



PlaceShapers

Together we help communities thrive



# Stay local, go far

Place-based Housing Associations' role in Levelling Up





# We are PlaceShapers

The national network of place-based housing organisations. We are a collective of collaborators, change-makers and policy-shapers. We are a voice for our members and a voice for our communities because many voices can make a bigger difference than one. Together, we go beyond housing.





# Foreword

**I come from a wonderful community with a rich industrial heritage and a fantastic spirit. I feel honoured to have been chosen to represent these communities and am determined through my role on the APPG for Left Behind Neighbourhoods to drive a bottom-up approach and make sure that residents' voices are heard as part of levelling up.**

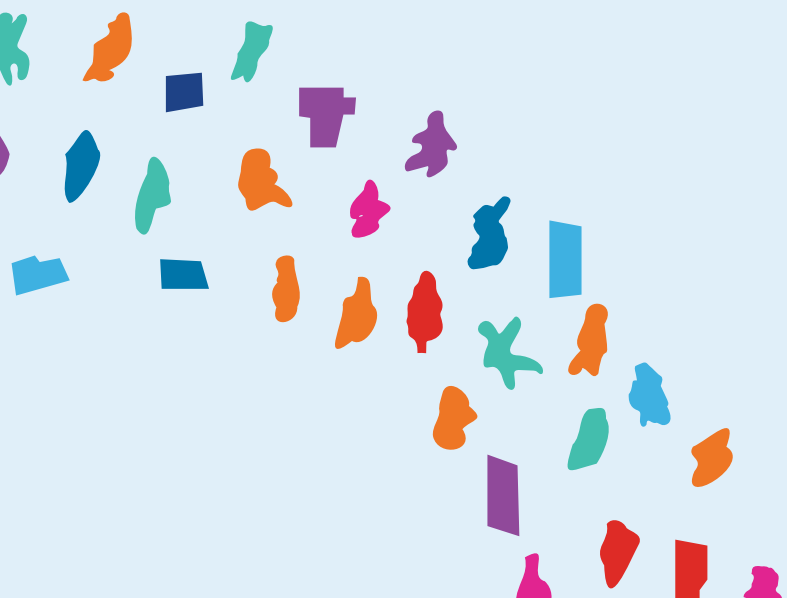
Community-focussed housing associations are the anchors of local communities, with deep roots and social purpose that affect incredible change for neighbourhoods. In the communities I represent, I have seen first-hand what a difference partnership working can make to increase opportunities for jobs and education and the uplifting effect a quality environment can have on residents' well-being and pride.

This report clearly defines four ways local housing associations can deliver and effectively drive the regeneration of local areas. Linking distinct economic, social, democratic and physical regeneration work into one combined programme aggregate and magnify the benefits on communities.

I don't underestimate the task of levelling up communities, but I believe a joined-up approach from central Government is critical to addressing left behind communities and climate change.

The right recognition and streamlining of funding will mean transformation and decarbonisation will be delivered quickly and with local residents. Using existing community assets is central to raising capacity and empowering our communities. So, let's use the experience of housing associations and their partners to deliver for left behind communities.

**Paul Howell**  
MP for Sedgefield



**PlaceShapers' mission is to put place-shaping at the heart of decision-making to improve lives and communities. So, it is unsurprising that we are fully supportive of the Government's commitment to 'level up'.**

This report, produced with housing associations in the PlaceShapers network and Bright Blue Intelligence, seeks to show how our work can contribute to this vital agenda.

Housing associations work in all the areas where levelling up needs to take place. We are deeply connected in these places. Our key purpose is to build and manage homes, and ensure they are affordable, safe and well maintained. But we care deeply about the communities we work with, and believe we have a wider role in supporting their wellbeing.

Many PlaceShapers members have been engaged in a variety of 'levelling up' activities for many years. Some examples of this work is in this report. However, we believe the scale of the challenge requires a different approach, one where Government works more with local communities and locally connected organisations so we can all play our part in helping communities to thrive.

