social housing organisations within communities, working alongside residents, local people and our own staff, how we can create that sense of hope.

How we do that? How do we drive our social purpose and make the right organisational decisions while we deal with unprecedented emotional and financial stress?

How do we deliver social value through our partnerships, through our communities, through our supply chain partners? How can we use every opportunity to generate that hope through everything we do?

How we respond to these challenges, how we create that sense of hope, will define our role in society for years to come.

We are still the most resilient of all non-profit organisations that exist within most communities. Even though our resilience is going to be severely tested over the coming months, it is time for us to step up. To be noticed as a sector.

To do our work in community investment, to deliver social value, to make a positive impact. To create that hope and rebuild resilience one step at a time.



Measuring the impact we've made

NEWS RELEASE

1 May 2020

HACT has been joined by a number of organisations in endorsing a set of nine impact measurements that the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment is asking social housing organisations to collect during the Covid-19 crisis.

“Social housing organisations have done a phenomenal amount of work in their roles in supporting residents and communities where they work over the last six weeks, and we want to understand and measure the impact they’ve had,” said Andrew van Doorn, Chief Executive, HACT. “As the sector leader for social impact in housing, we have identified nine measures that will help us to evidence the impact of the social housing sector during the Covid-19 crisis.

“These measures have been developed by the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment, working in partnership with a coalition of social housing organisations across the UK. We are asking social housing organisations to share these measures with us, so that we can aggregate the full scale of the work of social housing across the UK. Within organisations, these measures will also demonstrate the invaluable work of community investment teams to internal colleagues and Board members.”

The impact measures are endorsed by:

- NHF
- SFHA
- Placeshapers
- Tpas
- NIFHA
- Communities that Work
- Community Housing Cymru
- Northern Housing Consortium
- Clarion
- L&Q
- Sovereign
- Peabody
- Orbit
- MTVH
- Newydd HA
- Longhurst
- Irwell Valley Homes
- Southern Housing Group
- Hyde

Sinead Butters, Chair of Placeshapers, said: “Up and down the country I am hearing stories of how members have been part of the response to this crisis, going over and above in their communities. The importance of a decent affordable home in a strong community has never been more important. This data will help us quantify the impact made by housing associations and help inform how the country recovers, taking from it what we have learned and what can change nationally.”

Tristan Carlyon, Head of Research and Analysis at the National Housing Federation, said: "Housing associations have worked incredibly hard over these past weeks, ensuring that residents and communities have all the support they need during this crisis. This work by The Centre for Excellence in Community Investment will help us capture and quantify this work, showing exactly how much our sector does to support those who need it most."

Hayley Macnamara, Policy Manager, Community Housing Cymru, said: "Housing associations have demonstrated their role as community anchor institutions during COVID-19 and have stepped up to respond to the challenges that have emerged. We recognise that this is an uncertain time so we have put in place measures and support to maintain essential services and provide support to tenants and the wider community. We are pleased to support the Centre of Excellence in Community Investment measures and we will be using the results as part of our #WithYou campaign to illustrate how our members have served communities throughout the pandemic."

Ben Collins, CEO, NIFHA, said: "NIFHA supports the collection of information relating to community investment work undertaken by our housing associations, which in this currently difficult environment is critical, and demonstrates how the sector has stepped up to these challenges."

Jenny Osbourne, Chief Executive, tpas, said: "It's so important that as a sector we work together to track and understand how we have all responded to the Covid crisis in our communities. These impact measures will be a great help for that."

Karen Browne, Senior Policy Advisor, NHC, "Social landlords have always been more than housing providers and at this time of emergency it is important to measure the critical response

to the COVID-19 pandemic to help to monitor and continue to support residents and staff. It is important to direct support where it is most needed and this evidence will make the case for sustained support in the longer term."

Rachel Honey-Jones, Head of Community Regeneration, Newydd HA, said: "These measures will ensure that we are telling the incredibly important work housing associations are carrying out across the UK in these unprecedented times in a clear and easy to understand format for the wider general public. We are thrilled to be a key partner of the Centre and wholeheartedly endorse this excellent piece of work."

Sarah Willis, Head of Strategic Partnerships & National Delivery, MTVH, said: "This simple impact tool will enable us to work collaboratively as a sector to progress our thinking and inform our collective support for communities."

The nine measures we asked social housing organisations to collect and share:

- Number of residents identified as vulnerable in the past month
- Number of welfare calls to residents in the past month
- Percentage of residents requesting any form of support
- Number of people supported with advice and guidance in the past month
- Amount distributed through direct financial support in the past month
- Number of food interventions in the past month
- Percentage of households receiving food interventions more than once
- Number of staff deployed to community response roles in the past month
- Number of residents identified as being at risk of falling into arrears as a result of self-isolation or illness

We are planning to measure the impact of the sector's great work responding to the crisis

Robert Sugden, Head of Communities, HACT

5 May 2020

At the end of every week, I reflect on the amazing work that the social housing sector has done.

In my role as head of communities at HACT and the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment, I spend a lot of my time talking with, listening to, and sharing information with colleagues in social housing organisations across the UK.

Every week, I hear about the huge amount of work they've been doing to help their residents and their communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ability to keep track of the work that's happening across your organisation, as well as building up a picture of the wider sector's response, is vital.

Within days many had mobilised quickly to call vulnerable residents, deliver food packages to low-income households, move offline services online and partner with local organisations on the distribution of prescriptions and free school meal vouchers. As teams embarked on this work an ask of the centre was to provide some guidance on how teams should capture and reflect on it, so that they can evidence their impact in the months ahead.

There was so much work going on, in fact, that many heads of community investment we spoke to questioned what information they could and should be capturing, as well as how they would demonstrate and evidence their impact in the months ahead.

The centre has responded to these questions by creating a set of impact measures to help housing associations understand and monitor how they have been responding to the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic has posed. Creating these impact measures has been an extension of the work the centre has already done around collective impact.

The ability to keep track of the work that's happening across your organisation, as well as building up a picture of the wider sector's response, is vital.

From an organisational level, these impact measures can be used to collect information on how much your team and your wider organisation have done. As well as showcasing the role your team has played in responding, they will give you the tools to internally influence the thinking around the importance of community investment in this ongoing crisis. Using these impact measures should be easy and allow you to quickly pull together information to share with your board.

We're already beginning to see new pots of funding becoming available to the sector, as well as new offers for partnership from other organisations. By enabling you to collect information and quantify the value of your work over the medium and long term, these impact measures are designed to help your organisation with future funding applications.

The centre's ask is that you share this information with us so that we can understand what the sector is doing cumulatively, and how it is responding over time. Month to month, this data will enable us to show just how many thousands of calls are being made to vulnerable residents, just how many food parcels are being delivered, how much has been invested in vital community and voluntary services, and just how monumental the effort has been from staff to help their residents and communities.

While these impact measures will tell one part of the story of how housing associations have responded, we also acknowledge that other parts of the story are more easily captured through personal reflections and observations. After all, facts and figures can only tell part of the story

We'll ask you to report back on these measures every month – starting with combined totals for March and April. We'll then share month-on-month totals with you as we collate these.

The information that emerges from these impact measures will help us to tell the story of how this crisis is evolving. The findings will support current and future research projects that highlight the valuable contribution social housing organisations have made in the crisis, support our influencing work with a range of stakeholders, and support plans for collaborative funding bids – something we'll be sharing more on soon.

Data gathered from these measures will bolster conversations that we're already having with regional and national bodies inside and outside of housing, and feed into work of multi-sector partnerships we're part of, such as the Community Action Response partnership – highlighting the crucial role of community investment in supporting and sustaining local neighbourhoods.

And it should give us data to share with them on why housing, community investment in particular, needs to be part of a co-ordinated and long-term response to the crisis and in addressing the long-standing issues of poverty and inequality that the past six weeks have accentuated.

We are keen that these measures be shared as widely as possible across the sector and ask that you share them with colleagues who may not be so engaged with the work of the centre.

We will be producing a short summary report on the findings from the impact measures, which we will later share with all those organisations that submitted information to us.

While these impact measures will tell one part of the story of how housing associations have responded, we also acknowledge that other parts of the story are more easily captured through personal reflections and observations. After all, facts and figures can only tell part of the story.

As well as the measures we will shortly be sharing a framework to guide reflection in your teams and organisations, encouraging some contemplation on the things you've learnt and gained over the past six weeks, changes you've made you might like to keep, and to identify areas where improvements can be made. First and foremost these are offered as an internal tool, but we'd love for you to share some of these reflections with us.

The impact we've made

March-April 2020

Data for March-April comes from 71 social housing organisations, with a combined stock of 1,057,748 homes (36% of UK total)



363,335

Total welfare calls made

5,266

Mean number of welfare calls made per reporting org [n=70]



155,304

Vulnerable residents identified

2,588

Mean number of vulnerable residents per reporting org [n=61]

6.8

There is one vulnerable resident per 6.8 homes



23%

Percentage of contacted residents asking for support



56,820

Number of residents receiving advice and guidance

931

Mean number of residents receiving advice & guidance per reporting org [n=62]

18.6

One resident receiving advice and guidance per 18.6 homes



34,355

Food interventions

603

Mean number of food interventions per reporting org [n=57]

30.8

There is one food intervention per 30.8 homes



30%

Percentage of households receiving more than one food intervention



£181,475

Direct financial support to residents

£4,033

Mean direct financial support per reporting org [n=45]



23,549

Residents identified at risk of arrears

512

Mean number of residents at risk of arrears per reporting org [n=47]

44.9

One resident at risk of arrears per 44.9 homes



3,251

Staff who were redeployed to community facing roles

57

Mean number of staff redeployed per reporting org [n=58]

13.4%

Redeployed staff as a % of total staff of reporting organisations



The View From: **Pobl Group**

Samantha Howells and Dafydd Hellard

6 May 2020

From a community regeneration perspective, this crisis has pushed our work to the forefront. As an organisation, Pobl prioritises asset-based community development, and we're seeing that happen organically in communities right now. Neighbourhoods are coming together to support each other and really show that they care.

Our team and the wider organisation have been careful not to overpower that. Instead, our aim is to work with our local partners to strategically bolster it. As a result, we've been able to really listen to our communities, understand where the gaps are, and help them accordingly.

Accessing funding on behalf of smaller community organisations has been a big part of how we've been doing that. Working in partnership, we've accessed funding to the tune of around £48,000 through various sources, such as the

community resilience fund. Since many of these groups have formed in response to Covid-19, they don't have constitutions or bank accounts in place yet so we've been holding their accounts for them to ensure that they can still access funding.

On an individual level, one of the most impactful things we've done as an organisation is welfare calls. Through them we've been able to link vulnerable residents to existing community provisions and support their individual needs. That could be as simple as getting them essential supplies or medications, delivering food parcels or providing digital support.

In some cases, we're seeing people in huge amounts of crisis – the situation has made anxiety and mental health a lot worse. Our team has been working more intensively with those people during this time, shifting the way in which they're delivering that support.

Sometimes we can over complicate our involvement with communities and this has really shown us that often the most valuable thing to do is simply pick up the phone. The consideration and the care that we've shown towards our customers through these calls has also led to an increase in customer satisfaction and trust in us.

Culturally as an organisation, it's changing us. It's taught us that engagement, compassion and care doesn't just sit with support staff but is actually a culture that needs to cut across organisations and inform roles that maybe aren't as people facing. We've had to become flexible – and more creative, too. For example, trades teams have now been redeployed to support with logistics around food banks and the local authority's free school meal service.

However, it's been our initiative with a local group called the Prescription Riders Gwent that's been our most innovative partnership. This has highlighted how housing, the third sector and community groups can come together to share local knowledge, maximise resources and deliver a service that is led by the community.

The initiative was born after Pobl were approached by a motorcycle group who wanted to do something to help in the community. At the same time our welfare calls were showing us that people were anxious about their prescriptions: they didn't want to wait in a queue at the local pharmacy for half an hour. Since the guys in the motorcycle group have natural PPE on them, with their gloves and helmets, they seemed the ideal candidates to deliver prescriptions!

Over the last two weeks Prescription Riders Gwent has really blown up and expanded. Working closely with GAVO (Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations) we've been able to help them to register as community key workers via Volunteer Wales. To make the process easier Pobl have accessed an app through GAVO that centralises the referrals: we receive the referrals, put a task on the app for all of the volunteer riders to see, and if they're able to do the collection they just click accept.

Like other community volunteer groups, the riders have been signed up to our E-Learning training and taken modules on coronavirus awareness, keeping safe in the community, effective use of PPE, and safeguarding.

The consortium of housing associations in Gwent are interested in rolling this out in their organisations. We've even been approached by the Welsh government who are keen to see how this works and collate the data to share with pharmacies.

As an organisation we can be very proud of how we've responded to the crisis. Now is the time we should also be asking ourselves: how has this been received by customers, what do they most value, and what are we going to take forward in terms of our long term approach?

For us as a regeneration team, this crisis has really given us a massive real-life example of why asset-based community development is so important. There's so much we can learn from this moment. This should form the way in which we interact with customers longer term.



The View From: **Optivo**

William Miller, Director of Social Impact

7 May 2020

As soon as the MHCLG issued its statement on supporting vulnerable high-risk individuals, it was clear that Optivo had a critical role to play within communities. This group of vulnerable residents not only included those aged over 70 years old, but also significant numbers of children with underlying health conditions.

We've adopted a layered approach, linking strategically with local authority hubs, recognising that we're playing a significant role in community resilience. In Sittingbourne, Kent, we were asked to help with the management of a food hub distribution centre, ensuring food parcels are delivered to local vulnerable people.

By offering social support and playing a significant role in building our residents' resilience, we've aimed to take pressure off the NHS.

Our primary objective is supporting our residents. There are also business drivers at play here: we want to keep as many people in jobs and help them to protect their household income and protect our rental income.

Our internal focus on supporting residents has accelerated with an urgent realignment of our services and our internal staff structures. We've combined with a necessary emphasis on providing services over the phone, digitally and through online support.

At Optivo, we've established a number of specialist collaborative service teams so that we can work more effectively. We're being more vigorous than previously, pro-actively calling residents so we can be more responsive to their needs. This is our one team approach.

While we're helping to shield those who are most at risk, ensuring they can get food, access to medical support and social contact, we're also focusing on supporting as many residents who are at risk of losing their jobs and income.

We've made over 23,000 pro-active, urgent support calls and have a number of multi-disciplined teams in action.

To protect our 5,300 residents who are over 70 years old living in our general needs homes, we've combined

endeavours across Resident Involvement, Customer Service, and Health and Wellbeing teams into one effort. They've been proactively connecting with these older residents, and have established that 11% require food access information, while 8% are very isolated and need further social contact. Over 87% of our respondents told us they were re-assured by our call.

We've another team who are focused on residents living in our Independent Living Schemes. We've spoken to all of them, almost 4,000 people, and are now following up those initial calls, whether with befriending support, food shopping advice or just general help.

Our major collaborative project has brought together our Income Team, Financial Inclusion Team, Employment Support Team and specialist Micro-enterprise Support Team. They're now all working together virtually to support 13,000 residents of working age, some of whom have additional support needs. The primary focus has been on providing specialist advice around employment and benefits. Many of the calls have been increasingly emotional, as residents are facing the risks of losing their jobs.

