



INSIDE
HOUSING

Social mobility and social housing: Parliamentary Taskforce Report

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Chartered Institute of Housing
 Octavia House, Westwood Way, Coventry CV4 8JP
 Tel: 024 7685 1700
 Email: customer.services@cih.org
 Website: www.cih.org

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Inside Housing
 Ocean Media Group, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5AP
 Tel: 020 7772 8300
 Email: editorial@insidehousing.co.uk
 Website: www.insidehousing.co.uk

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Gentoo Group
 Emperor House, 2 Emperor Way, Doxford International Business Park, Sunderland SR3 3XR
 Tel: 0191 525 5000
 Email: communications@gentoogroup.com
 Website: www.gentoogroup.com

Authors: Lord Richard Best, Chair of the SMASH Inquiry and Laura Shimili, Policy and Practice Officer (CIH)

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Executive summary

1. Does social housing hinder social mobility?

In answering the first question proposed by the taskforce Inquiry, we note the weight of academic opinion that there is no evidence of social housing, per se, inhibiting social mobility. And we recognise that it is easier to get on in society, educationally and job-wise, if you have a secure, decent home. Social housing, therefore, can clearly contribute positively to people's opportunity for social mobility.

Nonetheless, we were impressed by the arguments for avoiding risks of this form of housing becoming stigmatised in ways that undermine the morale and self-esteem of those who live there: creating more balanced communities through a mix of tenure and through sensitive allocation policies can protect against this potential threat.

Moreover we are clear that, irrespective of any wider community investment by social housing providers, the first duty of these landlords is to perform well in terms of the 'bricks and mortar' service for their residents. In the uncertain times that lie ahead – with potential impacts on tenants' life chances from the reductions in housing benefit and less income for landlords – social housing providers will have to prioritise their primary role in securing the essential home base where residents can prosper.

Only when they are confident that they are fulfilling their core housing function should they become engaged in the wider role which was the subject of our Inquiry's second question.

2. What more can social landlords do to assist social mobility?

In answering our second question we feel confident in asserting that social housing providers can play a powerful role in enhancing social mobility. As agencies with real know-how, with the trust of local people, with the skills to negotiate funding from other sources, with a deep-seated commitment to make a difference, social landlords can be the springboard for enhanced educational and employment opportunities.

In looking at the potential engines of growth in the UK's faltering economy, and in marrying the economic imperatives with the desire for greater social mobility, we see huge opportunities in harnessing the skills and the motivation of social housing landlords.

Social landlords are investing money from their own resources in community activities, over and above their housing responsibilities. We recognise that the savings and surpluses which social housing providers have been able to redirect from their mainstream business to their community investment programmes may now be under pressure. Reductions in grant-aid, and cuts to the housing benefit that helps tenants to pay the rent, may well affect the capacity of these key enterprises to enhance opportunities and support social mobility in myriad ways.

But we conclude on a positive note, having learned just how dedicated and enthusiastic these organisations have become. We see their wider community role as underlining and extending the value they can bring by enhancing social mobility. We commend their work to local as well as to central government and we wish them well.

Richard Best

Chair of the SMASH Inquiry

June 2012

Introduction

All Political Parties agree on the importance of opportunities for everyone to improve their position in society, to fulfil their potential. 'Social mobility' may be hard to define and measure; but as a general aspiration, it commands widespread support. Indeed it is mentioned no fewer than 13 times in the government's recent *Laying the Foundations: a Housing Strategy for England* (DCLG, 2011), where '*improving social mobility – helping everyone to enjoy that freedom to succeed – is the principal aim of the Government's social policy*'. The report goes further to place centre stage, that '*to achieve this aim, we need to recognise the fundamentally important role that housing can play in supporting social mobility*'.

The post war settlement was expressed through the action taken to implement the Beveridge Report, including a push on social housing, to tackle one of his five great wants, squalor. That saw a major council house building programme to ensure not just 'homes for heroes', but decent housing for working people. That council housing surge saw more houses being built during the MacMillan government of 1953 than at any other period. At that stage social housing was undoubtedly a contributor to social mobility.

In recent years, a number of studies have suggested that in the UK the greater social mobility witnessed by the 'baby boomers' born after the Second World War has now slowed. The expectation of the next generation that they would do better than their parents has become harder to achieve. The main evidence that sparked concern about social mobility in the UK compares the job status of children born in 1958 and their parents with children born in 1970 and their parents (Blanden *et al.* 2005). The study found reduced social mobility and a strong relationship between educational attainment and family income and social mobility.