## Matthew Walker

Chair, PlaceShapers

CEO Leeds Federated Housing Association





# Introduction

**In his first ever speech as Prime Minister, Boris Johnson talked of his desire to “level up across Britain”, with a mission to answer, “at last the plea of the forgotten people and the left behind towns.”<sup>1</sup> As a result, the current Conservative Government’s overriding ‘levelling up’ agenda was born.**

Of course, attempts to boost so-called ‘left behind’ communities are nothing new. Successive governments have introduced, with varying degrees of success, regeneration initiatives. Indeed, a core purpose of government itself is to intervene in areas where markets alone cannot deliver basic and fair outcomes for the people living there.

Now, over two years into Boris Johnson’s premiership, dominated by the terrible and tragic Covid-19 pandemic, we are finally now starting to see clear definition and energy around ‘levelling up’, with the new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) and a White Paper.

There is some distinctiveness in this Conservative Government’s ‘levelling up’ policy agenda. Coastal and former industrial areas, that disproportionately voted Brexit, are a prime focus. Regenerating areas is not simply about stimulating economic activity, important as this is; there also needs to be investment in social infrastructure, catalysing civic

activity and pride. ‘Levelling up’, then, is also about the liveability of places, not just their prosperity.

**We at PlaceShapers believe we should consider regeneration in its fullest sense in four ways**

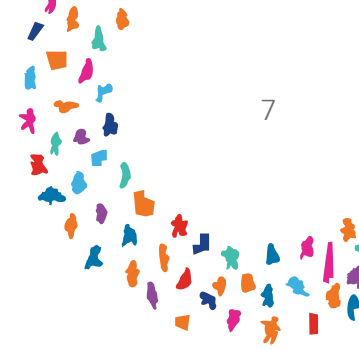
- **Physical regeneration**  
Improving housing and local physical infrastructure.
- **Economic regeneration**  
Improving employment opportunities.
- **Social regeneration**  
Improving civic activity and pride.
- **Democratic regeneration**  
Improving community involvement and empowerment

The new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, has talked about his vision of a country where people can “Stay local, but go far.”<sup>2</sup> The Minister here is trying to show a determination to break the relationship between social and geographic mobility, quite a dramatic departure from conventional economic and political wisdom.

Certainly, the Conservative Party has been, for some time, associated with the famous idiom, “Get on your bike”, which derived from former Cabinet Minister Norman Tebbit’s speech in 1981 to the

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/boris-johnsons-first-speech-as-prime-minister-24-july-2019>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/19604005.michael-gove-says-levelling-our-moral-obligation-darlington-visit/>



Conservative Party Conference. It was emblematic of that transformative decade of Thatcherism, which was motivated by Conservative principles of agency, opportunity, and freedom. Working hard, at school or in work, and bettering yourself to leave the modest means and areas you were born into or found yourself in, was passionately celebrated.

There has been a communitarian correction in conservative thinking. The modern Conservative Party stresses rootedness, community and interdependence. Conservatives recognise the need to build and protect institutions, especially for local communities. Institutions shape individual behaviour, bringing different people together in pursuit of a common good so that social cohesion and capital is strengthened. Thriving local institutions are thus vital for levelling up so-called ‘left-behind’ areas.

So, what key local institutions can support and transform individuals and communities in deprived areas? Conservatives have traditionally looked to the Church and charities, but housing associations are also increasingly critical anchor institutions in ‘left behind’ areas.

More than 2.4 million households live in accommodation provided by housing associations, with many of them being in ‘left behind’ areas, especially in the Midlands, the North East and North West of England.<sup>3</sup>

Housing associations are more likely to be found in areas with fewer employment opportunities and lower levels of educational attainment, with almost half of all socially rented homes located in the most deprived 20% of areas in England, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation

(IMD).<sup>4</sup> Their residents are more likely to be low-income workers or unemployed<sup>5</sup> and they are more likely to be elderly or have a long-term disability or health problem.<sup>6</sup>

These are the communities who stand to benefit from levelling up significantly and who are in particular need of feeling the benefits of any post-Covid-19 recovery.