In the week before last, we made over 3,300 calls, and flagged up 160 cases for specialist financial inclusion advice. We've also had over 1,000 Universal Credit sign ups from this group in the last five weeks, which is a significant number and change.

We're also working with our ASB team and domestic abuse counsellors to enhance our therapy support phone service. We're expecting to provide additional support for people as the confinement period impacts.

We've also refocused tasks for our youth workers, using them as digital content gatherers, so they can collate and disseminate information and support materials to vulnerable young people and families who are currently confined.

In the next few months, there's a real opportunity for social housing organisations to be leaders in community recovery programmes. The driver for this should be around key areas of action where we can align our efforts with strategic partners and co-invest in community resilience, stimulus and recovery.

We have the infrastructure, grass roots alignment and potential to co-invest. We're ideally placed to deliver around a number of themes, including community hardship recovery funds, jobs and trading programmes, young people, wellbeing programmes for those who have to continue to shield and those who've been through the trauma from Covid urgency.

As a group of housing associations, working through HACT, the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment and Communities that Work, we should be positioning to pitch for a set of collaborative programmes that can make a huge difference to our residents, and our communities, as they move into recovery.

At Optivo, we're determined to play our part in newly forged community and residents' resilience support. Listening to people. Making the most to build on a new appetite for community support and ownership. Resetting our community service offer on fresh tracks.



**COMMITTED TO
COMMUNITY
INVESTMENT**

The Board Charter



In April, whg and Mossclare St Vincent's both signed up to the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment's Board Charter. They were joined by Livv Housing the following month.



By signing up to the Board Charter, they were demonstrating their commitment to community investment, which has played such a central role in supporting residents and communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.



The Board Charter is an easy commitment for social housing organisations to make: it involves them agreeing to nine pledges that signal their dedication to community investment.



Community investment is the work that social housing organisations do alongside people and communities to help them thrive. Now, more than ever, we need to commit to community investment so that we can deliver on our social purpose.



Find out more about how to sign up to the Board Charter and a full list of all the organisations who have signed up: www.ceci.org.uk/the-board-charter/



Barrhead Housing
Association Limited



Briefings

In May, the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment published the first in a series of eight briefing notes. Each briefing addressed significant issues that were emerging in the UK as a result of Covid-19 that impact on the work of community investment.

In each briefing, we brought together available evidence to help community investment colleagues think about and plan future strategies, as well as how resources might need to be directed.

The briefings were developed in response to requests from community investment colleagues from across the UK. The subject areas were:

- mental health
- employment
- GDPR
- young people
- older people
- hardship and poverty
- digital inclusion
- women

The briefings can be downloaded from the Centre web site: <https://www.ceci.org.uk/resources/>



MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL HOUSING: RESPONDING TO THE CURRENT CRISIS

Will Howard, housing and health officer

21 May 2020

It will come as no surprise to those who've been keeping up with the news, working on the frontlines with residents, or even just listening to friends, colleagues and family, that the current period of crisis and lockdown is having a significant impact on the mental health of the UK population.

As social housing organisations look to plan their future service provision, the questions many will want answered are what is the likely long-term impact and who will be most affected?

If we look towards evidence from previous outbreaks of virus epidemics, such as SARs, it seems that the impact won't be shared evenly. While the psychological distress, increased isolation and levels of anxiety that have come with the lockdown will be short lived for many, certain other groups they will suffer mental health problems disproportionately badly. For those groups, longer term support and care will be needed.

This is particularly relevant to social housing organisations as those who are most affected are more likely to live in social housing.

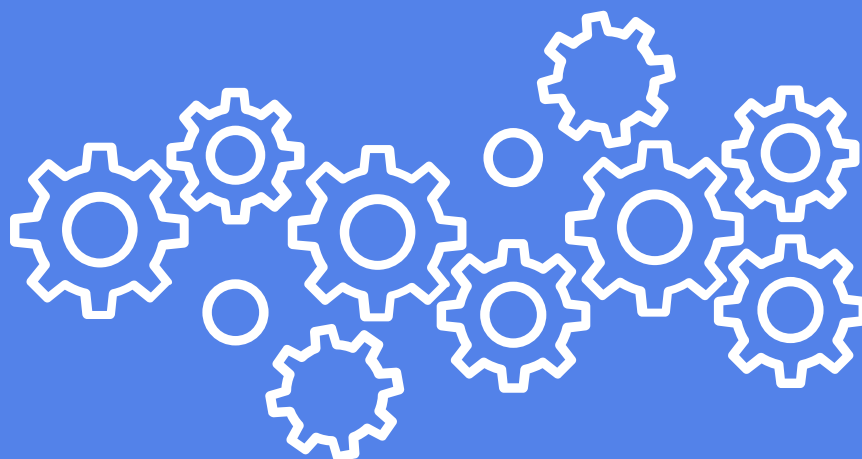
Those most likely to suffer poor mental health are those who became sick with the virus, particularly those who were hospitalised. They are likely to experience significant mental health problems, including PTSD and depression. Likewise, healthcare

care workers will also be likely to suffer from poor mental health. Evidence from the SARs outbreak in China indicates that some healthcare workers may experience anxiety, depression, PTSD and burn out for months, and in some cases even years, after the virus had ended.

Children and young people are another group who have been highly effected, particularly children who are losing out on social contact with their peers because of school closures. Likewise, evidence from places where parents have been in isolation with children show that they, too, experience significantly worse mental health than those who are not isolated with children.

Older people, too, are experiencing poor mental health. During the SARs epidemic there was a 30% increase in suicides amongst the over 65s; one piece of research suggested that being in quarantine for ten days seemed to be the tipping point. That's concerning since the isolation we're looking at over the course of this lockdown is far longer than ten days.

People with existing mental health conditions and learning disabilities are also a group who will be badly impacted. There is already evidence that referrals to mental health services are currently much lower than expected, which indicates that there are people out there who are not getting the support they require. As a consequence of



lockdown, many of these people have lost access to support networks, coping mechanisms and treatments such as counselling or therapy which they would have been receiving. Others may be finding it hard to understand the situation.

For social housing organisations, low-income residents will be amongst those who are suffering disproportionately badly. Research done on the impacts of epidemics on the mental health of populations in the past confirm the trend that the poorer the household, the more likely and more longstanding the mental health issues seem to be. We're already seeing evidence of this in the UK, with recent reports showing that the poorest areas in the country are suffering the most.

According to the Centre for Mental Health, if the economic impact of Covid-19 is similar to financial crisis we're likely to see 500,000 additional people suffer poor mental health. We can expect those people to disproportionately be social housing residents and BAME people, and recent reports in the news have strengthened emerging evidence around those projections.

As social housing organisations, it's going to be very important that we invest in mental health support, not only in terms of providing services for residents but seeing mental health support as an organisational wide issue. If we do that, the mental health recovery time will be quicker.

Many social housing organisations already acknowledge the additional psychological stress that something like repaying rent arrears and owing money puts on residents. Educating our staff teams on these wider issues and looking, for instance, at mental health and money and debt advice in tandem, will be a vitally important long-term consideration.

Critically, we will also need to recognise the impact that this current situation is having on our own staff, and their mental health and wellbeing. Staff working on the frontline, in particular, will be meeting with increasing numbers of people with mental health issues, so there will be a need to equip them with the skills and support they need.

Working in partnership and linking with national and local organisations who have expertise in other areas of mental health provision, will also be crucial. Interventions and services that have already brokered that space between health and housing, such as Link's Better Than Well project or Orbit's Breathing Space programme, have had clear and lasting positive impacts on the lives of residents.

A final thought: it's mental health awareness week this week and the theme is kindness – it's important to be kind to our families, our friends, our colleagues, our neighbours and, most critically, ourselves.



The View From: **Clarion Futures**

Phil Miles, Director

21 May 2020

The minute the lockdown was announced, we had to review the way we worked and how we could continue to provide services. We rapidly came to the conclusion that our financial guidance and employment support work could continue, unabated, by phone. We also continued other key support services like debt advice and tenancy sustainment.

Anything community-based or involving group interaction, however, had to stop. We run over 60 community centres and all of them have had to close. This meant we had to put a lot of our projects for young people, local sports and volunteering activities on ice. Similarly, a lot of our digital inclusion service has been heavily impacted because a lot of it was delivered one-to-one either in sheltered schemes or in community centres.

Within communities we turned our attention to the impact Covid-19 was having on our local partners. Our service provision is split between initiatives we deliver ourselves, and those that we commission through our Third Sector partners. Their survival is critical because without them we can't continue to deliver these projects.

Now we're offering dozens of online employment courses covering subjects including retail, construction and digital skills

So we quickly switched our grant funds so that it would be an emergency support fund giving out grants to our charitable partners so they could provide a response to Covid-19. We also reviewed our existing

grants and, where appropriate, changed the terms and conditions so that the money could be spent on activities related to Covid-19 responses. If, for example, we'd given money to a group to run a youth sports project, but the group were no longer able to do that, if they could now get those young people to volunteer to deliver food parcels, we would be happy to change the grant terms.

We also fast tracked a number of initiatives, including energy vouchers. We'd already spent a long time looking at food vouchers but found them difficult to administer. Instead, we've concentrated on energy vouchers and those have gone very well. We've used them to put extra money into the pockets of residents so they have more money to spend on food.

Since lockdown began, we've supported more than 150 people into work, almost two thirds of whom have taken up roles directly linked to the Covid-19 crisis.

We've also been reviewing our hardship fund. Previously this had been used to provide residents with white goods. After lockdown was announced, we had to find a new provider for this scheme, as the existing one couldn't deliver to residents anymore. Then we found that the new provider would only deliver the new white goods to people's doors: they would install cookers but wouldn't do washing machines or fridge freezers. We got around that by

switching to smaller appliances including microwaves, so that residents could lift them into their homes and install them on their own. We're also looking to extend our hardship fund to supply furniture.

We've always offered online training courses to help residents improve their employment prospects, but we've seen a significant increase in the number of people taking part since restrictions on movement were imposed. Courses that would normally be classroom-based have been adapted and we're now offering dozens of online courses covering subjects including retail, construction and digital skills.

An ever-changing external environment has meant that we've had to adapt at pace to make sure people have the best possible chance of success in our new normal. Being interviewed via video rather than face to face, for example, presents a whole new set of challenges, so we've created guidance so that people are confident with the format and able to present themselves in the best possible way.

Some sectors are experiencing growth so we've shifted our focus, recruiting for roles such as supermarket delivery and in-store roles, food production and cleaning. We've also been working closely with partners in the NHS and the Department for Work and Pensions to help recruit people to staff the 111 call centre and deal with the high volume of new Universal Credit claims.

Since lockdown began, we've supported more than 150 people into work, almost two-thirds of whom have taken up roles directly linked to the Covid-19 crisis.

Like most other social housing organisations, we made sure that we called our 12,000 residents over the age of 70. We've also been calling all our 18-25 year-old residents as we know they're a vulnerable demographic. It's been a very positive experience and has resulted in a lot of follow up work, whether with our support staff or by linking them into local provision.

Although it's a very sad and terrible event, this situation has shone a light on the great work that all of us do.

We've also been working with Liminal Labs to pilot a virtual innovation pop-up labs series. Each pop-up lab brings together residents, local organisations and Clarion staff to co-design solutions for an ageing population through design-thinking activities. We'd run some successful labs before the Covid-19 crisis and have recently run our first virtual pop-up lab. This involved 16 participants coming together on Zoom to share their creative ideas about how we can respond to the social isolation that's happening at the moment.

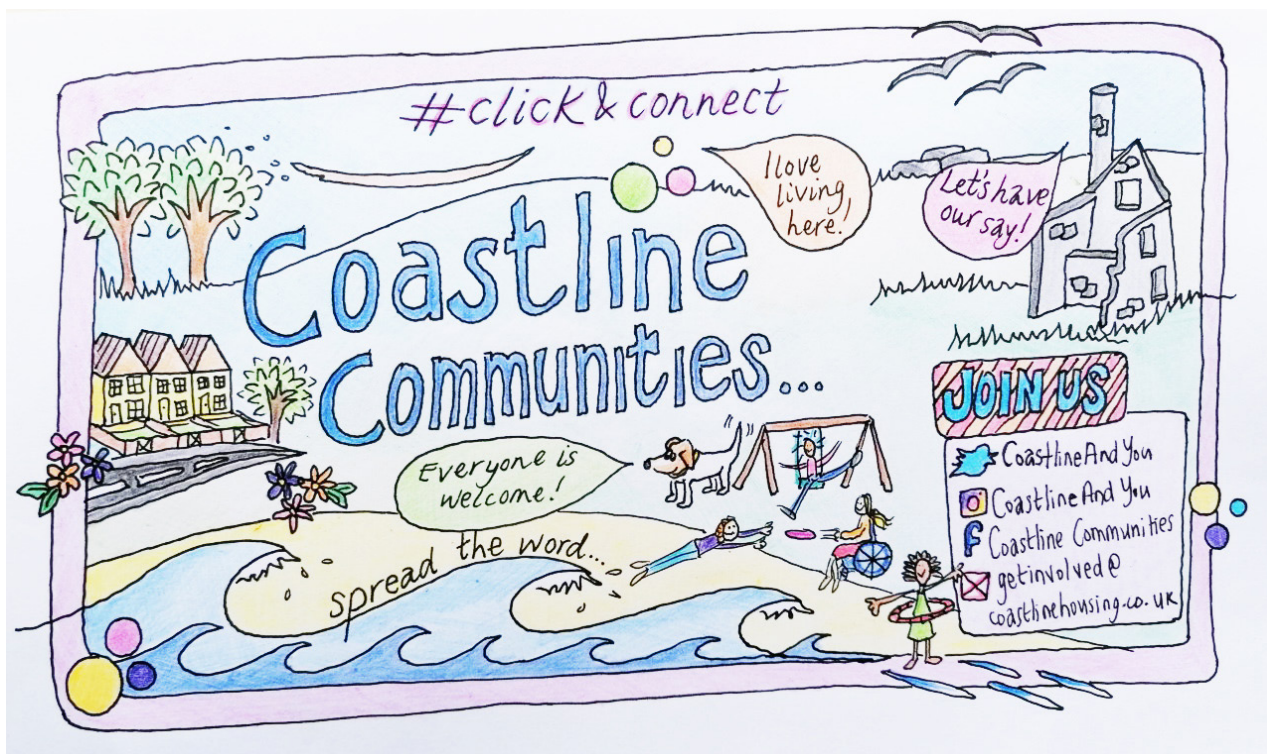
Despite our concerns, by the end of the two four-hour sessions, we had developed two ideas. One is around supporting communities to grow their

own vegetables. The other looks at how we can support those transitioning from work to retirement with a peer support programme. The virtual pop-up lab demonstrated how we need to be flexible in our approach towards our work at the moment, as well as the latent creativity that we have amongst our residents and our colleagues.

Our work has always been at the heart of the Group but that feels even stronger now. We know there will be an increase in unemployment, so our employment support, our money guidance advice and our financial inclusion service will all be critical in the future. I sense a real desire to look at long-term place making and really think about how we can ensure we have really strong communities going forwards.

Although it's a very sad and terrible event, this situation has shone a light on the great work that all of us do. It's a great opportunity for community investment to play a bigger role in social housing organisations and also help frontline staff to feel that they can provide more support and demonstrate their care in communities.