Social mobility is not necessarily associated with physical mobility: it may well be possible to do well in life without moving to a new neighbourhood. But to what extent does your housing, where you live, help or hinder the fulfilment of your potential? And in particular, does it make a difference – for better or worse – if your landlord is a social housing provider?

At the request of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and *Inside Housing* magazine, a group of Parliamentarians came together early in 2012 to explore the relationship between social housing and social mobility. This report is the result of our deliberations.

As the Inquiry's Chair, I place on record my own appreciation for the input of my Parliamentary colleagues – Peter Aldous MP, Heidi Alexander MP, Baroness Hilary Armstrong, Andrew George MP, Stephen Gilbert MP, Paul Uppal MP – and to Stuart Macdonald, Editor of *Inside Housing*, and Grainia Long, Chief Executive of CIH.

The two big questions

In essence we found ourselves faced with two key questions:

- first, to what extent does living in a home provided by a social landlord – a housing association or local authority – increase the likelihood of succeeding in terms of education and employment and getting on in the world? Or, on the contrary, does living in social housing lower aspirations and reduce life chances?
- second, in what ways might social landlords make a positive contribution to increasing social mobility and enhancing the opportunities for the residents in their properties to have successful lives?

The first of these questions required us to interrogate leading academics working in this field, while for the second question we took evidence from a range of social housing providers who have been extending their organisations' activities beyond simple bricks-and-mortar housing provision.

Question 1:

Does social housing help or hinder social mobility?

We were very fortunate to hear from academic colleagues with extensive research experience and knowledge of this subject: Professor John Hills, Director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) and Professor of Social Policy at the LSE, author of *Ends and means: the future roles of social housing in England* (John Hills, ESRC, 2007), for the previous government which considered this issue; Rebecca Tunstall, the Joseph Rowntree Professor of Housing Policy at York University; Alex Morton, Senior Research officer from Policy Exchange; Professor Ian Cole, Principal research fellow at the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research and Doctor Ruth Lupton, Deputy Director, of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) and Senior Research Fellow at the LSE.

We wanted to know to what extent the evidence from research suggested that social housing either accelerated or slowed down social mobility. Is it the case that the provision of secure affordable accommodation in itself supports socio-economic progress? Or, conversely, is it true that concentrating those on low incomes in particular estates or neighbourhoods, perhaps with few role models of parents going out to work, damages the prospects for those living in social housing.

At one level, it is obvious that those living in decent housing have better life chances than those who are homeless, or living in grossly overcrowded flats, or in cold and insanitary conditions. We can measure the effect of people living in such inadequate conditions, to the extent that at the extreme end, we know that the average age of death for the homeless is in their mid forties. Of course, social housing providers are helping people get on, simply by meeting their fundamental need for a satisfactory place to live.

Perhaps this is enough: a number of our witnesses suggested that social housing providers were contributing – significantly but unquantifiably – to social mobility through provision of their core product. They are supplying the foundation, for individuals to succeed at school or in employment and for families to thrive.

However, the different ways in which social landlords can provide housing – the ways they build new homes, let and manage them – may in itself influence the lives of those who live there. In our sessions we noted different modus operandi amongst social landlords.

Neighbourhood effects

Some social landlords seem more conscious than others of the impact on their tenants of the neighbourhoods in which they operate.

None of us live in isolation: our homes are in a wider setting and we have neighbours whose lives influence our own. A common characteristic of social housing is the proximity of households who

have all been allocated their homes on the basis of housing need. How much does it affect your social mobility if those around you are amongst the most disadvantaged in society?

In times past, social housing – then almost exclusively council housing – went to aspiring families with jobs; for many, it was a step up, a sign of social mobility in itself. But over time, council and housing association accommodation has been allotted increasingly – and in the most pressurised areas, exclusively – to those on the lowest incomes and to those facing the greatest difficulties. Today, living in social housing sometimes can mean being labelled and stigmatised. This cannot help with social mobility. If society appears to exclude you, then you might well be expected to react with hostility, rejecting society in return. So does the evidence suggest that because of the form which social housing takes – the concentration and often segregation of those with the greatest needs – it creates places with less social capital, with less capacity for self-help and with a greater propensity to exclude its tenants from mainstream society?

The answer from our academic witnesses is that there is no evidence to suggest that social housing causes social problems. There is a very small ‘tenure’ effect on adult outcomes, and possibly none (Tunstall et al, 2011). It is certainly not proven that, per se, living in social housing automatically sets you at a disadvantage at school or keeps you out of employment.