As Conservatives appreciate, the state alone cannot level up all the ‘left-behind’ communities across the country. Housing associations are community-based organisations that are already deeply embedded in ‘left-behind’ areas, so they can use their existing knowledge and expertise to catalyse and propel the levelling up agenda.

On top of the core purpose of providing homes for affordable rent and sale, housing associations provide an estimated additional £750 million each year into community work. This work has been particularly notable during the Covid-19 pandemic, where housing associations have been supporting the livelihoods of residents while also sustaining critical services.

In the work they do, housing associations support all four dimensions of regeneration: physical, economic, social, and democratic. But, despite all of this, housing associations face significant funding challenges and uncertainties.

**This paper shows how housing associations are supporting regeneration in its fullest sense and offers policy recommendations to enable them to make an even greater contribution to the levelling up agenda.**

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, “Live tables on dwelling stock (including vacants)”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants> (2021).

<sup>4</sup> Leon Feinstein et al., ‘The public value of social housing’, The Smith Institute, <http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/PublicValueofSocialHousing.pdf> (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Maire Williams, “Delivering change: What Housing Associations can tell us about employment and skills”, Centre for Cities, <https://www.centreforcities.org/reader/delivering-change-housing-associations-can-tell-us-about-employment-skills/skills-unemployment-challenge-within-cities/> (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Maire Williams, “Delivering change: What Housing Associations can tell us about employment and skills”, Centre for Cities, <https://www.centreforcities.org/reader/delivering-change-housing-associations-can-tell-us-about-employment-skills/skills-unemployment-challenge-within-cities/> (2015).

# Physical regeneration

**Physical regeneration, the restoration of physical infrastructure, is essential for improving many 'left behind' communities and is already a core responsibility for housing associations when it comes to homes for their residents.**

Housing associations are currently experiencing issues securing funding for physical restoration. Housing associations have become increasingly reliant on private financing to fund their housebuilding and physical restoration work over the last two decades, with private finance's contribution representing more than 80% of gross English housing association investment in 2018-19, in comparison to less than 50% in 2000-01.<sup>7</sup>

Since the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, housing associations have also been investing heavily into fire safety remediation to address outstanding issues with cladding. This has created additional financial pressure on housing associations, with estimates that the sector will have to spend £10 billion to address outstanding building safety issues.<sup>8</sup>

There are now concerns that meeting all these costs will make it more difficult for housing associations to deliver new housing or improve existing stock.<sup>9</sup>

Importantly, housing associations in 'left behind' areas can struggle to secure private funding for physical restoration due to the lower value of housing stock in the areas they operate. Local authorities in the northern regions of England are particularly likely to suffer from low demand for housing,<sup>10</sup> meaning housing associations located in them effectively have fewer valuable assets. This leads to less borrowing capacity and less ability to offset investment through sales of new homes, both of which could support physical regeneration.

Housing associations can access various funding streams for initiatives to regenerate local areas. This includes existing and upcoming government funds, such as the Future High Streets Fund and the Levelling Up Fund. While these provide funding for broader regeneration, it is noteworthy it is very limited.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Williams, Piers Williamson and Samuel Marlow-Stevens, "Funding housing associations: changing models for changing times?", <https://www.thfcorp.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UKHRChapter2WebUpload.pdf> (2020).

<sup>8</sup> Housing Today, "NHF criticises lack of funding for housing associations in Building Safety Bill", [https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/nhf-criticises-lack-of-funding-for-housing-associations-in-buildingsafety-bill/5112640\\_article](https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/nhf-criticises-lack-of-funding-for-housing-associations-in-buildingsafety-bill/5112640_article) (2021).

<sup>9</sup> Financial Times, "Affordable UK home building hindered by post-Grenfell fire safety costs", <https://www.ft.com/content/208f164b-0b69-4961-852b-e3509dc558d1> (2021).

<sup>10</sup> Neal Hudson, "A Housing Crisis? More like a series of local crises needing local solutions", Residential Analysts, [http://resi-analysts.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A-Housing-Crisis-2018\\_10\\_15\\_v3.pdf](http://resi-analysts.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A-Housing-Crisis-2018_10_15_v3.pdf) (2018).