What's been striking over the past two months has been how much frontline staff, repairs staff and housing officers, were really keen to volunteer and get involved in projects and programmes to help communities. It demonstrated the huge commitment they have to the people we work with.



The View From: Coastline

Justin Ricks, Community Navigator

22 May 2020

During the recent health crisis, like many social housing organisations we've been making welfare calls to our customers to proactively identify if they have any additional support needs.

During these calls many customers expressed feelings of social isolation. Often, they were living on their own and in loneliness dwelling on their anxieties. Some were even talking about increased problems with their mental health.

Out of these calls, especially the more informal wellbeing checks, came the idea that what many of our customers needed was actually a befriending service. Those we spoke to often surprised and delighted us with the range of hobbies and skills they had or had recently taken up. Some were

even using these hobbies to manage their stress during lockdown and expressed how much having something to do had helped their physical and mental wellbeing.

This emerged as a regular theme. During lockdown, it seems, people have more time to reflect on the activities they really enjoy. We also started to find residents who had common interests and thought, wouldn't it be great if that person could talk to this person? It struck us as a great opportunity to connect the community.

As a result, Click & Connect was born. The service, run by Coastline, is done via a Facebook page. It asks customers to contribute and post their hobbies in order to connect them to people who have similar interests. We originally set up a Facebook

page in January which was dedicated to community stories and specifically for very grassroots community engagement; this is where Click & Connect now sits.

The service is really taking off. People are identifying with it and the success stories page is full of people posting about their hobbies and passions. We have quite a broad geographic spread of customers in housing across our area of Cornwall. Normally many of them wouldn't meet face-to-face, so creating this digital space is a unique way of connecting those who wouldn't have been before, especially our most elderly and vulnerable customers.

What the page demonstrates is how much people have in common, and want to share, learn and be inspired by each other. During a welfare call one resident told me about her new kitten, which she had been photographing. She now has the opportunity to share things about her pet via the page with her wider community. Even someone who doesn't have a skill or hobby still has a space to talk about and share an interest that's important to them, even if they don't want to take up hobbies themselves.

Another example of successful matching has been two people in the local community who are interested in model railways. Through the scheme they can connect with each other and have meaningful conversations that staff in our organisation wouldn't be able to have. Crochet and knitting have also been popular activities on the page, with many users commenting on each other's work and supporting their efforts.

While customers are one consideration, we were also realising that our staff may well be socially isolated and want to share their experiences. One Coastline colleague who, unbeknown to us, was a particularly good musician created a song and released it on the page. And as a keen photographer, I've also shared my interest. Coastline staff are there as page facilitators to encourage people to engage and feedback.

Although the project is in its infancy, we've demonstrated the principle of it. As a social housing organisation which does a lot of work around asset-based community development, Click & Connect is a natural extension of that approach. It looks at what people are already doing in their communities, what their interests are already, and provides the space and resources to nurture and support that.

Now more than ever is a time to be customer led and reflect on the services our customers really need, instead of creating a project to fit around them. The service is ultimately about encouraging people to connect with others in a way that enables sustainable and long-term relationships that will improve wellbeing. Whether their interest is really deep and meaningful or lighter, in some ways it doesn't really matter – it's about how that person is able to find a community and support network through sharing it.

The hope is that when lockdown eventually ends, customers will meet up in person when it's safe to do so.



The View From: **Derventio**

Jackie Carpenter, Assistant Director Strategy

26 May 2020

Derventio Housing Trust started in 2002 with a temporary winter night shelter that had 10 beds. Since then, we've grown exponentially, and now have 600 supported housing units across twelve local authorities, helping over 1,000 people a year.

The model we adopted for our supported housing was to find 2, 3 or 4 bed PRS-leased homes in the community. We talk of them as being ordinary houses in an ordinary street. We wanted them to be like this so that the people living next door wouldn't know they were living next to a supported housing unit: it's proved to be much better for residents, as it gives them more dignity.

Our supported housing is 90% of our work. The other 10% is specialist projects to support people, including a homeless hospital discharge project.

*Some people have skills.
Others are learning them.
Growing Lives is a place
where they can share skills
with each other, breaking
down the barriers between
them and us.*

We also have a couple of ESF and National Lottery Community Fund programmes that don't just support homeless people, but also people facing challenges to help them access employment opportunities.

And lastly, our Growing Lives project, that's based in a community centre in Ilkeston, where we help people rebuild their confidence and skills. We've got a garden with chickens, a bike workshop, arts projects funded by the Arts Council and a training kitchen where anyone who wants to can join in and help cook a meal.

Some people have skills. Others are learning them. Growing Lives is a place where they can share skills with each other, breaking down the barriers between them and us.

We made sure that everyone has a phone – we got funding to buy some phones and also have had phones donated to us. We want to ensure people have the means to get in contact with us or the health service as and when they need.

Since lockdown was introduced, we've had to change the way we work. We had to close the centre but knew that for the 15 to 20 people who come to it every day, the social aspect was important to them. A lot of them come from broken or non-existent relationships with their families. So without Growing Lives, they were more isolated and vulnerable.

We've been taking packs round to them and dropping them off outside their homes. These have included craft packs, sewing packs, art packs, recipe ideas for meals they can cook for themselves at home. It's also an opportunity for us to see them and check that they're ok.

There's been a lot of talk about the value of distraction packs, so we've created one for the people we work with. It contains activities and puzzles and suggestions for things people can do while they're in isolation. It also includes some tips for keeping your mental health and wellbeing good. It's available on our web site as an interactive PDF. We also printed 750 copies and have been delivering one to each residents – and taking the opportunity to make sure they're ok as well. We've also made this freely available to anyone who wants to use it, and organisations from around the country have downloaded it.

After the lockdown was announced, we contacted all residents to check they were ok and find out about any additional vulnerabilities they might have. We also made sure that everyone has a phone – we got funding to buy some phones and also have had phones donated to us. We want to ensure people have the means to get in contact with us or the health service as and when they need.

Now we're keeping in touch with people with regular phone calls, at least twice a week, sometimes more.

We also visit our homes to check people are ok, to carry out our legal safety checks, and to check on any potential ASB issues, because of our duty towards our community and neighbours. We do this once a fortnight.

In the meantime, we'll continue to keep in touch with people already living in our homes and making sure all the people living in our accommodation feel supported.

In Derby and across the county, we've been part of the local response to homelessness. We've had weekly phone calls with our colleagues from local authorities and other organisations, so that everyone knows what is happening and we can coordinate our response. Initially, we needed to work out what that response would be, liaising with street outreach teams, hotel managers, hostel providers, so we could get as many people off the streets as possible.

There's been a lot of flexibility locally which has been really impressive. It's helped that we had some existing relationships with other providers and local councils. Strategically, it's all felt very joined up.

Now with lockdown easing, the focus has switched to what's going to happen next. There've been a lot of conversations about what each provider can offer and ideas about how we can help those who are more challenging to house, like chaotic rough sleepers. Recovery plans are already well developed, and it's good to feel that Derby and Derbyshire are at the forefront of good practice.

We're hoping to be able to start moving people into new, permanent accommodation now. If we can do this, we can move more people into our own supported homes and help them make that transition off the streets.

In the meantime, we'll continue to keep in touch with people already living in our homes and making sure all the people living in our accommodation feel supported.

The impact we've made

March-May 2020

Data for March-May comes from 80 social housing organisations, with a combined stock of 1,167,129 homes (40% of UK total)



555,684

Total welfare calls made

7,124

Mean number of welfare calls made per reporting org [n=78]



184,827

Vulnerable residents identified

2,532

Mean number of vulnerable residents per reporting org [n=73]

6.5

There is one vulnerable resident per 6.5 homes



25%

Percentage of contacted residents asking for support



90,195

Number of residents receiving advice and guidance

1,203

Mean number of residents receiving advice & guidance per reporting org [n=75]

13.2

One resident receiving advice and guidance per 13.2 homes



61,656

Food interventions

856

Mean number of food interventions per reporting org [n=72]

19.4

There is one food intervention per 19.4 homes



34%

Percentage of households receiving more than one food intervention



£643,188

Direct financial support to residents

£10,720

Mean direct financial support per reporting org [n=60]



36,398

Residents identified at risk of arrears

628

Mean number of residents at risk of arrears per reporting org [n=58]

32.8

One resident at risk of arrears per 32.8 homes



4,356

Staff who were redeployed to community facing roles

60

Mean number of staff redeployed per reporting org [n=72]

14.3%

Redeployed staff as a % of total staff of reporting organisations



The View From: **Look Ahead**

Kate Bawden, Head of Communications

11 June 2020

At the beginning of the crisis, we identified three primary aspects to our response. First, business continuity measures in place across the organisation, both locally and cross-organisationally. Second, additional or new measures we have introduced in response to the crisis. And third, new services we've started since the Covid-19 crisis began.

We provide support, care and accommodation services to around 7,000 people a year through 120 different services across 30 local authorities. We work with people with mental health needs, people with learning disabilities, young people and care leavers and the homeless. We also work with people who

may go in and out of hospital a lot. We also we have a number of registered care services and many integrated services delivered jointly with local CCGs and health trusts.

Our first response was to look at our business continuity plan. Even though we'd regularly reviewed and stress tested it over the past few years, we hadn't planned for a global pandemic of these proportions I'm not sure that anyone had! What we did know, though, was the importance of our 1,000 strong staff team, so we already had plans in place to deal with staff shortages, with every service having its own local business continuity plan. These have proved crucial.

Everyone involved in our central service functions – just less than 100 people – moved to home working, with appropriate remote working technology. We introduced daily senior leadership calls where we monitored staff shortages and suspected customer cases at each and every service. We were able to do this thanks to the data we collated daily and made amendments to our reporting systems to enable this. We've seen throughout this that all the investment we've made in our IT and online systems over the past two – three years have really paid off.

The other huge issue at the start of the crisis was PPE. We encountered the same difficulties in accessing PPE as most social care providers early on, although now we've got a good and steady supply.

We RAG-rated every service in terms of acuity of need – some of them can run with fewer staff if needed, but others absolutely cannot. At its height, our staff absence rate reached 18%, but we were able to cover that thanks to the incredible dedication of staff working overtime and covering shifts. The dedication of our frontline staff has been amazing; their viewpoint has been, "Of course I'm going into work to support our clients because if I don't, then who is?"

Now we've got access to testing, that pressure has eased a bit, as any staff

member who thinks they may have Covid-19 can access and get the results of their test, usually within 48 hours, which means they can come back to work quicker if the test is negative. Previously, if they had symptoms, they had to isolate for at least seven days.

The other huge issue at the start of the crisis was PPE. We encountered the same difficulties in accessing PPE as most social care providers early on, although now we've got a good and steady supply. We've been able to source PPE through local authorities and networks and have also built up an extensive central supply, through both donations and paid orders, in case any services are struggling to access it locally.

From the start of the crisis, we also delivered mandatory staff training around infection control and how to use PPE safely. We set up a resource centre dedicated to Covid-19 on our intranet, with FAQs, guidance on PPE and how to use it in different settings, how to support people when they're self-isolating and how to encourage social distancing. Then every week we share an internal email wrapping up all we'd been talking about that week. There's been so much information for staff so we've had to manage it quite tightly.

We've done a lot around wellbeing for our staff, introducing a wellbeing offer that can be accessed online, as well as promoting telephone counselling and online support. We already did a lot of reflective practice across the organisation anyway, but that has become even more important. We've provided mental health resources and

wellbeing checks for people working in services as well as those working from home. We need our staff to be well and feel confident, safe and protected going into work, so we've invested in this. We've just asked all our staff what they think of our response. Over 40% have responded and it'll be interesting to see where we've done well and where things could have been better.

We've also increased our communications to our customers with a special edition of our customer magazine and information about support networks and available help, while our Tenant and Landlord Panel is meeting virtually so customers can feed in about their experiences.

One of our challenges, particularly for clients with mental health issues, has been asking them to do the opposite of what we normally ask them to do. As part of our recovery approach, we are usually very much promoting the importance of social contact, engagement and not isolating yourself. Now we're having to tell people to do the opposite so it's been a big shift in the way we support people. We've tried to do this by being as creative as possible.

In our learning disability services especially, staff have been acting like family for many of our clients. For people with particularly high needs, consistency with staff has been critical to helping them

to stay safe and well. In some services there was a rise in anti-social behaviour, because people were struggling with the sudden changes or didn't have the capacity to understand what was going on. So we've had to put things in place to keep their engagement really high. Our staff have been hugely creative and have really excelled at supporting social distanced activities – yoga, badminton and arts to name just a few,

We wanted to recognise and celebrate the commitment and dedication of our staff so we introduced our own internal communications campaign, 'Social Care Heroes', encouraging people to share and celebrate what they've been doing. We've had regular messaging from senior leaders, ran weekly themed competitions encouraging innovation and adapted our quarterly staff awards scheme in light of the pandemic. This has enabled staff to nominate colleagues for the work they've been doing, and how they've been supporting clients who can't see family or friends. The nominations have been truly heart-warming.

One of the additional things we've had to do during this period is to find new food sources for our customers. Beforehand, a lot of our services and sites relied on food donations that they usually accessed through local restaurants or chains, like

Prêt à Manger, or through foodbanks. We had a lot of local arrangements in place. However when restaurants and cafés shut their doors, so did our supply chain.

Staff who normally work in our Business Development team became our food donation team, working with a many different local partnership organisations. Within the first day, they had arranged for a delivery of 1.5 tonnes of food to different services. We've been supported by so many generous charity and corporate partners, including Nando's, who donated 600 meals to our South London homelessness services, when they reopened for delivery last month. It's made a real difference to people in our services who may have struggled to get food otherwise. We've also ran a public fundraising campaign to raise money for food and other essential items for our most vulnerable customers.

Finally, our new services: since the end of March, we've been supporting the GLA by delivering temporary emergency accommodation for rough sleepers. We are currently running two hotel services in south London accommodating 250 former rough sleepers. It was a quick turnaround – we had the first person move in with 72 hours of the GLA asking us to set it up. Both are protect sites, which means that they are for rough sleepers or homeless

people who have health conditions that can make them particularly vulnerable to the effects of Covid-19.

They have food delivered to their door three times a day and staff on site to assist them. Now, we're working with partners to try and ensure that, wherever possible, they don't return to the streets but can be moved on to more suitable accommodation. We're looking at each individual's needs and working on a case-by-case basis to move them on in a positive and sustained way.

The last three months have been like nothing we, or anyone else, has seen before. We know the challenge is likely to be far from over but we are pleased at how we have weathered the storm so far and the measures and the systems we now have in place.

As we move forward, focus will remain on protecting not only the physical health but crucially also the mental health of both those who work for and those we support. There's a phrase that in the context of the pandemic, we may all be in the same storm but not all of us are in the same boat. We are keeping this firmly in mind as we keep focused on safely supporting our customers, some of the most vulnerable (even at the best of times) within our communities.



The View From: **Orbit**

Sam Scharf, Director of Community Investment

15 June 2020

Before the Covid-19 crisis began, we'd planned to reach out to the sector and share the learnings from four of our Better Days programmes. The impact of Covid-19, however, meant that we had to put this on hold temporarily.

Last year, a number of our core services in our Better Days programme had come to an end, so we'd taken the opportunity to evaluate them properly so we could learn what had worked, what hadn't, and how we could best rethink the support we provide to our customers.