A current study for JRF is carrying out an experiment to test the widely held idea that people in areas with poor reputations, including some social housing estates, face discrimination from employers. The exercise has involved sending out over 2,000 electronic applications for jobs that require limited skills and experience (e.g. cleaners, security guards, kitchen hands) from fictional candidates in three UK cities who lived either in areas with poor reputations or in places with ‘bland’ reputations. No statistically significant difference in response rates has been found between the people from different areas, suggesting that qualified candidates should not fear post-code discrimination (at least up to the interview stage). The factor which the study found most limited the potential for work – to provide real social mobility – was the state of the labour market: candidates in the high unemployment areas had only half the chance of positive responses for similar jobs as those in the lower unemployment areas (forthcoming report from JRF).

If a neighbourhood is known for its criminality and drug culture, clearly there are huge risks for the children and young people growing up there. But the presence of a significant social landlord offers at least some protection against adverse neighbourhood effects – which no private landlord could be expected to tackle.

In many areas with concentrations of low income households, neighbours and extended families are a source of mutual support and solidarity: the movement of people to different locations would seem likely to disadvantage these households.

Mixed income communities

This is not to say that there are no lessons here for social housing landlords, in terms of the composition of the estates they build and manage. Our Inquiry heard a good deal about the value of mixed tenure housing – or, more accurately, about ensuring a mix of people on different incomes living within social housing estates. There seems little danger of a new estate being shunned and marginalised by the rest of society if it comprises of owners and shared owners and tenants all living in similar accommodation. A mix of incomes – with different tenures often acting as the proxy for different incomes – can be seen as a safe guard against the risk of ‘residualisation’. And in terms of the long term viability and sustainability of a housing development there is the added impetus of the business case for mixed income communities.

Achieving this can involve building a mixed income community at the outset as has been the case for much social housing over recent years. Or it may be accomplished retrospectively by sales on the open market of some vacant properties. This approach is well illustrated by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust’s SAVE scheme (Sales of Alternate Vacants on Estates). This creates opportunity for first-time buyers to access low-cost home ownership, and landlords can enforce covenants that prevent speculative landlords acquiring the stock – a practice which has created serious management difficulties. And the right-to-buy (RTB) incentives can retain better-off tenants on estates through fulfilling ambitions to become owners.

We have heard the case put forward – not least by the Minister, Grant Shapps – that social mobility is best addressed by helping people become home owners, and that the sale of social housing under the soon-to-be-revived right-to-buy can assist this process. RTB sales at significant discounts can clearly advantage individual households; but we also heard of the danger that the need to replace like-for-like at a time of acute shortage may be compromised by the generosity of the discount arrangements.

Allocations

As well as addressing the hazards of negative ‘neighbourhood effects’ through providing social housing in mixed income communities, we heard how tenant selection policies can also affect social mobility.

The allocation policies agreed between local authorities and the housing providers need to recognise inherent dangers of getting unbalanced housing developments. Giving some priority to people in employment – perhaps through some lettings at market rents – and to some people likely to add extra value to the community, for example through voluntary activity, can also reduce the risks of an estate or neighbourhood becoming detached from mainstream society.

One of our witnesses warned of allocation policies that encouraged ‘welfare dependency’ by giving incentives to demonstrate an inability to work, in order to secure a decent home. He advocated the policy that ensured some tenants in employment could obtain social housing.

We were clear that measures to achieve a mix of tenures/incomes in social housing will not be a miracle cure for those suffering the greatest disadvantages. It will not be sufficient in itself to provide tenants with opportunities for greater social mobility. But it can contribute positively in ensuring this sector is not stigmatised with consequent impacts on the morale and life chances of its residents.

Housing management

Whatever else social landlords do to support their residents, the starting point must be in providing an efficient and effective service of housing management.

How the social housing is looked after – whether the environment is safe, whether anti-social behaviour is addressed, whether the estate is kept in a clean and attractive state and homes are well maintained – will affect its image and the reputation and self confidence of its residents.

Getting the ‘bread and butter’ housing requirements right, managing social housing to high standards, with speedy repairs and engagement of residents in the management process, must be the essential attribute of the good landlord. Several of our witnesses emphasised that it would be a grave mistake for housing associations and councils to engage in more ambitious community initiatives specifically to assist social mobility, while neglecting their primary function in providing decent, secure, affordable homes.

Future prospects

A number of the practitioners who joined us expressed concern about some of the current changes to welfare benefits and funding arrangements. Will the cuts to housing benefit leave more households struggling with debts and financial problems, inhibiting their chances of any social mobility? Will resulting arrears undermine the financial strength of the social landlords? Will higher rents under the new financial regime – ‘affordable rents’ – make life tougher for social housing tenants? Will a loss of long term security make for less cohesive, stable communities?