## Incommunities Housing Green Lane

*Incommunities is a housing association based in Yorkshire, managing almost 22,600 properties across Bradford, Kirklees, Wakefield and Rotherham.*

Green Lane is an estate located in Bradford originally built in the 1950s that has suffered significant physical deterioration and increasing rates of anti-social behaviour and deprivation. After demolishing the previous housing, Incommunities struggled to attract interest from private developers for regeneration due to the location and scope of the project. This led to an in-house development arm leading on the construction of 142 new properties for both rent and sale and an establishment of a supply chain that utilises local suppliers while also providing local residents opportunities for training and employment.



## Physical regeneration (continued)

Indeed, the last piece of funding dedicated purely to the restoration of existing homes was the £140 million Estate Regeneration Fund launched in 2016, with funding available until 2021, and an additional £400 million of loan funding made available for estate regeneration in the 2017 Autumn Budget.<sup>12</sup>

All funding provided by Homes England, such as through the Affordable Homes Programme, is only targeted at building new homes, rather than regeneration or replacement of homes.<sup>13</sup> However, many 'left behind' areas have a significant number of empty homes, and regeneration work will be most impactful if it allows housing associations to bring them back into use for social rent and for sale.

Some housing associations have successfully leveraged public investment to attract private funding, contributing £6 for every £1 of public funding in 2019, representing £13.5 billion of new private finance.

<sup>14</sup>However, without additional financial support from the Government, some housing associations are likely to struggle to effectively raise funding for physical restoration, especially in 'left behind' areas.

### **Homes England should enable housing associations to access funding for the improvement and replacement of existing homes, not just the building of new properties.**

This proposed new funding from Homes England should be available for mixed tenure developments, which are key for many housing associations. The funding for expanded eligibility could come, in part, from multiple sources, including the Affordable Homes Programme, the upcoming Shared Prosperity Fund,

and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This new funding should include support for the development of brownfield sites that housing associations can directly apply to, given that former industrial areas have a significant amount of such land, and that the current Brownfield Land Release Fund is only limited to applications by local authorities. The new funding should also be flexible, allowing projects of all sizes to be selected, with greater priority given to areas facing the greatest economic and social challenges. Where projects do not meet the criteria for the national fund, support should be provided to access private funding sources.

### **The road to net-zero**

All physical regeneration must also address the demands of reaching the UK's new, legal 2050 net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target. Reaching net-zero is both a challenge and an opportunity for levelling up 'left behind' areas, as decarbonisation is likely to be a difficult process for some individuals. Still, it will also provide demand for new green businesses and jobs. Some people will need to move from high-emitting to low-emitting jobs. High-emitting jobs are more likely to be in areas described as 'left behind',<sup>15</sup> meaning housing associations have an opportunity to play a significant role in assisting the re-training and employment initiatives that must take place to service the green economy.

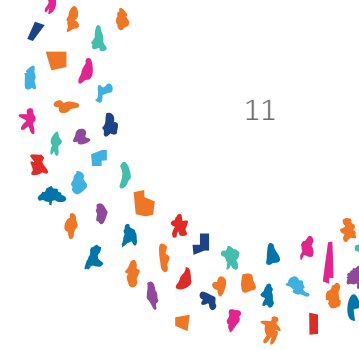
Social housing contributes only 10% of the UK residential sector's total carbon emissions, despite representing 16% of all housing in the UK.<sup>16</sup> However, housing associations will need to go much further with reducing the carbon footprint of their homes if the UK is to reach the 2050 legal target of net-zero emissions.

<sup>11</sup>Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, "Guidance: Estate Regeneration Fund, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/estate-regeneration-fund> (2016).

<sup>12</sup>HM Treasury, "Autumn Budget 2017", [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/661480/autumn\\_budget\\_2017\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/661480/autumn_budget_2017_web.pdf) (2017).

<sup>13</sup>Homes England and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, "Guidance: Apply for affordable housing funding", <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-affordable-housing-funding> (2020).