We wanted to share what we learned from this process, but have had to sit on them while our attention has been focused on responding to the needs of our customers over the last three months,

Each of the projects was evaluated independently, to give legitimacy to the findings. We asked HACT to evaluate our mental health and financial resilience services, while the Institute of Learning and Work evaluated our employment service. The evaluation into our debt service was run as a randomised control trial (RCT), with internal support and from HACT.

So what have we learnt?

One of the takeaways was that it's good to see how rigorous our data collection has been, and how you can use data to change what you're doing, rather than just collect it. I've been pleasantly surprised that some of our data work has helped to reinforce or change our thinking – that's not often the case.

Where we've done business benefit analyses, that's strengthened our resolve around debt and employment and helped operationalise those services across the business. Where we've needed to understand our customers around mental health, it has helped change our tender and the support we provide. It means we're being driven by customer demand rather than datasets.

The evaluations have given us greater insight into our customers. Sometimes it's easy to do, report and tick boxes and say look isn't it great, and what great outcomes we've achieved. But these evaluations have highlighted where support might not be as effective as well.

For example, with our employment service, we found out that while we provide a great employment service, the data tells us that in-work poverty is the greatest issue facing our customers. So we've changed and adapted our employment service, refocusing it so it can deliver true value.

We'll be delivering our employment service through a housing association lens. We'll use it to help tackle in-work poverty, insecure work and how we support our customers to have a digital focus. We'll also be looking at a circular skills model, using our supply chain and future needs around construction and future supply chain.

So the evaluations have given us lots of food for thought in how we reshape our services. And now we're using the learning from those evaluations as content for a series of webinars, so we can share our findings with the sector.

We've already hosted two webinars – one on employment, and the other on debt. And we'll be hosting two further webinars, on financial resilience and mental health, over the next two weeks.

Each webinar is a chance to reach out to our colleagues in the sector, to share the learning and promote collaborative learning. There are many areas where collaboration could be much greater in the sector: we've seen that over the past month, especially, in our work around mental health, talking about our Breathing Space model, introducing our service partners to other social housing organisations, and promoting collaborative responses.

Community investment will be at the fore of our future.

We've had a lot of internal debates about its role and these evaluations have helped us demonstrate that what we do is adding value to people's lives, as well as to the business. If we're having to suggest that we need more funding during this budget round to cater for demand, we can point out what impacts that investment will make.

We'd like to continue to work with and support others, to influence what they do and how they shape their services to their customers. We have a wealth of information and evidence about what's worked for us, so it's critical that we share that with the sector. Many haven't had the opportunity to do this analysis, so we hope that this opens the door for better collaboration across the sector.



The View From: **Bromford**

Janette Vizard, Grants and Social Value Officer

19 June 2020

My role at Bromford involves working with numerous local charities, voluntary organisations, schools and different community projects across Gloucestershire.

Before Covid-19, my work involved grant advice and training, and helping projects maintain their processes as fit for purpose, so that might be compliance or governance training.

The projects cover everything from sports centres to small community organisations. One thing that has united them all since Covid-19 is funding, or rather the lack of funding. Most charities were told to shut their doors and that was that.

They had to close up, cancel all their fundraising activities and saw any income they might get from room hire stop overnight. Although the Government announced £750 million in funding for charities to ameliorate against the impact of Covid-19, most of this funding was for on the ground emergency response and most of the people I work with didn't benefit from the fund.

These smaller projects or charities are usually run by one project manager who does everything. They manage their facilities, arrange activities, coordinate volunteers and staff and are also in charge of compliance and governance. It can be a lonely job.

As charities start to think about re-opening or re-mobilising, we've developed a checklist to support them – and which we're happy for others in the sector to use.

There's no one size fits all for this, because from day centres to sports halls to charity shops to community centres, they're all different and all will have different requirements. Some will have cafés, some use public transport, others will use their own transport, so each will need their own individual risk assessment.

The checklist is to help people think everything through. For example, everyone has to have a risk assessment when they remobilise, based on their employees returning to work. This means you'll need to think about toilets, for example – you might need to block some of them off because of social distancing. Or you might, like many organisations, choose to just keep a disabled toilet open.

If you haven't been in your building for the last 12 weeks, before you make a cup of tea you should definitely check with a professional to see whether a Legionella test is required.

Charities will need to evaluate the risk and then look at the government guidance to see what sort of regulations they're suggesting, and then compile their risk assessment. Then they'll need to print out the risk certificate. There's a risk assessment template in the checklist.

A lot of the regulations might not be available yet, so some of this work will be guess work, using whatever guidance there is to inform people's own unique circumstances.

There's an expectation that small charities, if prepared, could open on 4 July, subject to the R rate. So they'll need to get themselves ready, understanding requirements around PPE, screens, signs, as well as developing the risk assessment – if you're the only person, this will be a tall order.

The checklist provides people with some answers, some suggestions and some support. For example, if you haven't been in your building for the last 12 weeks, before you make a cup of tea you should definitely check with a professional to see whether a Legionella test is required.

You should also check your insurance and make sure it's still valid – you never know, you might get a discount. Some projects I'm working with have been given a three-month discount, so it's worth checking.

The checklist also contains lots of links to further advice. A word of warning, though: this advice is constantly changing, so you'll need to keep on checking it.

We hope the checklist will help smaller charities and voluntary organisations get back to work sooner, without encountering too many unforeseen problems. There's a lot to consider, but with the checklist, the path to re-opening should be a bit smoother.



The View From: **Peabody**

Stephen Burns, Executive Director Care & Communities

23 June 2020

Each year we strive to increase the impact our Community Foundation has on the lives of our residents and their sense of community spirit.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenge. Following government guidelines on social distancing, we took the difficult decision to close all of our offices and community buildings to the public, in an effort to stop the spread of Coronavirus.

As an organisation, we quickly responded by keeping critical services running and putting in place a range of emergency measures and adapting services to ensure the most vulnerable received the support they needed.

As part of this, we set up a Resident Wellbeing Project, a new strand of work

led by our Communities, Tenant & Family Support, Financial Inclusion and Residents Services teams.

This ensured that we were able to quickly put measures in place to support our residents in ways that would help them most. We also looked at the organisation as a whole and how we could best use available resources, including redeploying staff to support resident wellbeing.

Our teams contacted over 10,000 residents who were known to us as being vulnerable or in the older, high risk, categories. This led to us setting up a food delivery network that has provided almost 2,000 emergency food parcels to our most vulnerable residents since the start of the pandemic.

We have also been working closely with local partners to ensure we have a co-ordinated local response. This has included supporting local authorities and mutual aid groups through our partnership with the London Food Alliance, providing space for food distribution, with some of our community centres operating as distribution hubs and providing weekly ready meals through our partnership with The Plattery and Ink Squid Bar.

Our partnerships with FareShare and the Felix Project have enabled us to provide essential food and supplies to residents and households in need throughout this time.

Our Financial Inclusion team has been inundated with requests for support from residents experiencing a change in their financial circumstances. This has seen the team helping residents to urgently access Universal Credit and other benefits. We have also helped mobilise and coordinate support through our many partnerships with local authorities, small grassroots organisations and other stakeholders.

Other ways in which we have been supporting our residents include:

- 104 matches to our befriending programme
- Assisting 103 households with fuel concerns;
- Supporting 101 people through our Pharmacy Approach scheme.

We have also made more strategic changes to our services. The Peabody website now has a dedicated section on wellbeing that provides information and links to help and resources available to residents and communities through

local authorities and local organisations. Peabody residents are able to refer themselves or a neighbour for support through the website.

We have also successfully managed to transfer many services online and are now delivering virtual youth clubs and sessions for parents and families to connect and share their successes, worries or concerns. We have successfully delivered online training programmes and employment support in addition to online business forums to support our enterprise programmes.

We have established wellbeing area coordinators to link residents with sustainable local services during this time and we are also continuing to design new services using virtual design tools such as Mural.

Peabody also donated an additional £100,000 to help small charities and grass roots organisations provide critical support to vulnerable residents through the lockdown period. The donations were pledged to London Community Fund's London Communities Coronavirus Appeal and Islington Giving's Crisis Fund. This has enabled them to provide emergency funding to small organisations working with communities across the capital.

Through it all, our 1,300-strong team of care & supported housing staff have continued to provide critical care across our sheltered housing, homelessness and special needs schemes in London, Essex, Kent and Sussex. While the pandemic may have brought extraordinary challenges for us all, it reinforced that residents and communities are at the heart of everything we do.

THE HOMES AT THE HEART CAMPAIGN

NEWS RELEASE

25 June 2020

HACT supports the Homes at the Heart campaign that has been launched today.

Dear Chancellor

Put homes at the heart of recovery

We are writing to urge you to put good quality, affordable housing at the heart of your plans for social and economic recovery from the coronavirus crisis.

This pandemic has transformed our relationship with our homes. For some, home has been a sanctuary from a dangerous and unpredictable virus. Home has become their office, a classroom, a gym or a place of worship. But for countless others, the place they have spent lockdown has felt like a prison – housing that is far too small, too expensive, of poor quality or isolated from the support that would help them to live well.

The coronavirus crisis is further highlighting the need for secure, high quality, better designed affordable homes and, for many people, support to live in them. Not least for many of the people most affected by this crisis – low-paid key workers living in homes they can't afford, rough sleepers helped off the streets, homeless families in temporary accommodation, older people in unsupported homes, and families stuck in overcrowded conditions.

Without action, we are likely to see many people's housing situations get much worse in the weeks, months and years ahead, as the economic impacts of the crisis are felt across the country.

In times of crisis, the worth of social housing is ever more visible and to so many of the challenges that lie ahead, social housing is the answer. The social housing sector stands ready to play a major role in shoring up the future of the country.

Public investment in all types of new and existing social housing gives more back to the economy than it takes. Building and improving social homes, including delivering on the decarbonisation agenda, creates jobs, kick-starts growth and brings huge environmental benefits.

Investing in supporting people to live well in their social homes improves health and wellbeing, and drives cost savings for the NHS. Social housing is at the centre of thriving communities.

That is why we support the Homes at the Heart campaign.

As you develop and deliver plans to get the country back on track, we are calling on the government to put social homes at the heart of recovery – as a driver of economic and social prosperity, and an anchor for strong communities.



Homes at the Heart

Campaign partners

ARCH
CIH
Crisis
National Federation of ALMOs
NHF

Campaign supporters

APSE
ARCO
Argent
BME National
British Property Federation
Build East
Building Societies Association
Campbell Tickell
Care & Repair England
Carers UK
Centre for Excellence in Community Investment
Centre for Local Economic Strategies
Citizens UK
Consortium of Associations in the South East
Communities that Work
Compass
CPRE
Design Council
Devonshires
Federation of Master Builders
Future of London
GI5
Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
Greater Manchester Housing Providers

Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce

HACT
Homeless Link
Homes for Cathy
Homes for the North
Homes for the South Housing LIN
JLL
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Liverpool City Region Housing Associations Group
Localis
National Energy Foundation
NatWest
North East England Chamber of Commerce
Northern Housing Consortium
Placeshapers
Public Practice
Refugee Council
Royal Institute of British Architects The Royal
Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
Rural Housing Alliance
Save the Children UK
See the Person
Shelter
The Smith Institute
Town and Country Planning Association Tpas
West Midlands Housing Association Partnership
Willmott Dixon
UNISON
Nick Gallent, Professor of Housing and Planning, &
Yvonne Rydin, Professor of Planning, Environment
and Public Policy, Bartlett School of Planning, UCL
(in a personal capacity)



The View From: Catalyst

Rhys Evans, Community Engagement Manager

26 June 2020

Historically, summer programmes for young people have been one of the highlights of the community calendar. They've been about providing what individual communities need through a range of positive diversionary activities.

At Catalyst, we've always tried to make the summer programme experience something out of the ordinary for the children and young people who take part. It's not just about turning up and playing football or painting. It's about active citizenship, volunteering within the community, providing longer term opportunities and skills, that type of thing.

Through the summer programme, we reward and recognise the young people's contribution. For example, we award points for volunteering and that can then be converted into rewards, such as go-karting,

a day at a theme park or white-water rafting. We like to take young people out of their comfort zone, and then say thank you to them for all the effort they've put in over the summer.

When Covid-19 hit, we had to revisit our summer programme plans. We did lots of research and it became obvious that lots of other housing associations were trying to do the same sort of thing. We all want the best for our communities, we all want to help people experiencing holiday hunger, and so on.

But does it make sense for each organisation to be doing their own thing?

Shouldn't we start talking about how we can have a programme of activities that's accessible to all our communities simultaneously?

One of the positive outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it has forced us to think more collaboratively.

The same could be said for employability programmes: it seems every housing association runs their own. It seems nonsensical that we're limited to our own postcodes or own neighbourhoods. We could deliver them more cheaply and with much higher quality if we shared resources.

The summer programmes for young people definitely lends itself to this.

One of the themes we've been looking at is young people's mental health. Psychologists are warning about an impending tsunami of mental health issues. How can we use the summer programme to create projects and activities that not only reduce isolation and loneliness, but also provide a sense of achievement and development?

Rather than a young person just taking part as an individual in a street dance session on Zoom, for example, how can we create some sort of continuity so that you create something as a group? That's the ethos we want to inform the summer programme.

Traditionally, summer programmes tend to be delivered on the same estates or in the same areas year after year. If your housing association home isn't in that area, then your chances of taking part in a summer programme are slim. Moving the

programme online means we remove that link to postcodes. For example, we can offer a streetdance class that's being filmed in north London to residents in Cardiff.

Working with the Housing Associations' Youth Network (HAYN), we're looking at five or six different types of offer, ranging from a full digital programme where people can log on and access any event they want, to individual events.

One of the really exciting elements of the programme is promoting accessible transport – bikes. We're looking to help young residents get access to low cost bikes, along with offering bikeability training and bike servicing. All of this will be at low or no cost to residents. We're also planning cycling competitions – a bike-related prize for the person who does the most cycling in a week, that sort of thing.

By working collaboratively across the sector, we can increase our procurement value and increase the prospect of sponsorship from the corporate sector. The more housing associations we can get involved in this, the bigger it will become, and the more attractive it will be to supporters, and most importantly, the greater the benefits will be to our residents and communities.

I'd ask people to get involved with HAYN – it's a national network and we want housing associations across the country to be part of it.

The impact we've made

March-June 2020

Data for March-June comes from 82 social housing organisations, with a combined stock of 1,193,238 homes (41% of UK total)



656,315

Total welfare calls made

8,414

Mean number of welfare calls made per reporting org [n=70]



187,121

Vulnerable residents identified

2,636

Mean number of vulnerable residents per reporting org [n=71]

6.4

There is one vulnerable resident per 6.4 homes



26%

Percentage of contacted residents asking for support



116,954

Number of residents receiving advice and guidance

1,539

Mean number of residents receiving advice & guidance per reporting org [n=76]

10.2

One resident receiving advice and guidance per 10.2 homes



86,395

Food interventions

1,168

Mean number of food interventions per reporting org [n=74]

13.8

There is one food intervention per 13.8 homes



38%

Percentage of households receiving more than one food intervention



£1,007,536

Direct financial support to residents

£15,993

Mean direct financial support per reporting org [n=63]



38,298

Residents identified at risk of arrears

696

Mean number of residents at risk of arrears per reporting org [n=55]

31.2

One resident at risk of arrears per 31.2 homes



4,407

Staff who were redeployed to community facing roles

61

Mean number of staff redeployed per reporting org [n=58]

14.4%

Redeployed staff as a % of total staff of reporting organisations



The View From: **Stockport Homes**

Tanya King, Customer Engagement and Inclusion Manager

6 July 2020

In terms of project work, the main impact of Covid-19 has been on our network of local pantries, which are community food stores. These operate on membership arrangements. People pay £3.50 a week to access up to ten food items. The premise of the pantry is it offers dignity and choice, and is not a foodbank. They're located in communities where we have the most stock, which tend to be in deprived areas.