At present these questions remain unanswered and will have to be closely monitored, and the extent to which social housing flourishes, or stagnates, depends on wider social and political factors.

Conclusions

We accept the wise guidance from the eminent academics who shared their thoughts with us and it is clear to us that there is no evidence that social housing *per se*, inhibits social mobility.

Clearly there is a strong correlation between a) living in a home provided by a social landlord; and b) experiencing social disadvantage. But that does not mean that a) has caused b).

Rather, it is because a household is in difficult circumstances that it has been allocated social housing. And it is perhaps unsurprising that those who have moved into social housing continue to experience difficulties in terms of educational attainment or access to employment, since the problems they have faced do not quickly disappear.

Nonetheless, we conclude that the experience of social housing providers and feedback from residents emphasises the importance of avoiding housing in this sector becoming stigmatised with a consequent impact on the morale and life chances for residents. We see the benefits of creating mixed income communities, from the outset and retrospectively; and recognise that sensitivity in tenancy allocations has a part to play in this.

At the same time we do not think any special initiatives or community programmes can substitute for the social landlord giving its attention, first and foremost, to providing a high quality housing management service. This is the foundation on which many other efforts to improve social mobility must be made.

Our report now goes on to explore whether, over and above our conclusions about the ways in which social landlords provide housing, there are additional tasks that social housing landlords could and should take on to enhance the chances of social mobility for the four million households who live in their homes.

Question 2:

What more can social housing landlords do to assist social mobility?

We were pleased to hear the experience of a range of housing providers who are using their presence within deprived communities to go beyond their bricks-and-mortar role.

Our witnesses included representatives from, Riverside Group, Merthyr Valley Homes (Wales), Plus Dane Group, RCT Homes, Peabody Trust, Gentoo Housing Group, New Charter, Bolton at Home and Leaders Reflect Solutions, a social enterprise that works with young people in Lambeth. The taskforce also received a written submission from Glasgow Housing Association (GHA).

Common characteristics

These organisations shared some characteristics which seem to be important to the provision of 'Housing Plus' activities:

- they were embedded in specific areas; they were the very opposite of absentee landlords, with strong ties to particular localities
- a number were looking after estates originally developed under direct local authority control (operating now as Arms Length Management Organisations or Voluntary Transfer housing associations); none were 'going it alone' and all were working with their local authorities in close partnerships, as well as with voluntary and community organisations
- all were redirecting savings and surpluses from their mainstream activities, and using their financial acumen to secure additional funds, not least from charitable sources
- all shared a commitment to use their local connections and capacity to improve significantly the neighbourhoods in which they were major players.

All of the members of the SMASH Inquiry team were very impressed by the passion, as well as the expertise which these witnesses brought to our sessions.

History

Of course this sector inherits traditions that stretch back to Octavia Hill and her successors, in going well beyond the remit of the private landlord. Many of the predecessors of today's social housing landlords took a holistic view of their responsibilities, concerning themselves with the lives of their residents and providing educational and recreational opportunities. Indeed, the sector can lay claim to have pioneered many aspects of the 'Big Society'.

Some of those we heard from – like the Peabody Trust – have sustained this wider role for many decades. Others have been created with broader objectives than simple housing provision. And others have found themselves 'in business for neighbourhoods' because of the scale of their presence as property owners in particular areas.

Scale

Our hearings built up a picture of extensive input by social housing landlords which lent itself to achieving change on a wider scale than many of us had appreciated. We heard how the National Housing Federation 2010-11 'neighbourhood audit' discovered that its members were investing at least £435m p.a. in community activities, over and above their housing responsibilities. Housing associations were providing 6,800 neighbourhood services which provided benefit to around 5.5 million people. Figures from the latest neighbourhood audit are not available yet but it is expected that investment will have increased as social landlords have continued to provide for their communities.

What impressed us most, perhaps, was that these many local projects – whether working with schools and colleges, organising training mentors and work experience, or tackling 'digital exclusion' by supporting individuals in learning new IT skills – were being pursued not as a peripheral add-on but as a major exercise within their localities.

What follows in our report are some key areas where housing landlords can make a contribution and examples of their varied initiatives.

Range of activities

In recent years the journey outward from delivering core housing activities to meeting wider needs within local communities has often started with answering the demands of residents for improved safety, in tackling anti-social behaviour, and working closely with the police service. This focus has broadened into providing constructive activities for young people – 'youth diversion' – with sports and a range of other engagement.

We noted that the services supplied are often concentrated on the factors most likely to improve social mobility, the following headings are an illustration of the range of activities.