<sup>14</sup>National Housing Federation, "Comprehensive Spending Review 2020: National Housing Federation submission", <https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/resource-files/comprehensive-spending-review-2020-national-housing-federation-submission.pdf> (2020).



This is a significant challenge for housing associations; only a combination of extensive retrofitting, new building standards and a rapid growth in uptake of low carbon heating systems will help achieve the necessary deep decarbonisation.<sup>17</sup>

The Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, which commits £3.8 billion to improving energy performance of socially rented homes over the next ten years,<sup>18</sup> is a significant step forward.

However, housing associations can only apply as part of a local authority led bid, though the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) intends to allow individual housing associations to apply directly in the future waves of funding.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, housing associations continue to face uncertainty about which low-carbon heating options will benefit their residents, while others are concerned that technological solutions, without future improvements in commercial viability, will raise costs for their residents and drive more people into fuel poverty.

Housing associations need more support from the Government to decarbonise effectively. Modelling by Savills for the National Housing Federation suggests that decarbonising housing associations' homes will cost at least £36bn<sup>20</sup>

**A long-term, government-led plan for decarbonising the social housing sector, with concrete funding and clear strategy, is needed to ensure that housing associations can plan for the future.**

**Considering the projected cost of decarbonisation, the Government should bring forward the now £3.8 billion committed to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and go beyond the allocated £800 million for the 2022-2025 period as part of the Heat and Buildings Strategy to enable long-term certainty.**

All this funding should be targeted at areas with a higher concentration of poorly performing homes, which are more likely to be found in 'left behind' areas.

<sup>15</sup> Ted Christie-Miller, "Getting to zero?", <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Net-Zero-.pdf>, Onward (2020).

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, "English Housing Survey data on energy performance", <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/energy-performance> (2021).

<sup>17</sup> "Social Housing: leading the Way to Net Zero", Sustainable Energy Association, <https://www.sustainableenergyassociation.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/SEA-social-housing-digitalcompressed-1.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, "Notice: Information about the Social Decarbonisation Fund", <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-housing-decarbonisationfund/information-about-the-social-housing-decarbonisation-fund> (2021).

<sup>19</sup> Nathaniel Barker, "NHF in talks with government over allowing housing associations to bid directly for decarbonisation fund", Inside Housing, <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/nhf-in-talks-with-government-over-allowing-housing-associations-to-bid-directly-for-decarbonisation-fund-71463> (2021).

<sup>20</sup> ONS, "Public sector employment, UK: December 2017", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandla>







**Livin**  
**York Hill**

***Livin is a housing association which manages over 8,400 homes across County Durham.***

York Hill is an estate in Spennymoor that originally contained 144 homes which were constructed in the 1930s. With the area being associated with high levels of anti-social behaviour, and properties facing issues with damp and insulation, two-bedroom houses in the area were selling for as little as £15,000, making the area unattractive for private investment into regeneration.

To regenerate York Hill, Livin invested £5.4 million from its own reserves into building improvements, such as installing external wall insulation and improvements into local amenities, such as new in-curtilage parking. This effort delivered 110 homes for both sale and rent, with Livin explicitly focusing on increasing homeownership in the area, which rose from 32% to 62% as a result.



# Economic regeneration

**Housing associations are most likely to assist economic regeneration through the preparation for – or provision of – jobs. Housing associations themselves act as significant providers of jobs in communities, both directly and indirectly.**

Around 140,000 people are employed directly by the social housing sector in the UK.<sup>20</sup> Depending on their size, housing associations directly provide a range of opportunities due to their significant supply chains, building work and day-to-day management of their properties, with jobs available in fields such as construction, management, social work, and others. The skills required for the range of positions offered directly by housing associations mean they act as providers of apprenticeships or specialised training, with some housing associations committing to train a set number of apprentices and trainees each year. Some housing associations place emphasis on providing these opportunities to their residents where possible, improving the prospects of those in their communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a more significant impact in terms of employment prospects on younger workers, with many of them losing jobs or going on furlough.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in rural areas

such as North Yorkshire, where most jobs are low waged, but housing prices are relatively high, younger workers have been increasingly priced out. Housing associations are vital to addressing this, both in terms of providing employment support and affordable housing to younger workers.