Normally people come to our five food stores every week, but over the lockdown period we've had to completely change their format. Since many members haven't been able to collect food in person, we've been operating a home delivery service for members and other vulnerable households amongst our tenants.

We've managed to keep two pantries open, but with pre-packed bags and social distancing for collections. Recently, we've re-opened a third pantry and are planning to use a delivery van to provide pre-packed bags to the remaining two areas.

Stockport Council also commissioned us to deal with any referrals they had through their Covid helpline. Anyone presenting with an immediate need for food would be directed to us. Consequently, need for the service has massively increased and we've been delivering hundreds of food bags each week.

At one point we were delivering to local school children whose family were having issues with school meals vouchers. We've also delivered to a cohort of around 30 particularly vulnerable looked-after children throughout.

Local foodbanks have now taken over the role of emergency food provision, as they are confident they have sufficient resources. As we begin to move out of crisis mode into recovery, our focus is on supplying our pantry members and encouraging new members to join as a sustainable option.

Our digital offer also had to change. We fund a local social enterprise called Start

Point who are great at engaging people with no interest in digital and persuading them, particularly older people, of the reasons to go online.

During lockdown, Start Point moved all of their learners, mostly over 55s, onto weekly Zoom sessions. Sixteen local digital champions do either one-to-one support or group support every week.

Most of the training is for people who want to learn how to do online shopping, banking, and basic skills to keep them safe online. We will build on this shift to reach more customers with digital support from their homes as well as local drop in sessions when they can safely restart.

One huge benefit of this period has been the increased partnership working. Within our own organisation, internal communications and relationships have really developed. Teams from across the organisation have helped out where they were needed, especially with the pantries.

In the first few weeks many of the operatives had no work, so they acted as packers and delivery drivers for our pantries. Before lockdown, some staff didn't even know the pantries existed, particularly if they were doing a trade job, so there's definitely more appreciation for the work we do now.

Staff from other parts of the business have also helped out with welfare calls, which has been a massive operation. We had thousands of residents to contact, so calls were allocated out to everyone with capacity. People in our organisation who might not have a massive amount of contact with customers have been on

the phone to people who, in some cases, needed a lot of support.

This has really heightened the appreciation of what other staff members do. This is something we are seeking to embed in our regular work, rather than a one off project.

Our relationship with the Council has also been enhanced during lockdown as we worked really closely with them on an integrated food offer. Our relationships with third sector organisations have been really positive, too. Local Covid groups who mobilised really fast have linked in with us, and our relationships with local foodbanks are better than ever.

Our next steps are laid out in our recovery and transformation plan, which we are delivering. We're trying to get back to business as usual as soon and as safely as we can. Where that's not possible, we're looking at offering alternatives.

We've also been co-ordinating a survey across all the different service areas, speaking to customers and getting their feedback on the services we delivered differently during lockdown. For example, if people feel they're happy to be rung instead of seen in person, this will free up staff resources to focus on the most vulnerable households who do need face-to-face contact. Evaluating how necessary home visits are for some services will be a permanent change where customers are happy with telephone or digital contact.

We've learnt a lot during this period. Now is the time to work with our customers to develop more effective services to benefit everyone.

RECOVERY AND RESET: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN PLACE

Andrew van Doorn, Chief Executive,

13 July 2020

Over the last three months, we've been talking with colleagues from social housing organisations across the UK on a regular basis. Initially, those discussions were focused on identifying vulnerable residents and the best ways of organising the distribution of food and support to our residents and communities.

They were also about how we shift our work and engagement online, and look after ourselves and each other during this crisis.

Since then, those conversations have changed. Now, they are focusing on the future role of social housing organisations in place and how we use our resources and presence in communities to be a key part of the recovery and reset that is now needed.

Before we think about the future, let's stop for a moment and reflect on the impact that we have had since March, in responding to the challenges of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown.

We have unlocked the passion of many who work within the sector. Our social purpose has come to the fore and has been keenly felt.

We have delivered on our role in communities, ensuring that vulnerable residents and local people have been supported and not forgotten.

We have strengthened and developed relationships with local community groups, local authorities, the NHS and local businesses.

We have demonstrated that we can be agile, embracing new ways of working, shifting to digital and redeploying staff to different areas of the business overnight.

We have engaged with our residents on a scale that has never been seen before, responding to their individual needs, whether with food parcels, advice and guidance, financial assistance or just a regular call to see if they are OK.

We have continued to deliver our care and support services despite significant challenges, from staff shortages and the lack of PPE.

We have facilitated the ending of street homelessness in many cities.

We have responded to issues of poverty, which have huge impact on our communities, in particular, our BAME communities.



We have achieved a lot but it doesn't end there.

Amidst all the uncertainty about the future, I'm clear about one thing: we can't go back to the way things were before. We need to move forward. We need to use our passions for making a difference and our creativity for being different. When the chips are down, we are a sector that steps up and delivers.

How we do this will define us as a sector for the next decade. The roles that we take, the decisions that we make, and the way that we work together will show who we truly are.

So what does come next? What do we need to explore now as we think about the future? How can we build on what we've achieved?

How do we embed the new relationships we've developed locally and make collaboration the norm? How do we turn our new engagement and trust with residents into insight, involvement and service improvement?

How do we meaningfully tackle poverty and inequality? How do listen carefully and act on what we are being told by our BAME colleagues and communities?

How do we pivot our organisations so that they are providing the right support to our residents and our communities? How do we enable our community and voluntary sector partners to survive and thrive?

What role do we play in local economic development, beyond regeneration and housebuilding? How do we use our presence as significant local employers to support our residents back into work?

How do we understand and measure our impact in a meaningful way?

And how do we embed the positive gains we've made in our own organisational transformation and go further and faster than we could have imagined just three months ago?

The answers to all of these might be challenging.

But just as we've responded to the challenges of the last three months with agility, intelligence and dedication, so we can do so again.

And in doing so, we will create a new role for social housing in place.



The View From: **ClwynAlyn**

*Louise Blackwell, Community Development Officer and
Stuart Hughes, Resident Involvement Officer*

24 July 2020

ClwydAlyn set up a new wellbeing team to support our most vulnerable residents towards the end of March. We have stock across seven counties in North Wales and we quickly realised that many of our residents were vulnerable.

The new wellbeing team did some initial mapping to find out what kind of local community support already existed in the different counties where we operated to avoid duplicating work. Then we started calling residents, offering them emotional and practical support and signposting them to specialist support services. Some residents have requested regular wellbeing calls, so we check in on them weekly or fortnightly, depending on what their wants and needs are.

In the first months especially, many people across the organisation got deployed to different roles. With the welfare calls, staff who would normally be working in different areas of the company helped out, even some people who were self-isolating since the calls could be done from home. We've made a total of 1,925 wellbeing calls as of July 13.

Many residents we contacted were just pleased to know that ClwydAlyn were there in case of an emergency. It was reassuring to know that if their son or daughter who goes shopping for them gets ill, we would be there as back-up. Our team at ClwydAlyn helped by collecting shopping and picking up prescriptions for residents who couldn't leave their homes,

and when needed signposting them to other services for more specialist help.

Other residents who lived on their own, were elderly, or were having to shield or self-isolate and who didn't have family and friends around, required more support. Initially quite a few residents needed practical support with things like food interventions, information on what they were entitled to and how to get it.

For others it was letting them know about what local community voluntary groups existed that could help them. For the people we've called who have been in crisis, we've signposted where we can, letting them know about excellent services like New Mind or the mental health helpline for Wales.

We've got an indoor pack for people who don't have big gardens or are housebound that includes a bonsai tree, and patio containers. The packs are about promoting physical and/or mental health and wellbeing.

We know that it's been a difficult time for our residents, which is why we've recently launched a new wellbeing project where we deliver wellbeing packs full of exciting freebies to our residents. These packs are themed to give residents a choice of content; we've got one for physical exercise containing weights, a yoga mat and a water bottle, another pack for gardening containing seeds for vegetables

and flowers, and a mindfulness pack containing a colouring book for adults, pens and pencils. We've added another one today for baking.

We've even got an indoor pack for people who don't have big gardens or are housebound, which includes a bonsai tree, and patio containers. The packs are about promoting physical and/or mental health and wellbeing, and encouraging people to get out into their gardens, enjoy the fresh air and get exercise.

The packs are inspired by Anglesey council, who were doing a similar project that concentrated on gardening and the outdoors. Some of our staff who were furloughed within our asset management maintenance team helped deliver those kits.

ClwydAlyn thought it was really good practice, so after helping Anglesey with their project we made the decision to take it on and extend it. As well as ClwydAlyn funding it, another one of our contractors, Travis Perkins, have given us match funding which has given us a bigger budget.

When we're doing the welfare calls now, we promote the packs to people we've been supporting for the last few months who we know are particularly vulnerable. We launched about a week ago and we've delivered around 80 so far. We've also been liaising with our colleagues to invite them, if they're happy and work in different patches, to help with the delivery of the packs. And we've had lots of uptake.

This has enabled people from other parts of the organisation to take ownership of the project. For example, two housing officers helped out yesterday and it was a chance for them to be seen in their community and have a chat with residents, rather than just going to sort out maintenance or anti-social behaviour. They've fed back how much it has helped them build rapport and trust with the community.

At a supported living scheme for young people in Wrexham we donated a couple of devices, so residents were able to keep in touch with family and friends

One thing that's happened since the start of lockdown has been an increased recognition of the great work that's being done elsewhere in the community. Rather than siloed working, we're increasingly signposting residents to other community groups who can help them with specific needs.

Smaller local community groups have been amazing and were very quick at identifying local need. The local authorities set up weekly food parcels but even then, you often had to wait a week. Whereas some of these local community support groups which have minimal funding ensured that there was always

an emergency food parcel available. There's definitely been more interest, understanding and awareness about some of the other great services that exist alongside the more visible ones.

Going forward we'll be moving more of our meetings and services online which hopefully will attract younger families who aren't always able to make face-to-face meeting because of work commitments. Through consultation exercises on social media and the internet, there's a lot of work going on to finding out what works for our residents and how we might do it better.

In terms of digital inclusion, we've also been getting requests from residents for tablets and mobile phones, some of which we've been able to fund. At a supported living scheme for young people in Wrexham we donated a couple of devices, so residents were able to keep in touch with family and friends, and similarly at an extra care facility in Anglesey.

We'll be continuing to look after the wellbeing of our residents better and intervening as early as we can. Working towards a policy of no evictions is a big part of that. ClwydAlyn is taking an early intervention approach, aiming to ensure our residents have all the support they need, in order to successfully sustain their tenancies



The View From: Govan HA

Rory Brown, Community Inclusion Assistant, and
Ryan Davidson, Community Inclusion Officer

29 July 2020

We started contacting tenants the week before lockdown. There was about four or five staff who had been sent to work from home and they were calling tenants to get a grasp on who required more help and what their support needs might be.

There were people who were self-isolating because they had symptoms or because of their age and their circumstances, and then folk who couldn't get out to access the pharmacy or doctor. We tried to very quickly gather information to develop a wrap-around service. We had a lot of support staff on the front-line delivering food, doing shop runs and gathering prescriptions.

We linked in with other third-sector organisations to see what their capacity was and what support they could offer. A lot of them were in a similar position – they were trying to gather information as they went.

We linked in with two other organisations to deliver a food service: a hot food van run by the Salvation Army and a school packed lunch programme delivered by another of our partner organisations. Then we linked in with other organisations as and when they were able to offer support. Part of that was us looking at the facilities that we had that were available to offer to other organisations. For example, Govan Help had started their own food response but had nowhere to run it from, so we offered them our hub space.

We've got 1,600 people in our social rented properties, and about 650-700 factored properties which are still service users. We also have regular service users who access our community hub and community programmes. There were at least 120 people getting support for food via deliveries; the food van was catering for upwards of 110-120 people a day.

That doesn't include (GYIP) Govan Youth Information Project who were part of that. They were handing out 130-150 packed lunches per day and have delivered 1,000 activity packs during lockdown.

When we started doing food provision, we fitted the truck with wifi so that when people came and got food from the truck they could also access free wifi.

After week five or six, Well Fed Scotland, a food charity, approached us to say they were aware of the work we were doing, our rapid response, and how central we were to the approach in Govan. They'd been funded to deliver pre-cooked meals and asked if they could partner with us to deliver 150 pre-cooked meals per day through the delivery vans.

It was all hands-on deck.

Once we realised that our physical contact with tenants and regular service users would have to be limited, we began looking at alternative methods for contacting and engaging with them, such as using the digital platforms, and making iPads and tablets and wifi and data more accessible. Cheap mobile phones were an instant win as tenants didn't have to be taught how to use the device and were a quicker way of keeping in contact: tenants could contact us, as well as social workers and support workers.

We accessed some emergency funds through the Big Lottery and Foundation Scotland that was split between the food provision service, the digital inclusion service, activity packs and PPE for volunteers and people who were using their cars and covering their expenses.

Round the same time as we started doing the food provision, a decision was made to close our two community centres – a community hub and digital hub. Those two spaces meet two very obvious needs – around food provision and connectivity. People come in to get fed but then there was provision around wifi and computers.

When we started doing food provision, we fitted the truck with wifi so that when people came and got food from the truck they could also access free wifi. With all the public spaces like libraries and fast food restaurants closing, wifi had become harder to access. The food truck did a route around Govan every day and people knew that if they were in that area they could get free wifi.

We had been operating our digital lending library for three years. Through the library, people were able to access IT classes and then take a device away for a week, learn on it and come back and use it again. All those devices were in-house when lockdown happened, so we quite quickly deployed all those devices to tenants that we needed to be in regular contact with, or third sector partners who didn't have devices to work and operate on.

We were then approached by SCVO to pilot the Connecting Scotland fund that they announced which was £9 million. They wanted to see how that could work quite rapidly. The Scottish government asked us and the Glasgow Disability Alliance to pilot something, using 15 devices with a lump sum of data on each of them that we had to give to tenants who were totally offline. Some staff underwent digital champion training so they could tutor people through using those devices.

Many of these organisations were in contact with people who had dropped out of a service because they couldn't afford connectivity or were trying to reach service users with no internet.

The scheme worked really well. The feedback from it was that having a lump sum of data on a SIM card wasn't the most economic approach. For example, we had one gentleman in his 70s who discovered YouTube for the first time and flew through his data in the first three days and then phoned us up wanting another top up.

We were doing that for four weeks and topping them up, £20 every four days. It was interesting, particularly in his case because he was a tenant we hadn't known before the welfare checks. He was shielding. He had a health condition. The more we spoke to him over phone, we realised he had nothing in the house,

he had no TV, he had no access to information. We are keen to get a house visit to him and see how we could support him after the lockdown. It was quite a nice opportunity meet some of our harder to reach, more invisible tenants.