Employment and employability

Employment is recognised to be the single biggest factor in determining not only adults' life chances, but also those of children and grandchildren.

The taskforce heard of the emphasis from housing providers on organising employment opportunities. As agencies with local clout and professional competencies, and as bodies that spend substantial sums through their building programmes, and repairs and maintenance work, these social housing providers convinced us of the considerable value they can add in getting people into jobs. Some had set up social enterprise arms, not least supporting government agencies in implementing programmes such as the new Work Programme. Some had supported the creation of local companies on their estates. And almost all had done deals with their building contractors to secure apprenticeship opportunities.

Working with adults to provide advice on local employment opportunities and instil confidence and skills in CV writing and interview techniques is just as important because adults can then transfer their increased confidence and skills on to their children and into their communities. Below are some illustrations of what landlords can do in the areas of employment and employability.

Wales

RCT Homes is a Community Housing Mutual, established in December 2007, through the transfer of 11,000 homes from Rhondda Cynon Taff Council in the South Wales Valleys – has aspired to be ‘more than a landlord’ taking a holistic approach to housing led regeneration intended to assist people and places to thrive. Some employment successes have been:

- RCT Homes has created over 1,000 new jobs and workplace training opportunities over the last four years for those who are least work ready
- 392 Future Jobs Fund Trainee contracts were created with 47% achieving employment/further education outcome which compares to 20% for Wales as a whole
- A family employment initiative has engaged an additional 250 people deemed ‘furthest from the work place’ – with multiple generational unemployment and economic inactivity – in volunteering and gaining employability skills.

The organisation has been able to generate the level of opportunities for training and employment through the scale and flexibility generated by its social enterprise Grow Enterprise Wales (GrEW). Through this social enterprise, it has been possible to take advantage of national employment programmes and lever in new opportunities with relatively quick start up to delivery timescales.

RCT Homes has also used the approach of interviewing applicants directly in Job Centres, with no requirement for written application, but based on positive attitude to work and training and not only on their previous ability.

Also in Wales, Merthyr Valley Homes is a smaller association of 4,300 homes that operates in some of the most deprived areas in the country. The Gellideg estate in the north of Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales is part of an area that suffered the decline of manufacturing and experienced high levels of unemployment and social exclusion. Six mothers living in the estate who wanted to create a better life for their children decided to create the Gellideg Foundation which has now grown into a community group and registered charity, employing over 35 people, delivering programmes in the fields of health, youth work, education and the environment.

Merseyside

We noted how often landlords are working in partnership with other agencies to enhance work and apprenticeship opportunities.

Plus Dane Group – a housing association in Merseyside and Cheshire owning and managing 13,000 homes – is working as a ‘neighbourhood investor’, to create conditions where people can thrive and grow. The group has set up the Bear Town Apprenticeships Programme in partnership with East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce. There had been concerns that despite interest and longstanding commitment, the take-up of apprenticeships by the private sector was low with the exception of a handful of very large companies who benefitted from national or corporate apprenticeship programmes: so the scheme was designed to make apprenticeships easy for smaller firms.

In addition Plus Dane is involved in the on-going implementation of this apprenticeship scheme and is marketing it to local firms and within local secondary schools where they have established relationships. It is also undertaking the recruitment and administration required to match opportunities to aspirations. It is providing each apprentice with a trained mentor and is ensuring that links with the local college or training provider are in place so that apprentices are registered for their qualifications and their attendance and progress is monitored.

The scheme was launched 7 months ago and has already created 5 new apprenticeships with a further 5 in the pipeline which will see a target of 10 apprenticeships achieved in the first 12 months.

The housing associations noted the challenges for small firms to overcome, in taking on apprentices:

- finding the time and covering the costs required to fulfil the administration work and to mentor those who have little workplace experience
- creating links with colleges and training providers, and making sure learning is aligned to workplace requirements
- the need to offer enough work or a long term commitment to an apprenticeship which can take up to 4 years.

Riverside Group – created in 1928 in Liverpool, as a charitable housing association, now owning over 50,000 homes – has set up a dedicated team for employment and enterprise support. Whilst the core of the business is housing, the organisation is involved in a wide range of non-housing activities relevant to the places it operates.

The dedicated team of project officers provide information, advice and guidance to individuals who want to access employment, training and opportunity for work experience. The team works closely with individuals to identify and break down barriers to work, and develop a personal action plan helping them to achieve their goals and manage their finances on the journey back to work. In the last year 1,089 people were engaged by the service, 706 people received advice, 182 people accessed training, 21 people undertook work experience, and 171 people entered employment and 21 people undertook volunteer work.