Housing associations can also help by acting as facilitators of job and training opportunities for other organisations in 'left behind' communities. Housing associations frequently interact with hard-to-reach groups directly and have the potential to develop significant personal relationships with them, linking them up with local businesses and training providers.

<sup>20</sup> ONS, "Public sector employment, UK: December 2017", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/december2017> (2018).

<sup>21</sup> ONS, "Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, seasonally adjusted", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/realtimeinformationstatisticsreferencetableseasonallyadjusted> (2021).



we are aspire  
Achieve training

*Aspire Housing is a housing association managing almost 10,000 homes in Staffordshire and Cheshire.*

Aspire Housing belongs to a family of organisations with a social purpose known as we are aspire, which includes Achieve Training, an apprenticeship and training provider, and Realise Charity, which focuses on helping people overcome barriers into employment.

Achieve Training is a social enterprise established in 1982, joining the broader we are aspire group in 2008, and is the largest independent provider of apprenticeships in Staffordshire.

Achieve Training offers a range of courses, with an emphasis on working directly with local businesses to provide apprenticeships and traineeships. This focus allows the skills training to directly benefit the local economy. Furthermore, Achieve Training, in particular, focuses on providing training for young people, especially those who did not succeed in school and are likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a strong emphasis on upskilling and training them.





## Economic regeneration (continued)

A significant proportion of housing associations go as far as providing direct employment assistance, with the National Housing Federation estimating in 2014 that 39% do so. Such assistance includes everything from providing information to more tailored casework where a resident has regular contact with a staff member that helps them search for jobs.<sup>22</sup> Research has shown that investment into employment-related support by housing associations improves employment levels, with full time employment rates increasing with an annual investment of up to £30 per housing unit.<sup>23</sup>

Housing associations have successfully used the EU Structural Funds to support economic regeneration efforts, particularly for direct employment assistance. Accessing the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is set to replace EU Structural Funds, will be key for housing associations to continue supporting their residents. The UK Government must ensure that housing associations have the same ability to access funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as with previous EU Structural Funds.

**Greater certainty and opportunities for long-term funding should be provided through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to enable housing associations to deliver services such as direct employment assistance.**

While the ability of housing associations to formally link up with other organisations and offer direct employment assistance is highly dependent on their size and resources, integrating the provision of housing, training and employment support across the public and third sector is an effective way to improve outcomes for residents.<sup>24</sup>

**The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should ensure that local Job Centre Plus are encouraged to work closely with local housing associations and create formal links where relevant with any direct employment assistance programmes that they run, particularly those focused on long-term unemployed.**

DWP's commissioning programmes often focus on scale, meaning housing associations, especially small ones, are unable to make bids for DWP funding of welfare programmes.

**The DWP should reconsider how it sets conditions for bids for employment programme funding to allow smaller providers, such as housing associations, to participate.**

<sup>22</sup> National Housing Federation, "A home, a job, a future", <http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/A-Home-A-Job-A-Future.pdf> (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Mark Wilding, Katy Jones, Philip Martin and Lisa Scullion, "Housing Works: Assessing the Impact of Housing Association Employment Support", Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit, <https://www.ceci.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2019/06/Housing-Works-May-2019.pdf> (2019).

<sup>24</sup> Mark Wilding, Katy Jones, Philip Martin and Lisa Scullion, "Housing Works: Assessing the Impact of Housing Association Employment Support", Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit, <https://www.ceci.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2019/06/Housing-Works-May-2019.pdf> (2019).



**Beyond Housing  
New Directions**

***Beyond Housing provides 15,000 homes to over 30,000 customers in the Tees Valley and North Yorkshire.***

Using the funding from the European Social Fund, Beyond Housing is running New Directions, a project focused on supporting people aged between 15 and 29 who are not in education, employment or training with support to get into employment. This includes employing specialist advisors who provide one to one support, which includes general advice on finding jobs, help with securing training and work experience placements

with local employers and activities to help with confidence building.