When the supporting communities fund came through from the Scottish government, we were asked how we could get devices into the hands of people who most needed them. It made more sense to us to use an intermediary model where we would procure the devices, get them prepped and set up and then give them to ten organisations locally who had been meeting the needs of local people during lockdown. Many of these organisations were in contact with people who had dropped out of a service because they couldn't afford connectivity or were trying to reach service users with no internet.

The first round involved us deploying 120 tablets to ten organisations locally. Instead of giving them a lump sum of data, we moved to giving them unlimited data. Each device has two months of unlimited data covered from the fund. At the end of the two months, the pay-as-you-go element sits with the organisation, as do the devices. For us, there was a bit of a legacy to this. It wasn't just about giving people devices, it was about having devices as a community resource locally and growing that element as well as its legacy.

There was also a lot of chat about how organisations could adapt their approach

to community work post-Covid taking some of the learning we've experienced during this period and acting on that.

One of them, Creative Steps Programme, has got 120 users with health conditions. Part of their programme is about getting them out of the house and engaged with the community in order to increase their confidence and their health outcomes.

The last five weeks has been about trying to reduce those barriers to connectivity and data. Our aspiration has been to create a digital culture in Govan, where people are able to get and access learning. The lending library has been part of this.

Jerry had put 120 people into work last year, which works out as roughly £1million in salaries and new income in the area, but 80% of those people have now lost their jobs and incomes.

We've also developed an amazing partnership with Glasgow Clyde College. Before the lockdown they had a service called Gift Tech, which was part of our learning programme where the college bought new machines after their old ones were decommissioned and scrapped. For the same amount of money, the college found that they could up-cycle them and distribute them to people in need.

When lockdown happened, we contacted GiftTech and asked them if they were still operating, because many of our residents need devices. But they didn't have an infrastructure or distribution point in mind as the college had closed during lockdown. So we acted as the distribution point, using the food network to distribute devices so people could collect food on a particular day and collect a PC. Over the past five weeks, 35 PCs have been distributed.

At the start of the Connecting Scotland pilot we asked them who they were thinking about to receive the devices: they said they preferred a scatter shot approach, that we would try and engage with different sorts of tenants. So we allocated some to our older residents, some to refugees and asylum seekers, and some to people who'd just lost their job and then linked them in with Jerry who is their local job match coordinator. He has started these conversations about getting CVs up to date, practising telephone interviews or Skype interviews.

Jerry had put 120 people into work last year, which works out as roughly £1million in salaries and new income in the area, but 80% of those people have now lost their jobs and incomes. So we've been trying to get ahead in tackling that issue again.

Before lockdown we offered a lot of services in the community: a free breakfast every morning, free community meals

every week, a men's group and a women's group. We've been concerned about how we deal with issues of people not attending them – every time the regular service users access these services it's not just for food but for the social aspect, so they can keep up a routine to stop themselves from using drugs and alcohol.

Since lockdown, a lot of these service users have supported each other in the absence of staff and services being there, which has been hugely positive.

We're lucky that we've got a view of what's happening on the street and have been able to stay connected to our residents. It's allowed us to feel a lot more plugged in than we would do otherwise.

One of our regular service users called Stephen is a recovering drug user and also agoraphobic. He was one of the guys we've been concerned about. When we were in Govan recently, we popped into Greggs to get lunch and Stephen was standing outside and he had his false teeth in for the first time in a long time. He had lost a lot of weight previously, but he seemed to have put the weight back on.

We had a chat with him and said how well he was looking considering, and he said all the guys and girls have been great, we've all looked after each other, everybody has rallied round. All bar one of the regular

users seems to be avoiding any kind of substance misuse. They are looking after each other and doing food runs.

They're hanging out at each other's places, which isn't great in terms of the social distancing, but it's probably better that they've got a bit of support than using drugs and getting involved in other things that are a higher risk.

There has been a lot of people who we've walked past in the street and we're thinking, they're looking great now, or they're looking so much better now because of some of this behaviour.

We're lucky that we've got a view of what's happening on the street and have been able to stay connected to our residents. It's allowed us to feel a lot more plugged in than we would do otherwise.

Govan has been highlighted in so many fronts in terms of its Covid-19 response. It's been highlighted in the media and at a political level as well. It's been great to see how quickly it has responded. The organisation has found its areas of expertise and have just got on with finding solutions to the problems that were coming up.

The impact we've made

March-July 2020

Data for March-July comes from 82 social housing organisations, with a combined stock of 1,193,238 homes (41% of UK total)



719,411

Total welfare calls made

8,882

Mean number of welfare calls made per reporting org [n=81]



187,855

Vulnerable residents identified

2,573

Mean number of vulnerable residents per reporting org [n=73]

6.4

There is one vulnerable resident per 6.4 homes



27%

Percentage of contacted residents asking for support



139,557

Number of residents receiving advice and guidance

1,789

Mean number of residents receiving advice & guidance per reporting org [n=78]

8.6

One resident receiving advice and guidance per 8.6 homes



107,366

Food interventions

1,413

Mean number of food interventions per reporting org [n=76]

11.1

There is one food intervention per 11.1 homes



40%

Percentage of households receiving more than one food intervention



£1,150,303

Direct financial support to residents

£17,426

Mean direct financial support per reporting org [n=66]



38,956

Residents identified at risk of arrears

683

Mean number of residents at risk of arrears per reporting org [n=57]

30.6

One resident at risk of arrears per 30.6 homes



4,446

Staff who were redeployed to community facing roles

60

Mean number of staff redeployed per reporting org [n=58]

15.3%

Redeployed staff as a % of total staff of reporting organisations



The View From: Gateway Housing

Shahanara Akhtar, Employment and Training

11 August 2020

My role is the employment and training co-ordinator, but during lockdown I've taken on additional roles in health and wellbeing and domestic violence support.

When we went into lockdown, it was older residents who we reached out to first. A project group of 10 people, which I was part of, were given 300 calls to make in the first week of lockdown to residents aged 60 and over, and other residents who we had been notified were vulnerable.

Within that week we had to establish what call-back service the residents wanted and gave them two options. The first was that they could be given an 'OKEachDay' phone, provided by an external company, which included an alert system where the OKEachDay team would phone the resident to check if they were ok. The second was that residents could receive a call on certain days, at their convenience, from a Gateway member of staff.

The majority of residents opted to be called back by one of the Gateway staff team. We're about 20 weeks in now and

these welfare calls have been going really well. The staff members making the calls and the residents both look forward to chatting. For some, it's their only means of social contact. It's been really nice to get to know residents more personally.

I've even sent some residents cards to let them know that we care. The welfare calls have been really valuable in combatting loneliness and isolation, especially amongst older residents, and we've had great feedback.

We've also been working in partnership with other organisations in housing, who have helped a lot of people to find support, whether that's getting medication dropped off to them or food parcels delivered. Even if we can't physically do it ourselves, we've been getting that help and support to them.

With our younger residents and families, teams from Gateway have sent family packs home for children, including colouring books and pencils. We've also been helping them with IT support, and finding that many

family homes lack technology, despite the fact that parents have been working from home and children have needed to be home-schooled.

During lockdown we've offered additional financial advice for people who've been furloughed. We've seen a surge in the numbers of people going onto Universal Credit, many for the first time. We've been looking at ways that we can reduce that stress in people's homes – we know that rent and bills at this time have become very difficult for some people – so it's finding ways of managing that with them.

We've become more tuned in to what residents need at this time. We recognise that there's more need for mental health and wellbeing support especially. It's not just the elderly and vulnerable who are being impacted; we've seen poor mental health affect every age group at some stage.

In Tower Hamlets we have some of the highest levels of poverty in the country, so the lockdown and virus has had a disproportionate impact on families here. Some have been unable to buy food, others have kids at home who have needed home schooling. And not everyone has been safe in their home either.

Demand for domestic violence services increased really quickly after lockdown, and many victims were fearful of leaving their homes because of the virus. Part of my job was to inform those residents that they still had the right to leave their homes, as well as reassuring them that there are still safety measures out there such as refuges and financial and legal support.

Different parts of our organisation have also become better at communicating in order to support residents. For example, when I'm calling residents as part of welfare calls and they say they have a repair that needs fixed, I will refer them to the repairs team.

While everyone across the organisation plays a role in community investment in some way, my colleagues now see what a range of areas community investment covers, whether that's employment and training, health and wellbeing, domestic violence, welfare calls.

When I started working from home it was a strange adjustment. Because I work in community investment, I felt like I needed to be out in the community, and how could I do that from home?

But actually, because of the increased communication we've had with our residents, I know many residents better than I did.

The welfare calls in particular have let us build relationships that weren't there before lockdown – I've even said to some residents that we should have a cup of tea when this is all over. The appreciation between our staff and residents has really grown over this period.

In terms of next steps, we would like to do more intergenerational work, bringing older residents and families and children together. And we'll be continuing to have conversations about how to eventually go back to meeting people face-to-face, safely and where it can't be done online.



The View From: **North Star**

Peter Locke, Head of Communities

20 August 2020

At North Star our stock runs mainly across the Tees Valley and Teesdale in the south west of County Durham, although we also have stock in North Yorkshire, the Tyneside area, some patches in Sunderland, and in the north of county Durham.

Since we're spread over a wider geographic area we work with a range of different partners. This means there are also different challenges.

HACT's Community Insight tool shows that deprivation scores in the Teesside area

are high, and Middlesbrough faces some of the most significant struggles with child poverty. This context was important to bear in mind as lockdown took effect.

Initially we started by carrying out welfare calls, using metrics to work out who would be most vulnerable, such as people with long term mental health issues and the elderly. We made welfare calls to around 60% of our stock who we had identified as a priority, just to check in and reassure them that we were there to offer our support.

During this period, we found that, while we could provide some support to tenants, there was a huge amount of mobilisation within the communities themselves.

As well as my team, the housing team and the surveyors and maintenance teams were also involved in making those calls to our most vulnerable customers. People felt isolated, and for the many who didn't have friends and family close at hand to help them with shopping, picking up a prescription, or other chores, we worked with partners to source the help or we stepped in ourselves.

We've got a fairly small staff team so immediately we also took the decision to look at our capacity within the organisation. In the end 20 people offered to take on resident support work voluntarily. There

were also people going out to deliver meals as part of our work with AgeUK in Darlington. I've been going out to deliver prescriptions, and I still do that to this day.

During this period, we found that, while we could provide some support to tenants, there was a huge amount of mobilisation within the communities themselves.

Quite early on, an online Covid-19 support database emerged of organisations in local communities that were responding to the crisis. Because of our shared interest in helping vulnerable people in our communities, we contacted the local organisations on that database about how we could support them and refer into them. This partnership working was about ensuring enough provision for people should there be a massive influx of need.

The first thing we did was to make sure that we had coverage across that whole geography of where our stock is located. If we couldn't physically help out a resident, we made sure that there was an organisation we could put them in touch to deliver the appropriate care.

The second step was to make contact with all the partners that we had been working with, such as Greggs Foundation. They're a great example of a corporate partner who really shone during the crisis. We knew in our communities that there were quite a few parents who wouldn't be receiving free school meals; Greggs stepped up to make sure that these children didn't go hungry by delivering meals to them.

To other partner organisations we said: if you've got existing funding with us then let's look at how we can repurpose that to greatest effect during the pandemic.

The Community Hub in Thornaby, which is right in the heart of one of the areas with high deprivation levels, was an example of this. We had to close it down but one organisation, a food charity, who we previously funded to run cooking classes for elderly people, started delivering the meals they had available to people instead.

That slowly became a food bank type model and developed into a partnership with the council and other voluntary agencies delivering support across Stockton-on-Tees.

We also did another project in Teesdale with UTASS, an agricultural support service, to keep local post offices in rural areas running during Covid-19. UTASS were doing a lot of the prescription and food delivery in those areas, but they needed the post office to stay open so that people could access benefits and pensions. So, we provided the funding for that and waived any application for the money that we donated to them.

UTASS work across large, sparsely populated areas with little villages sporadically spread out, which can feel

quite isolated. They've always struggled to get food deliveries up there. An organisation like that who understands those issues can respond really well.

We've supported other things such as providing entertainment for kids at home sharing activities for parents struggling with home schooling on Facebook. However, we quickly realised that the online stuff only reaches a certain audience and that we should also be doing stuff in the real world. So, we worked with an organisation who put together boredom buster packs and craft things around Easter time.

Now, as we move out of lockdown, we're seeing a relaxation of demand on certain services. Although we're still continuing to fund a couple of projects in Thornaby, particularly where we've got the hub, and over in Teesdale as well, providing that ad hoc support for people who need it.

We're also looking at how we get our community centre back open so that when it's safe people can come back together and get that contact that they've been missing during this period of time. We're also thinking about how we capture the experience of lockdown, so we're asking our communities what's been good about this period of time as we move into the so-called new normal.

A new roadmap can measure the value of social housing

Andrew van Doorn, Chief Executive, HACT

10 September 2020

Social value is an intrinsic part of our sector's DNA. It is central to our collective social purpose. Today, I'm proud to announce that HACT is launching a roadmap for the future of social value in social housing.

The roadmap is based on the findings of our UK Social Value in Housing Taskforce, comprised of representatives from 23 organisations, including social housing organisations, national membership bodies, developers, contractors and the Regulator of Social Housing.

HACT has been pioneering social value in social housing since 2012.

As the charity of the sector, we were originally approached by a number of social housing organisations who wanted a robust way to measure the social value of their work.

In response, HACT and Simetrica-Jacobs, together with over 50 social housing organisations, created and launched the UK Social Value Bank based on the well-being approach. This groundbreaking approach is based on the most robust evidence

available, drawing on insights from large-scale surveys and, critically, being compliant with the HM Treasury Green Book.

The UK Social Value Bank pioneered a new way to measure social value. It was developed by the housing sector for the housing sector. It was designed to describe our social purpose.

Across the sector, social housing organisations are using social value information in a way that they have never done before. It has moved beyond retrospective reporting and into business decision-making

Since its launch in 2014, the UK Social Value Bank and the value calculator has been downloaded over 18,000 times. We have also developed three further social value calculators to help organisations measure their impact around mental health, community-led housing and community asset transfers. All four calculators are free for social housing organisations to use.

So much has changed since we first came together as a sector to find a better way to measure our social value. Now, across the sector, social housing organisations are using social value information in a way that they have never done before. It has moved beyond retrospective reporting and into business decision-making.

We have social value advisors driving forward the agenda in procurement and business intelligence. Social value is used to demonstrate the impact of our work and how we understand value for money.

It is being embedded into investment appraisals and used to forecast how much we can achieve for our people and our communities. It marks us out to our lenders, helping them meet their environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives and requirements.

HACT's roadmap

While much has changed, the sector can do even more. Our approach and the tools we use also need to evolve. As a sector, though, there is no value in social value unless we work together.

As a sector, we can report our financial performance because we use the same accounting principles. If we want to report our social value performance, whether individually and collectively, we have to measure it using the same methodology.

The challenge we face is to ensure that how we understand and measure social value is fit for the business of social housing now and in the future.

This is why we launched the UK Social Value in Housing Taskforce in January 2020. It had three aims:

- To review the current social value landscape;
- To understand perceptions of the impact to date of the UK Social Value Bank;
- To identify key areas for development and research, informing next steps for social value in the social housing sector.