Scotland

GHA's submission to the taskforce illustrates the large-scale opportunity the housing sector offers for economic growth and development and for improving people's lives in general.

GHA's £1 billion investment programme has generated 4,100 jobs for individuals employed directly through its investment activities. Indirectly, GHA's investment has created over 9,000 jobs in the region, with over two thirds (6,700) estimated to have gone to Glasgow residents (Heriot Watt and Napier Universities 2011). This has had a significant multiplier impact on Scotland's economy of more than £900 million, almost equal to the investment itself.

GHA developed Community Benefit Clauses which were significant in making a strong local impact. The clauses required that 10% of all labour needed was to be filled by individuals not previously in the labour market. This created a level playing field for all bidding contractors, and encouraged demand from those that were unemployed or previously in education and training.

The Community Janitor initiative is another important strand of work. A pilot of 6 janitors on 6 month paid training placements helping keep the neighbourhood clean, was started in response to local concerns about the state of the neighbourhood and unemployment. The project has grown, benefiting 1,293 people who have gained work experience, training and a supported transition back into the labour market.

As part of the commitment to enhancing aspirations and long-term wellbeing for tenants, GHA has run an apprenticeship programme for 3 years which has given a place to 30 young people.

GHA has developed a graduate programme with the first 2 graduate placements working in various offices across GHA over a planned 2 year Graduate Management trainee programme. While gaining invaluable work experience, GHA is also funding graduates to complete a Diploma in Housing Studies which should secure them permanent posts within GHA.

In addition GHA supports a range of local employability programmes with partners designed to support tenants and residents by increasing their life skills, confidence, vocational qualifications and aspirations. These include programmes for individuals disadvantaged from the labour market through disability, gain valuable work experience through 18 month and 2 year placements – 19 placements have been supported to gain work experience; for young women who are lone parents and not in education, employment or training – 65 young women have progressed to employment; for young parents supported to stabilise tenancies, develop positive parenting skills, and increase aspirations – 23 have gone on to further training or employment.

GHA has recently created Business Start-Up grants to support tenants setting up their own businesses.

Financial and digital inclusion

The Inquiry heard how many landlords were investing to provide their tenants with financial advice and support and have enabled them to gain a sense of responsibility in managing their personal finances. The taskforce heard contributions which outlined a range of different activities and initiatives.

Learning from others



RCT Homes is working with 16 other landlords and have financially supported the creation of Moneyline Cymru a Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI). The aim of the CDFI is to provide affordable, responsible loans and to change the way financial services are delivered to financially excluded people who might otherwise fall prey to high interest, doorstep lenders or illegal money lenders. The 17 landlords have pledged their support to fund five high street outlets and provide loan capital. In the past two years 6,000 loans were issued for a value of £3.3 million.

The initiative has saved in excess of £1.6 million in interest charges for borrowers. It encouraged people to open savings accounts – 95% of borrowers opened savings accounts and paid in some £250,000. It also helped reducing arrears levels for housing associations – arrears decreased from a peak of 2.7% to 1.47% in March 2011, the lowest level for over 15 years.

Digital inclusion is becoming more and more important in a connected society. Whether it is to manage finances, benefits or to access public services, education or social networking, digital access has been part of many landlords' community focus.

In 2011 the consultancy Experian reported that 38.9% of the population are digitally excluded. A local poll from RCT Homes showed that the figure was higher for their tenants at 49%. A key reason for being digitally excluded is the proportion of tenants who do not have a fixed telephone line, due to cost.

Having undertaken a pilot that provided access to over 250 homes, RCT Homes is seeking a commercial partner to roll out wireless broadband across the borough to provide low cost affordable wireless broadband to all tenants as a social enterprise. It has also supported over 250 individuals in learning new IT skills.

Scotland's broadband penetration rate is the lowest in the UK at 61% (Ofcom 2010). GHA is aiming to provide training and access to affordable internet for 30,000 tenants.

The representative from Riverside Group told the taskforce that it is hard to consider social mobility without thinking about home ownership. Riverside Group has developed OwnPlace scheme, a discounted sales initiative which renovates empty properties back to a mortgageable condition in areas of housing market decline, selling them at a discount to first time buyers who

are willing to make a 5 year commitment to the area and invest in the property. Through this initiative over 160 properties have been sold with many more planned.

Reducing child poverty

Peabody, a landlord operating in London, strongly articulated its role in reducing child poverty.