Beyond Housing also maintains Westfield Farm Community Resource and Training Centre, located in Redcar. This is run by staff and volunteers, offering free use of computers for job searching and providing support for updating CVs, completing job applications and using digital technology. Funding is available for unemployed residents who need support to obtain paid training or equipment to start a new job.



# Social regeneration

**Levelling up is also about strengthening relationships within communities, thus improving the social capital of so-called ‘left behind’ areas.**

With social landlords in England investing £750 million each year into community work,<sup>25</sup> above and beyond their core role as housing providers, many housing associations already provide substantive support for social regeneration. Most frequently, this comes in the form of providing community spaces that can be utilised by local organisations and residents for a range of activities, from youth clubs to pop-up food banks.

Some housing associations go further by providing financial and administrative support for community-initiated projects that operate within their neighbourhoods, with projects ranging from traditional Neighbourhood Watches to sports clubs for young people. Many of these projects are supported at a very early stage, where they typically would struggle to access funding due to lack of experience and risk for funders, making housing associations essential for their success.

Housing associations increasingly emphasise ensuring that investment into social infrastructure is community-led, since previous community projects have often received a negative or mixed reaction from residents as they did not consider their preferences. Some housing associations, such as Karbon Homes, have gone even further by providing training to community leaders, which helps them acquire the skills needed to develop and run community initiatives themselves.

<sup>25</sup> “The role of social housing in communities: five recommendations”, HACT, <https://www.hact.org.uk/news/role-social-housing-communities-five-recommendations> (2020).



# karbon homes

Karbon Homes  
Community Investment team

*Karbon Homes manages around 30,000 homes across North East England and Yorkshire, providing housing for 60,000 residents.*

Karbon Homes has a dedicated Community Investment team that provides grant funding for projects organised by local charities, not-for-profit organisations and schools, with a particular focus on food poverty, financial exclusion, and resident support.

In 2019-20, 61 different community projects were supported through this funding, totalling more than £286,000.

This includes financial support for a wide range of activities, including a youth group for families with children who have special education needs and disabilities, an independent hospice, and a church providing hot food for vulnerable families.



## Social regeneration (continued)

Housing associations also contribute to the social infrastructure of their communities by directly supporting their most vulnerable residents, including the elderly, the unemployed and those with long-term health problems. This includes working with benefit claimants to help them navigate the social security system, providing help with sudden hardship costs, and connecting such individuals with other charities, such as food banks.

Local authorities, who have provided similar support for local communities in the past, have suffered a 24% fall in revenue per person between 2009-10 and 2019-20.<sup>26</sup> While housing associations are well placed to fill these gaps, more support is needed to enable local and combined authorities, housing associations and other local stakeholders to come together to develop a coherent social infrastructure strategy, with an emphasis on supporting community facilities.

This is especially important due to the process of applying for and obtaining central Government funding for regeneration, where housing associations often bid as part of wider partnerships. Such bids are built on effective relationships with different tiers of local and combined authorities, who often lead on such bids while partnering with other major stakeholders.

**Combined and local authorities should be granted funding and powers to lead on efforts to improve social infrastructure, working with housing associations, local businesses and wider civil society.**

<sup>26</sup> Tom Harris, Louis Hodge and David Phillips, "English local government funding: trends and challenges in 2019 and beyond", IFS, <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/English-local-government-funding-trends-and-challenges-in-2019-and-beyond-IFS-Report-166.pdf> (2019).



### North Star Social capital investment

***North Star Housing Group is a small housing association operating in the North East, managing over 3,700 homes across the Tees Valley, North Yorkshire and County Durham.***

North Star Housing Group has limited resources to improve the social capital of their communities, but they have invested £60,000 in community development. They place a significant focus on flexibility, emphasising supporting initiatives that are strongly desired by communities and using local stakeholders to help with delivery where possible. This includes the provision of

community transport for their rural communities to tackle isolation; youth clubs and breakfast clubs in partnership with organisations like YMCA and Greggs Foundation; and provision of English lessons for speakers of other languages through a linkage with the local university.