The taskforce agreed that our sector needs to work collaboratively to standardise our approaches so that social value information is better understood and respected, is available to measure performance, and can be used to support and enhance our regulatory returns.

Our roadmap will enable the social housing sector to use social value information to improve services, enhance decision-making and increase the impact we make.

It asked HACT to develop a roadmap that included an expanded UK Social Value Bank, along with resources and tools that could be used by any project in any social housing organisation looking to improve, demonstrate and maximise its social, economic and environmental outcomes.

The roadmap we are launching today is the first step in that process.

It consists of three stages:

- Stage 1: expanding the UK Social Value Bank with a broader set of well-being values, a new set of economic values and a new set of environmental values. In bringing together these different methodologies, we will ensure they are coherent, robust and avoid double counting, so that social housing organisations can apply social value metrics across their business with confidence.
- Stage 2: developing tools to use the UK Social Value Bank. These will enable social housing organisations to apply social value metrics across their business, whether in asset management and investment, ESG reporting, or regulation and value for money.
- Stage 3: applying the UK Social Value Bank to the business of social housing. In evolving our approach to social value, we will develop a range

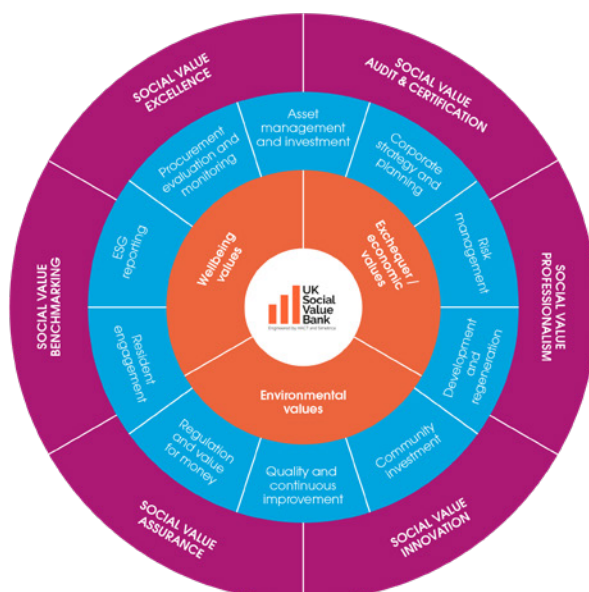
of services for social housing organisations, including social value assurance, social value audit and certification, social value benchmarking and social value innovation.

The social housing sector should be proud. We have always been at the forefront of generating and improving the measurement of social value.

Our roadmap will enable the social housing sector to use social value information to improve services, enhance decision-making and increase the impact we make.

Our roadmap is ambitious. Our roadmap is pioneering. Our roadmap will enable the social housing sector to use social value to improve services, enhance decision-making and influence stakeholders.

Together, we can do more.



Together, we can do more

A roadmap for the future of social value in social housing

- Stage 1: Expanding the UK Social Value Bank
- Stage 2: Developing tools to use the UK Social Value Bank
- Stage 3: Applying the UK Social Value Bank to the business of social housing

The impact we've made

March-September 2020

Data for March-September comes from 83 social housing organisations, with a combined stock of 1,222,015 homes (42% of UK total)



897,203

Total welfare calls made

10,941

Mean number of welfare calls made per reporting org [n=82]



189,237

Vulnerable residents identified

2,523

Mean number of vulnerable residents per reporting org [n=75]

6.5

There is one vulnerable resident per 6.5 homes



29%

Percentage of contacted residents asking for support



187,160

Number of residents receiving advice and guidance

2,340

Mean number of residents receiving advice & guidance per reporting org [n=80]

6.5

One resident receiving advice and guidance per 6.5 homes



137,744

Food interventions

1,727

Mean number of food interventions per reporting org [n=78]

9.1

There is one food intervention per 9.1 homes



39%

Percentage of households receiving more than one food intervention



£1,658,037

Direct financial support to residents

£24,030

Mean direct financial support per reporting org [n=69]



41,267

Residents identified at risk of arrears

724

Mean number of residents at risk of arrears per reporting org [n=57]

29.6

One resident at risk of arrears per 29.6 homes



4,474

Staff who were redeployed to community facing roles

59

Mean number of staff redeployed per reporting org [n=76]

14.4%

Redeployed staff as a % of total staff of reporting organisations



The View From: **L&Q**

Megan Cannons, Evaluation and Impact Manager

11 September 2020

One of the things that struck me was how quickly we adapted, both as a department and as an organisation, but also our partner organisations as well. And the different ways we've all adapted. We have got a lot of things done really quickly.

One of our largest programmes is called Learning to Succeed which HACT is evaluating. It's a schools partnership programme involving 30 schools in 12 boroughs across London that's focused on curriculum classes as well as careers advice and guidance. Its aim is to address

the skills shortage by getting young people to see the construction industry as a real career opportunity and highlight how the skills you learn in school can be applied in the construction industry.

Knowing that somebody cares when you're living alone and don't have many people around you, it's really helped some of our more isolated residents.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, we were about half-way through the three-year programme. When lockdown was being implemented, it was the end of the spring term and schools were beginning to close and our sessions beginning to end.

Construction Youth Trust (CYT), our delivery partner, started talks with schools about how we could adapt sessions for the summer term. CYT found that schools had enjoyed being part of the programme and were keen to continue to participate.

By April when schools started to reopen online, we already had ten schools signed up for the learning programme online. As well as keeping in touch with the schools that hadn't yet signed up, CYT also started to create online versions of their sessions. We considered a lot of different things

– how we make the sessions interactive, what's the right level of interaction, what are the safeguarding issues moving online, how do we make it available at times to suit young people, lots of considerations – and decided to do the sessions live to more than one school to maximise accessibility of it. This way we could reach more young people and make it all available afterwards.

When it comes to safeguarding, we've ensured that young people can ask questions and interact with staff leading the sessions but can't speak to or see each other. It means that we've got consistent levels of interaction with young people.

We encouraged organisations that tackle domestic violence to apply, as well as smaller, locally focussed charities and volunteer groups that may not have been eligible previously.

We also realised the importance early on of making sure that funding was going to the organisations that could help the people most affected by the pandemic. We worked quickly to repurpose our Place Makers Fund, which provides grants to organisations that support the communities our residents live in.

We changed the application criteria so that initiatives that support the over-70s and other vulnerable people took priority, as well as food banks and projects that improve social welfare and health and wellbeing. We encouraged organisations that tackle domestic violence to apply, as well as smaller, locally focussed charities and volunteer groups that may not have been eligible previously.

So far, we've allocated around three quarters of the £650,000 that we committed to helping people during this time.

We've managed to move our employment brokering sessions online so larger employers where can meet residents and start having conversations about opportunities.

Another big area of our work is our employment support programme. We have an in-house team of employment officers who work with tenants to get them back into work or support them into better work. pre-Covid, it was done face-to-face, with residents coming into offices. But when our offices closed, and we couldn't offer any more face-to-face appointments, we immediately looked into how we could move employment support online.

We've developed a series of employment webinars for residents focused on employability. They are holistic and aim to rebuild confidence, after lockdown. We've had a lot of positive responses from residents when we initially trialled them. Now we've launched another series of webinars for residents based around stepping out of lockdown into success.

We've also developed e-recruitment programmes. Part of the employment support team's role is to broker employment opportunities between larger employers and residents, with the aim of breaking down barriers around being able to apply for jobs. We've managed to move this online with e-recruitment sessions with larger employers where they can meet residents and start having conversations about opportunities.

Knowing that somebody cares when you're living alone and don't have many people around you, it's really helped some of our more isolated residents.

Moving activities online means we're now looking at how we can improve our digital offer. While we're not there yet, we're putting things in place to make sure that in the longer-term it's part of our business

as usual offer. We've a way to go but are progressing this at speed, and it's one of our main focuses when thinking about the new normal.

As well as adapting our employment offer to go digital, some of our employment team helped out with our welfare calls, triaging and offering an ad hoc befriending service for residents. This was very well received. Initially residents were surprised that they were getting calls from their landlord. Knowing that somebody cares when you're living alone and don't have many people around you, it's really helped some of our more isolated residents.

When lockdown hit, we had to close all our community centres, apart from one that was already operating as a food bank.

Now we're looking at this as part of the conversations we're having around mental health, to see whether this is something we can do in the longer term.

We're also looking at our community centres: when lockdown hit, we had to close them all, apart from one that was already operating as a food bank. We worked with another provider to use another centre as a food bank, and also started delivering food.

We were also approached by Southwark Council, who approached us after HACT recommended that they talk to us about using one of our community centres as a food bank.

Now we're looking at the medium to longer-term to see how we can continue making an impact with our work and support the recovery and reset of our communities.

A lot of our staff are volunteering in food banks and we're hearing that people who are using them now have never used a food bank before. They tend to be people who were in work a week ago but have now got nothing.

The food bank, changing the way our funding is distributed, the triaging, the move towards digital – they are all things that we've been able to do quickly and effectively.

Now we're looking at the medium to longer-term to see how we can continue making an impact with our work and support the recovery and reset of our communities.

We're starting to see the wider impact of the pandemic. It means that we'll need to establish new offers for different residents to those who we usually support.

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING PLACES

*Andrew van Doorn, Chief Executive, HACT
& Rachael Orr, Director, PlaceShapers*

18 September 2020

The challenges we have all faced over the past few months have been without parallel. At the same time, the responses we've witnessed – whether through mutual aid groups, street WhatsApp groups, or local foodbanks – have highlighted the very best in people and local communities.

Similarly, housing associations, and their staff, have responded with speed, humanity and skill: between March and June, they made over 600,000 welfare calls and identified over 180,000 vulnerable residents who have been supported with appropriate services.

In many ways, though, the hard work starts now.

No one really knows how challenging the coming months and years will be – but we do know that there were already too many people struggling to stay afloat before the pandemic began. And this riding tide of poverty is likely to affect thousands more people, the majority of whom will live in our communities.

What role can, and should, social housing organisations play in the recovery and reset of place, not only economically, but also socially? This is the broad question that PlaceShapers and HACT set out to find some answers to with a research project we launched in April.

Since then, we've spoken to numerous CEOs, Chairs of boards and frontline staff about how they've responded, what they've learnt from those responses, and what this means for the future of their work.

Six key themes have emerged from this work, all of which are interconnected, and all of which speak to the overarching theme of the role that social housing organisations play as community anchors.

First, the role of housing associations in place has become much more dynamic and hyper-local. We have become encouraged to view place through the eyes of individuals and their families. One question going forward is how far will this hyper-level focus become part of the existing focus on place? What will this mean for the delivery of services? How can we create new, vibrant hyper-local models that are fit for future purpose?

The second area is the challenges facing housing associations working across multiple localities and, in particular, across rural ones. Over the past few months, residents in rural areas have faced increasing inequalities around access to services, raising the question of how and who social housing organisations need to partner with to ensure isolated communities don't become even more isolated.



The third area is about greater partnership working, which has flourished during the past few months. Many place-based organisations have built on existing relationships, while others have had to create new relationships from scratch. Developing, strengthening and maintaining these partnerships and the new sense of trust that has been created will be critical in the future.

The fourth area is around agile working and governance. Just as staff have had to adapt to more agile ways of working, so too have boards. Board meetings have become more agile, thematic and regular. Nurturing and building the requisite skillsets for Board members to be part of this new agile approach to governance will be critical.

The fifth theme is around the shift towards the decentralisation of staff and services. Many Chief Executives told us that they anticipate a move towards a more decentralised model, as the viability and desirability of agile working and a closer presence within communities changes.

The final theme is around resident engagement. Over the last few months, social housing organisations have engaged directly with their residents on an unprecedented scale. The appreciation many residents have of our work and their trust in us has changed, mainly for the better. How do we embed this engagement across

organisations, building on this trust as we settle back into our usual way of working?

Moving forward, we need to be bold, harnessing and building on the appetite for collaboration across housing. We need to ensure housing is fit for the future. We need to adopt a new approach to Value for Money. And we need to enable social housing organisations to realise their role as community anchors.

Over the past six months, we have experienced the resilience of people at a time of greatest challenges. Yet we need to be able to sustain and build on this resilience. As our residents and communities begin to experience increasing economic and social pressures, so this resilience is going to be tested.

As asset-based organisations, we are in a unique position. We work in place for the long-term. We have the capacity to affect the recovery and reset of communities across the UK. There is much that we have already done to assist this recovery. And there is much we need to do in the future.

There are significant risks ahead of us that we will need to navigate. By working in collaboration, by evaluating and learning from our experience, by being bold in our choices, we will be able to accelerate change, maximise our resources and achieve greater impact as place-based organisations.

TOGETHER, WE CAN

Robert Sugden, Head of Communities, HACT

28 September 2020

One of the recurring themes we've heard about over the past six months has been how partnership working has flourished within communities. Whether it's individuals getting together in mutual aid groups or health officials working in partnership with housing and local government staff, partnerships have come to the fore.

Many place-based social housing organisations have built on existing relationships, while others have had to create new relationships from scratch.

I remember talking with colleagues from whg towards the end of March about their experience in Walsall. They were able to build on a pre-existing relationship they had with Walsall Council to quickly support their local community hubs. The speed of their response was impressive and highlighted the importance of partnership working at a local level.

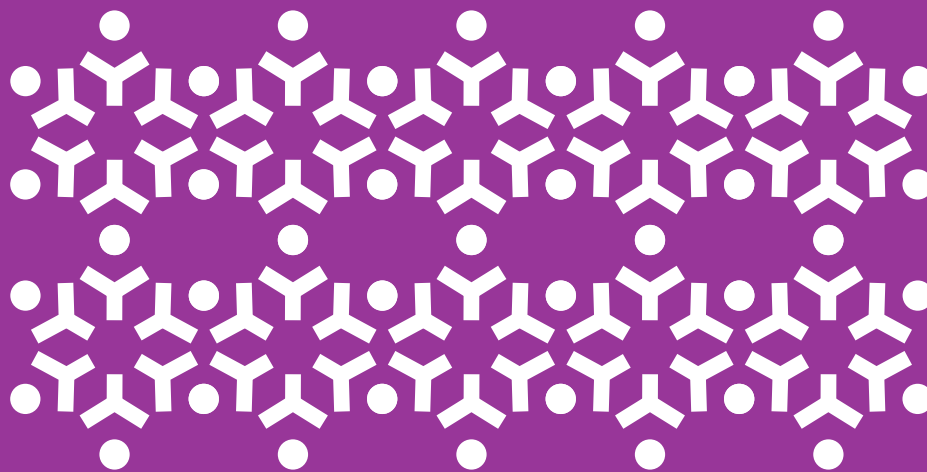
It's not just at a local level, however, that partnership working has thrived over the last six months. When we set up the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment in 2018, we wanted to provide the social housing sector with a UK-wide platform for championing and celebrating the importance and impact of community investment. The Centre is a network of organisations, professionals and individuals all working together

to deliver impact in communities where social landlords operate.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have directed considerable resource into creating and facilitating more spaces for practitioners to come together and share practice and approaches in response to the crisis. Prior to Covid-19, we had organised quarterly regional network meetings. Since March, these have been taking place on a weekly or biweekly basis.