London has higher than national levels of child poverty. The areas where the landlord operates are amongst the most economically deprived in England. Peabody's community development work helps tackle child poverty in a number of ways:

- large tenant and families services team
- through employment services, including specific services for parents with young children and lone parents with young children
- through direct support to secure good-quality employment opportunities for parents which can include loans and support to set up small businesses
- through support for development of social enterprises that provide flexible but relatively well-paid work for parents
- through direct or indirect support of credit unions that offer an affordable alternative to poor families when they need to borrow money
- through support for childcare service provision for residents through the conversion of empty or underused buildings at a very low or nominal rent
- supporting provision of positive and engaging activities for children and teenagers, including after-school activities, during school holidays and for teenagers who leave school at 16, through joint working and cooperation with local schools, children's centres and youth services
- through promoting self-esteem and a sense that life potentially offers much wider horizons than children have grown up with
- through exploring the use of models such as family and peer support systems to help address child poverty and its consequences.

Delivering community development services of this kind means that Peabody can make an additional contribution to the creation of conditions for the future social mobility of children living in low-income households.

Education

Given the crucial importance of education in increasing social mobility one of the sessions of the taskforce focused on housing's contributions to improved educational attainment and social mobility.

We heard of landlords' education initiatives that ranged from early years support to helping with literacy projects for older children and to training schemes, sometimes on a large scale.

New Charter – the biggest Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) in 2000 and one of the largest housing association in the north west with a stock of 18,600 homes, a turnover of £59 million a year and a workforce of over 800 – has become involved in education.

New Charter's journey into education started as a result of personal and organisational experiences relating to the recruitment of trade apprentices and work with local secondary schools. The journey into education saw the landlord become the sponsor of an academy and invest £3.5 million in the heart of one of the communities it provides homes for.

Learning from others



The **New Charter** Academy was formed from two failing secondary schools, which served areas in the worst 5% for both deprivation and child poverty, where 22% of looked after children in the borough were to be found, and where 41% of adults had never worked and 43% had no qualifications.

The Academy has developed a specialism in business and entrepreneurship, key to providing the emphasis needed to assist young people into an increasingly constrained job market.

GCSE results have improved over three years from the average between the two schools of 27%, with A*-C in English and Maths to 47% in 2011. Permanent and temporary school exclusions have been significantly reduced and behaviour for learning and attendance massively improved.

The association's Board believes there is significantly more that could be done in this field and has established an Education Trust, sponsored by the housing business which has aspirations to develop a chain of academies. The first step has been taken with the conversion of a local primary school into one of the earliest primary academies in the country. This school, like the secondary school, is in the heart of a housing community and will become the hub for some intensive community development work and will provide sustainable support for the neighbourhood.

Gentoo – committed from its beginning in 2001 to helping communities live, develop and improve – has developed a programme of work around education and supporting families and their children from the early years, on to the different stages of their development. The programme has tailored interventions for different age groups. The primary school programme focuses on inspirational experiences in the full spectrum of working environments. Gentoo's philosophy is that secondary school should be about discovering aspirations through real experiences and connecting to the values of work. The programme included work-shops, employability skills, personal coaching and job-searching. The final programme enhances the skills already acquired for work and life readiness.



Learning from others

The work developed through **Gentoo's** sponsorship of Academy 360 in Sunderland created a national award winning 'All Through' academy for 1100 students aged from 4 to 16. An early vision, consulting with the local community and working in partnership were elements that helped create a state of the art £23 million building. The creation, with partners, of a £2.25 million endowment fund continues to support family learning and programmes to combat educational disadvantage alongside further sponsorship of new curriculum approaches. This was done in parallel with Gentoo's significant investment in new housing adjacent to the new academy that, together, has transformed the local community. Gentoo continues to support the academy with financial investment management, human resources advice, building and grounds maintenance, community development and other services.

RCT Homes sees youth engagement activities as supporting a crucial on-going engagement with families and local residents, many of whom will be the next generation of tenants. As a result it has decided to engage in a range of activities from supporting young people excluded from, or at risk of exclusion from, mainstream education with work place based creative industries training, to education based short camping holidays to learn healthy living, financial budgeting, citizenship and responsible behaviour. Other initiatives included a careers camp for work experience; a primary age reading scheme aimed at improving child and adult literacy which is being delivered in local schools; youth diversion and education schemes such as football competitions, film making for young people and dance aimed at improving confidence and self esteem; job shadowing opportunities for school children and job interview training for 16 year olds.