# Democratic regeneration

**Change in local communities and economies must be done with the agreement and input of those living there. Previous restoration experience has shown that the early and significant involvement of residents is critical for the long-term success of such projects.<sup>27</sup>**

As physical regeneration can involve significant disruption for residents, with many having to move home on a temporary or permanent basis, housing associations have developed effective ways to hear the voices of their residents. This includes developing extensive communication channels to gather feedback and be transparent, collecting intelligence on the issues and vulnerabilities of their tenants and engaging with key community stakeholders. As such, housing associations have significant experience in building consensus among their residents for changes in their areas, and their expertise should be utilised by the Government in wider levelling up efforts, especially in the development of local regeneration strategies.

In particular, digital communication has made it easier for housing associations to effectively build consensus and gather feedback, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup> Digital channels lower the barriers to participation for all residents, making it easier for them to hear about and contribute to plans. This is especially the case for hard-to-reach groups, such as single parents, who are less likely to have time to engage.

Some housing associations, such as North Star Housing Group, allow for the creation of tenant management co-ops, where residents are given autonomy over running properties and shared spaces, including a budget to spend on improvements. Such delegation of power makes residents even more invested in their neighbourhoods, builds trust between the residents and the housing association, and makes procurements processes more efficient, highlighting the importance of effectively involving those affected in physical and social regeneration projects.

**The Regulator for Social Housing should encourage all housing associations to emphasise community capacity building, which highlights the strengths and assets of communities and focuses on helping them solve problems locally. This entails investing in communities, entering partnerships with residents and community organisations, and delegating decision-making and power where appropriate.**

Furthermore, the Levelling Up Fund already places some emphasis on funding bids demonstrating evidence of local engagement and the need to consult a range of local stakeholders. However, more could be done.

**The Government should prioritise bids in future waves of the Levelling Up Fund, which have a proactive and ongoing engagement process with local communities, emulating successful practices around physical restoration in the social housing sector.**

<sup>27</sup> "Regenerating neighbourhoods: created integrated and sustainable improvements", Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/regenerating-neighbourhoods-creating-integrated-and-sustainable-improvements> (1998).

<sup>28</sup> Trust for London, "London and low-income communities disproportionately affected by COVID-19" <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/news/new-poverty-report-shows-london-and-low-income-communities-disproportionally-affected-by-covid-19/> (2021).



**whg**  
**Community Champions**

***whg (Walsall Housing Group) manage 21,000 homes across the Midlands.***

Some housing associations organise schemes where residents are invited to become local 'community champions'- these are paid roles where customers receive training and directly engage with other residents on a range of issues. The core intention of such schemes is to create a network led by community representatives who have the trust of local residents and can act as their first port of call.

The role of community champions varies in scope between different housing associations. The Community Champions at whg provide a range of support to

other residents, from simply listening and drawing on their own experience of issues, to signposting people towards appropriate resources. They also run workshops and courses to improve the confidence and life skills of other residents, with 218 people enrolling into such training in 2019-20.

whg's Community Champions are also crucial in generating support and engagement from the broader community for physical restoration, especially those which involve demolition and the replacement of existing stock. Community Champions help with community events and meetings that help to inform the wider resident body about regeneration plans and get them more involved in the process. By having members of the community at the heart of this engagement, it is much easier to build the trust necessary to conduct significant physical restoration.



# Conclusion

**Levelling up so-called ‘left behind’ areas of the country, especially in coastal and former industrial areas, is a noble aim. Still, it is hard work, requiring significant investment and patience. No government alone can transform deprived communities.**

Local people and institutions are critical partners and resources for improving communities. Housing associations are vital anchor institutions that are already regenerating such communities – physically, economically, socially and democratically.

Modern Conservative politicians and thinkers are looking to improve the security – not just the liberty – of people living in this country. Looking more to its communitarian traditions, the Conservatives in office today need new allies and institutions to build economically, socially and environmentally vibrant communities in traditionally poor areas. Housing associations are here to help.

**“Levelling up so-called ‘left behind’ areas of the country, especially in coastal and former industrial areas, is a noble aim.”**



# PlaceShapers

Together we help communities thrive

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