We've also hosted a weekly meeting for community investment directors since the start of the crisis. Initially, these hour-long sessions were a space for colleagues to provide short updates about what they'd been doing over the previous week, sharing ideas and strategies about how to cope with the huge increase in demand on their services.

As the months have progressed, so the sessions have evolved into more thematic discussions. One, for example, looked at how social housing organisations could respond to increased demand for mental health services. HACT had just completed an evaluation of Orbit's Breathing Space project so we were able to use insights from that evaluation, as well as have direct input from colleagues at Orbit about their experience of running their Breathing Space project.



After inviting Orbit and their partners to speak at a number of our regional network meetings, we then hosted a webinar devoted to mental health issues which was attended by colleagues from over 60 social housing organisations across the UK. From this session, a collaborative project looking at how best to address the growing need for mental health support was established and was able to use its collective strength to procure reduced rates from a leading online mental health service provider.

Similar thematic discussions have also resulted in collaborative projects around young people, employment and Black Lives Matter. We've also established a network of organisations through whom we are distributing fuel vouchers to those residents who are most at risk of disconnection.

Then on 20 July, we were told about a DCMS-backed scheme inviting consortium bids for a government match funding programme. Within less than two weeks, we had convened and organised a partnership of 39 social housing organisations with over 1.1 million homes between them. Our final bid to the DCMS scheme consisted of over £6.25 million in funds that social housing organisations had earmarked as grants funding for local community groups and charities.

While we were unsuccessful with the bid, the value of collaboration is evident. Through collaboration more people can be reached, efficiencies in delivery are achieved, greater social impact is delivered and ultimately, savings to the public purse will emerge. However, this level of collaboration does not happen without significant work behind the scenes by organisations like ours.

With government needing a more collaborative approach to deliver support from civil society, it is vital that funding and policy responses do not overlook the importance of investment in infrastructure and enabling structures. The need for more funding and policy to support social infrastructure was noted in the Kruger report that was released on 24 September.

There will, no doubt, be more opportunities for collaboration in the future. We will use them to help unlock the potential of social landlords as key civil society partners to drive forward social and economic recovery in communities across the country.

Together, we can do more.



BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2020

NEWS RELEASE

25 June 2020

Working through the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment, a collective of organisations (see opposite page) came together to release this statement about Black History Month:

Since 1987, Black History Month has been an important annual celebration of the achievements of people of African and Caribbean heritage in the UK. In light of recent events, the need to celebrate and recognise the importance of Black History Month is more necessary than ever. The death of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter movement has refocused attention on the everyday realities faced by Black people in the UK.

As social housing organisations we have come together to form a cross-sector working group, to mark this year's Black History Month because these are significant issues that different institutions and sectors need to address. We want to take Black History Month 2020 as a moment to celebrate and recognise Black history in the UK, and a moment to start building for bigger long-lasting action on racial inequality.

Together, as a group, we have had difficult, but necessary, conversations about the role race plays within society and within our organisations. Together, we don't have all the answers, but we are not afraid to ask the questions.

We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected black people, as well as those from Asian and other minority ethnic communities.

We know that this is, in some part, due to widespread social and economic inequality.

We know that more should be done by those with the power to do so, including social housing organisations.

Black History Month provides an opportunity for us to collectively recognise and appreciate the achievements of



Black British people, of their heritage and culture, of their historical role within British communities across the UK. Simultaneously, Black History Month gives us the chance to provide context to present-day issues, such as the impact that colonialism and slavery has had on the lives of Black people.

There are many reasons to write this statement. As a working group of housing associations, supported by HACT and The Centre for Excellence in Community Investment, we want to state our commitment to tackling these issues, celebrate what we as a sector are already doing, and set out our collective commitment to doing more over the coming months.

We welcome a collaborative approach on these issues and are excited about the idea

of long-term collaborative action on racial inequality. We will be creating spaces and projects to discuss these issues and take forward this work and invite colleagues and organisations across the social housing sector to join us in this work.

Together, we are committed to raising awareness, celebrating and recognising the outstanding contributions that people of African and Caribbean descent have made within communities.

Together, we stand committed to providing opportunities for colleagues to learn about, and to tackle, racial inequality and social injustice.

Together, we will use our collective might to deliver change for the better – for our residents, our colleagues and our communities.

How the sector has been marking Black History Month

Robert Sugden, Head of Communities

21 October 2020

Never before has Black History Month felt more vital, or more important, than it does this year.

The events of the summer – from the death of George Floyd in the US and the Black Lives Matter movement, to the Covid-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities – have made the lived realities of, and continued discrimination against, many Black people in the UK impossible to ignore any longer.

Institutions and companies everywhere have responded by pledging to make real change. As social housing organisations rooted in diverse and vibrant communities, we have an important role to play, too – one that goes beyond simple words of support.

That's why to mark this year's Black History Month, HACT's Centre for Excellence in Community Investment formed a cross-sector working group, to keep these difficult but necessary conversations about the role race plays within society and our own organisations going.

As the working group's recently published statement about Black History Month outlines, there are significant issues that institutions and the wider sector still need to address, and we can do so only by coming together.

"Black Lives Matter and its fall-out around the world has raised the profile of Black History Month and highlighted it to a wider audience. Because people are now listening it's a great time to get Black history into our communities."

Members of the working group have spoken about the varied ways in which their organisations have been commemorating this year's Black History Month. There has been a significant expansion in the range of activities offered this year, both for residents and staff, despite the difficulties of navigating events in a socially distanced way.

Phoenix Community Housing, a resident-led association based in South East London, would

normally organise a big event called Diversity Day in its main office and community building, The Green Man.

This year, because of COVID-19, the association has moved Diversity Day and Black History Month online, where it will be hosting two workshops and a discussion panel. The first workshop is about how to become an inventor and highlights Black inventors throughout history, and the second is an African printed face mask class.

The panel discussion, which will be open to staff and residents, will ask the question: what is community?

Prior to the panel event, Phoenix will also be putting out lots of information to staff internally, such as questionnaires about Black history and why it's important, to incite debate and conversation.

Yvonne Phillip is community engagement officer at Phoenix Community Housing. She says: "Black Lives Matter and its fall-out around the world has raised the profile of Black History Month and highlighted it to a wider audience. Because people are now listening it's a great time to get Black history into our communities."

Yvonne has found the Black History Month working group particularly useful in this regard. "It's been really refreshing to see other Black faces around the table within the housing sector. I'm hoping that this working group continues and it's not just about Black History Month. We need to continue it in terms of minority groups within housing," she says.

Organisations such as Catalyst and Peabody are celebrating Black history and culture across the world and in the UK by hosting webinar events with prominent speakers. Peabody recently ran a well-attended webinar for staff featuring Cherron Inko-Tariah MBE, where she charted her journey as a senior Black professional in the UK.

Guest speaker Paul Anderson-Walsh delivered a thought-provoking session for Peabody earlier this month on the impact of structural inequality on well-being, and guest speaker Patrick Vernon OBE, who will spotlight civil rights leaders in the UK, will close Peabody's month of events.

At Catalyst, talks this month range from sharing personal histories and stories of speakers from different backgrounds and industries, to academic discussions on intersectionality, diversity, and Black history, poetry and spoken word sessions.

In a change from last year, Catalyst is also running confidential listening sessions aimed at finding out how it can better support its colleagues. Catalyst has also organised an online community project from the Unity Centre in Brent.

All of these sessions and events aim to encourage colleagues to dig deeper, look closer and think bigger. Yet as well as events tied to the month, Catalyst is using this year's Black History Month celebrations to encourage positive change across the organisation on equality and diversity.

It will review training to ensure that there are no issues with reinforcing stereotypes, develop a

learning library for colleagues to cover diversity and inclusion key topics, and launch a 'Colleague Working Group' and a 'Networks and Shadow Board' to increase diverse representation.

The team at Sovereign similarly recognises that Black history goes far beyond the month. This year it has launched a new employee network called the Caribbean African Asian Network (CAAN), for people who represent those ethnicities but also all minority groups and ethnicities.

On an internal Facebook page, it has been posting daily facts about famous Black people throughout history, providing education pieces to employees on topics such as intersectionality, and has changed its logo for October to reflect the colours of Black History Month.

Jerome Williams, equality, diversity and inclusion lead at Sovereign, says: "This year we have done more than ever before to mark Black History Month. In previous years Black History Month at Sovereign was always employee-led. Although employees are still key to what we have been doing, this year our involvement has been led from the very top.

"As an organisation we recognise the importance of race and ethnicity within our workplace and we're working hard to support the needs of our colleagues and to make our organisation more diverse and inclusive."

At Clarion, this year's Black History Month is also much bigger. Last year it had three events

across the whole month; this year it has three per week, for staff and members of Clarion's internal BAME network.

The line-up at these events features guest speakers from a range of backgrounds, such as a Black historian and African fashion designer, safe space Fridays, an employment webinar from Clarion's HR team that will share insights about the recruitment process, and a meditation session.

Clarion has also partnered with BAME Recruitment, which focuses on getting ethnic minorities into more senior leadership positions, as well as the Housing Diversity Network, which is running a racial awareness class for Clarion's BAME network and several webinar events throughout the month.

On top of this, Clarion has launched a campaign called 'stories of ancestry', which invites people to talk about where they were born, where they're from, and anything that makes them feel positive about their heritage. Although Clarion's BAME network is for staff internally, Clarion hopes to get the resident involvement and community investment teams involved off the back of the network's events.

Speaking about the increased focus that Black Lives Matter has brought to this month, Alozie Ohuonu, co-chair of Clarion's BAME network, says: "It's allowed resources to be freed up for things that the network have been asking for quite a long time. I hope that off the back of this it'll just continue."

THANK YOU

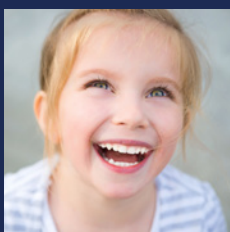
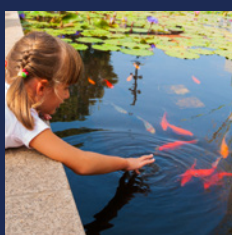
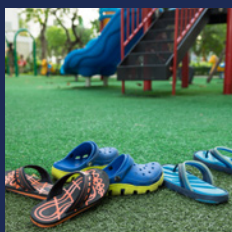
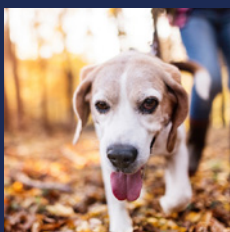
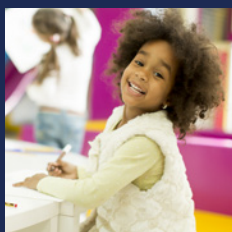
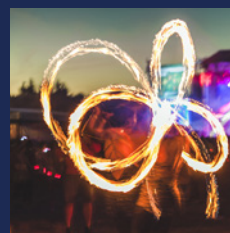
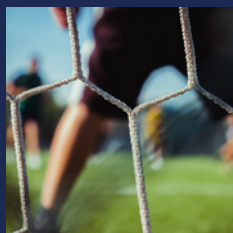
*To the following organisations who worked with the
Centre for Excellence in Community Investment in 2020.*

A2Dominion	CHS Group	Gloucester City Homes
Abri	Clanmil	Golding Homes
Acis	Clarion Futures	Great Places
Adra	Clarion Housing	Greenfields Community
Age UK	Coastline	Housing
Alliance Homes	Communities That Work	Grand Union Housing Group
Anchor Hanover	Community Gateway	Guinness
Apex	Community Housing Cymru	Habinteg Housing Association
Arcon	Community Matters	Hafod
Ark Housing	Connect Housing	Halton Housing
Ashton Pioneer Homes	Connexus	HCVS
Aspire	Connswater Homes	Healthy Homes
Aster	Cornwall Housing	Hexagon
Ateb Group	Cornwall Marine	Hillcrest Homes
B3 Living	Cotman	Home Group
Barnet Homes	Cottsway	Homes in Sedgemoor
Barrhead HA	Cross Keys Homes	Honeycomb
Bernicia	Crown Simmons	Housing Solutions
Bolton at Home	Curo	HQN
BPHA	Derventio Housing Trust	HTS Group
Broadacres Housing	Ebbsfleet District Council	Hyde Housing
Association	Edaroth	Hyperoptic
Broadland Housing Group	Efficiency North	Imani Housing
Bromford	emh group	In common living
Byker Community Trust	Engie	Inquilab Housing Association
Cache	Equity Housing Group	Irwell Valley Homes
Cadwyn	Estuary HA	Jigsaw Homes
Cartrefi Conwy	Family HA	Johnnie Johnson Housing
Castles & Coasts HA	First Choice Homes Oldham	Karbon Homes
Catalyst Housing	Flagship Group	Keep Moat
Centre for Ageing Better	ForHousing	Kirklees Neighbourhood
Centrepont	Forviva	Housing
Cheltenham Borough Homes	Foyer Federation	L&Q
Cherwell District Council	Futures Housing Group	LB Lambeth
Choice	Gentoo	LB Newham
CHP	Glen Housing	LB Waltham Forest

Leeds and Yorkshire HA	Octavia	Simetrica-Jacobs
Leeds Federated	One Housing	Six Town Housing
Lewisham Homes	One Manchester	Social Value UK
Lido Centre	Ongo	South East Consortium
Linc Cymru	Onward Homes	South Ulster Housing
Link	Optivo	South Yorkshire HA
Linstone	Orbit	Southern
Lintel Trust	Ore Valley	Southway Housing
LiveWest	Origin	Sovereign
Livin	PA Housing	Stockport Homes
Livv	Papworth Trust	Stonewater
Locality	Paradigm Housing	Supporting Communities
Longhurst	Peabody	The Good Economy
Magenta Living	Phoenix Community Housing	Thenue Housing
MHCLG	Places for People	Thrive
Mid-Wales HA	Placeshapers	Together Housing Group
Monmouthshire Housing	Plymouth Community Homes	Torus
Morgan Sindall	PML	Tpas
MSV	Poplar HARCA	Trafford Housing Trust
Merthyr Tydfil HA	Port of Leith HA	Trent and Dove
MTVH	Procure Plus	Triangle
Muir Group	Progress Housing Group	UKGBC
National Federation of ALMOs	Radius	United Communities
NB Housing	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	United Welsh
Network Homes	Red Kite Community Housing	University of Salford
New Horizons	Regenda	UWE
Newground Together	Regulator of Social Housing	Valleys To Coast
Newington HA	Rhondda HA	Vectis
Newlon	Riverside	VIVID
Newport City Homes	Riverside Centre	Wakefield District homes
Newquay Orchard	Rochdale Boroughwide Homes	Wandle
Newydd	Rosebery	Wates
Northern Housing Consortium	Rural Housing Association	Watford Community Housing
NHF	S4B	Weaver Vale
NIFHA	Saffron Housing Trust	Weaver Vale Housing Trust
NIHE	Salix Homes	Welsh Procurement Alliance
North Star	Sanctuary Housing	West Highland HA
Northampton Partnership Homes	Saxon Weald	West Kent HA
Northwards Housing	Shepherds Bush HG	Wheatley
Notting Hill Genesis	Service Insights	whg
Nottingham City Homes	SFHA	Wythenshawe Community Housing Group
Ocean Housing	Shoreditch Trust	Yorkshire Housing
		Your Housing Group



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