In Scotland **GHA** has developed a Better Futures Bursaries programme – with bursaries worth £1,500 per year for up to 4 years – aimed at supporting young tenants access higher education. From a pilot of 10 bursaries in 2011/12 GHA has a target of awarding 200 for the academic year starting in October 2012. For the last 7 years, GHA has run an educational grants programme aimed at tenants undertaking vocational qualifications to help them move into work or upskill themselves.

As a local employer GHA has used its expertise with local schools to develop pupils' interview techniques and completing applications.

The in-house training facility, The Academy, offers courses to tenants, in developing IT skills, the Chartered Institute of Housing's accredited qualification, and works with local secondary schools to develop this further for school pupils.

Focus on people's aspirations and futures

Many of those who presented evidence to us noted that landlords can play a particular role in countering the lack of or low aspirations they find among their tenants and their families. While it is clear that social outcomes are not determined by tenure – income and opportunities play a crucial role – there can sometimes be a greater sense of dependency and helplessness among those on the lowest incomes. Social landlords can do a lot to shift mindsets and attitudes, and it is that ambition and aspiration that is a prerequisite for social mobility.

We heard how working with families and young children to provide a range of activities around self-care, confidence-building, better health and preparing families for school, helps families and early child development.

Learning from others



Bolton at Home created in 2002 as an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), managing 18,000 homes – works to improve the social and economic conditions of estates and other disadvantaged areas in Bolton. This landlord organised a special graduation 'I Can Make it Happen' event aiming at raising future aspirations for 170 pupils aged 10-11. Children took part in a week-long series of activities designed to highlight the importance of learning, education and positive social activities. They met with employees from a range of professions to find out about various vocations. Ensuring there was something for everyone, trips were also arranged to the theatre, a study support centre and the local university, where pupils could find out about the wide range of courses and employment opportunities in the borough. These activities were for many something they had not experienced before.

New Charter Housing has become the lead agency for the delivery of family intervention services for 'troubled' families. This involves intensive work at a very intimate level with some of the most difficult families who exhibit a multitude of problems and experience intervention from a wide range of agencies, including Child Care, Education Welfare, Police, Probation, NHS, JobCentre Plus and more. Many of the families in this programme have children who attend the academy and as a consequence, integrated working between the Family Intervention Project and the school has seen significant enhancement and improvements to the life chances of the children.

Future prospects

As well as an eagerness to do more in their local communities, we heard some nervousness about the future. Social landlords were clear that social mobility depends on wider economic factors:

- the success of employment-generating initiatives remains dependent on the wider economy of the region and the area

- reductions in local authority spending can deeply affect 'non-essential' activities and the voluntary and community organisations that provide them
- if welfare reforms lead to loss of rental income from housing benefit, then the revenue that underpins their valuable programmes of extra work within their localities could be threatened
- if income streams look more risky, private sector financial institutions – upon whom housing associations depend – may become more reluctant to lend
- if their tenants have less spending money because of the 'bedroom tax' and other reductions in their incomes, participation in wider social activity becomes more difficult. Bettering yourself, moving upwards in society, may be harder.

Conclusions

We recognise that social housing providers come in different shapes and sizes. Not all see a role for themselves beyond the important task of creating a home environment in which people can prosper. This in itself represents an important contribution to supporting social mobility.

But we were greatly heartened to discover the talent and the dedication, reflected in practical progress, which a growing number of social housing landlords are now demonstrating.

We have noted their common characteristics, the traditions they have inherited and the range of activities they are now delivering. Maybe the most encouraging finding from our Inquiry has been the scale on which these community activities are now being rolled out. These enterprises really are making a highly significant difference in deprived areas and directly increasing opportunities for their residents' social mobility.

The future of this work is uncertain. Social landlords have been funding much of their community work themselves and in partnership with others and this is at risk given changes to the public funding model for housing, and through welfare reform. The taskforce is concerned for the future of some of this work, and that housing organisations may be faced with difficult decisions about how/whether they continue to fund this work.

Some people think that social landlords exist primarily to provide housing but not everyone the taskforce heard from agreed, as many organisations see their role as 'community investors'. The question 'what are housing organisations for' remains open to debate. The different opinions might lead to greater divergence in the sector as organisations make fundamental decisions about what their purpose and function is. However there was agreement that the basic landlord functions have to be high performing and efficient otherwise none of the community work can be successful.

During our hearings we sensed from the social housing organisations an entrepreneurial spirit and a zest for their mission that will ensure that every effort possible is made to overcome the difficulties that may well lie ahead.

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For any queries please contact:

Laura Shimili
Policy and Practice Officer
Chartered Institute of Housing
7th Floor, 236 Grays Inn Road
London WC1X 8HB

Tel: 020 7520 3384
Email: laura.shimili@cih.org